THE KAIBAB DEER

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt established the Grand Canyon National Game Preserve on the Kaibab Plateau. His intention was to protect the mule deer from overhunting by humans and predation by natural enemies. He knew that human activities had depleted wildlife species throughout the country, and only a few locations in the West still contained the numbers that had flourished a few decades earlier. Roosevelt hoped that future generations of wildlife enthusiasts would be able to visit the Kaibab Plateau to witness an abundance of wildlife not remaining elsewhere.

The plateau is about 60 miles from north to south and approximately 45 miles wide. It is bordered by the Grand Canyon on the south and east, by Kanab Canyon on the west, and high desert on the north. These vast natural boundaries isolate the plateau (Figure 1). An estimated 4,000 deer lived in this area when Roosevelt established the preserve, and he hoped that protection would increase their numbers significantly.

The United States Forest Service administered the new preserve as it had the surrounding forest lands since the 1890s. Ranchers grazed fewer domestic animals there for a combination of reasons, including degraded forage conditions and reduced permits from the Forest Service. The mandate of the preserve prohibited all deer hunting on the plateau and at the same time exterminated “varmints” such as mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes and wolves. Bounty hunters diligently tracked and killed mountain lions, which they viewed as the most significant enemy of the deer. Wolves were already rare by 1900, having been almost completely exterminated by ranchers before the turn of the century. Although local ranchers may