(42) FACTORS GOVERNING FOOD PREFERENCES OF ALASKAN MOOSE

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Abstract: Foraging herbivores face many decisions in food selection, and the goal of this research was to determine the role of food preferences of moose (*Alces alces gigas*) in a changing landscape. We hypothesized that the net rate of energy intake would be maximized and, in using mass intake as a proxy for energy intake, examined whether energy intake is a driving variable of foraging behavior. We observed how hand-reared moose moved within simulated patches and measured the amount of food they consumed during a series of feeding trials in which 2 browse species of varying preference were offered in alternating proportions. Our results support the hypothesis that moose select foods in a manner that maximizes energy intake in mixed-species patches. They further indicate that food preferences are circumstantial based on bite size and plant density and provide information that is critical to the analysis of habitat requirements of Alaskan moose.

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