

Noble intentions; deadly results

The unintended consequences of baiting and feeding deer, elk and turkeys

We all want to help wildlife, right? Yet deer, elk, wild turkeys and other game species rarely need human handouts of corn and other supplemental feed.

That's because beneath their fur and feathers is a complex coat of armor crafted by thousands if not millions of years of evolution.

Ironically, what often endangers or kills wild animals are the well-intentioned but detrimental effects of feeding and baiting.

The irony of the well-intentioned act

While providing piles of corn, hay or other feed can be a "feel good" act it often results in bad consequences: disease, auto accidents, hunter conflicts, habitat loss, animal behavior changes. All are outcomes from feeding and baiting. It's not uncommon for wintering deer to eat themselves to death despite having reserves of fat.

Feeding and baiting can increase the cost of government because state and federal agencies are duty-bound to protect the public's wildlife and private livestock from animal diseases that can and do wreak havoc on local, state, regional and national recreational and agricultural economies.



This deer died after over-eating from the pile of corn shown in the background. Supplemental feeding can result in enterotoxaemia, a fatal disease commonly called grain overload.

Piles of food draw piles of problems

Supplemental feeding creates so many problems by closely congregating animals that would otherwise feed apart on natural foods. Tight concentrations of deer and elk, for example, dramatically increase the odds that an infected animal will spread

Chronic Wasting Disease, bovine tuberculosis or brucellosis via nose-to-nose contact, eating feed contaminated by another animal's disease-carrying saliva or inhaling bacteria.

State and federal agencies spend millions of dollars each year to prevent and contain animal diseases. Feeding and baiting can initiate or exacerbate these problems.

Individual actions impact people, animals, habitat, society and government

Auto accidents



Supplemental feeding often draws animals away from their natural feeding and bedding areas to locations where they create traffic accidents.

Behavior changes



Supplemental feeding can make wild animals less fearful of humans, delay winter migration and even result in starvation if animals have not migrated to wintering areas and feeding ceases.

Habitat and crop loss

High concentrations of deer and other large plant-eating animals can retard forest regeneration, change plant species composition and result in significant crop depredation.



Hunter conflicts

Some hunters and many non-hunters think baiting deer is unfair or unethical. This increases polarization among natural allies and erodes hunting's image.



Please “help” your local deer, elk, wild turkey and other wildlife by not “helping” with handouts of food. It’s the responsible thing to do. Today’s abundant wildlife populations are not the product of individual piles of bait feed but rather a society that came together to regulate hunting, conserve habitat and manage species in sustainable ways.



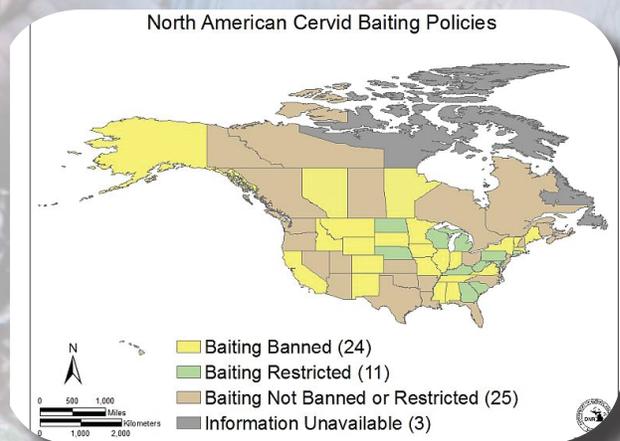
Big problems start with small handouts. Feeding deer makes them less wild and more vulnerable to disease.



More is not merrier. Deer that congregate in unnaturally high numbers tend to damage privately owned crops, vegetable gardens and ornamental plants. They also retard new forest growth by eating the buds of young trees.



Expensive and largely unseen, millions of dollars are used each year to fund state and federal efforts to monitor, minimize and potentially eliminate diseases that affect public wildlife and private livestock.



Increasing international awareness has led many states and provinces to ban or restrict the baiting of deer, elk and moose. States that don’t restrict baiting are being confronted with hunting ethic issues, including rearing a future generation of hunters who don’t scout, identify deer sign or learn deer behavior.