

Appendix C
IT IS NOT AN ELK PROBLEM - IT IS A PEOPLE PROBLEM⁴⁰

Elk have been indigenous to some parts of the country for a long time. In Benezette, PA, Elk have been a part of the community since 1913. In this area, it is not unusual to have elk walking through someone's front yard, much as elk do in Estes Park, CO or moose in Anchorage, Alaska. The occurrence of elk in Benezette had not been an issue until the area was publicized as a unique wildlife viewing opportunity. Once this area became noted as a great place to see elk, it has become saturated with tourists.

While this may not seem to be a problem, it has proved to be a challenge to the local people living in the Benezette area. There were no public restrooms, no designated parking areas, no designated viewing areas. In a quiet rural town of less than 250, suddenly the population grew to over 2,000. Visitors were blocking people's driveways, knocking on people's doors at all hours of the day to use their restroom, leaving garbage in areas because there were no trash receptacles. It was not uncommon to come out one's back door in the morning and find tourists using your picnic table. The residents in Benezette did not seek this notoriety and were not prepared to handle the influx of tourists who have swamped the area. Elk are not the problem...people are.

What is more of a significant problem is how to accommodate tourists that are coming to the area. The infrastructure of the area has not been able to keep up with the large numbers of tourists coming to the area. Increased visitors to an area put strains on local sewer systems, communication systems, housing options, travel arteries and utilities in general. For any tourism community to be successful, the community must develop adequate infrastructure to handle the mass of visitors sure to come. However, providing for the tourist is more than just an engineering problem.

Hospitality is a key in any tourism venture. Wildlife viewing is no exception. In conjunction with infrastructure, the local populace must be "made aware" or "educated" towards hospitality expectations of tourists. Tourists expect certain amenities and the most basic of those is courtesy from those in the community where they will be spending their dollars. This hospitality could be a "hard sell" if the local populace is unreceptive to the crowds that are sure to come. **SEKTDA would be the best entity to assist the communities in preparing for their "guests" (see RECOMMENDATIONS – TASK 5.5)**