

It is against the law

Feeding elk in Pennsylvania is illegal. Although feeding elk may enhance wildlife viewing, supplemental feeding increases disease risk, long-term habitat destruction, risk of elk-vehicle collisions, and habituation to humans. With CWD close to our border in Maryland, increased potential for disease transmission and outbreak is another immediate concern. In addition, numerous Pennsylvania elk have died as a direct result of supplemental feeding. Supplemental feeding is harmful for elk and is illegal in Pennsylvania.



Spreading feed spreads disease

Supplemental feeding congregates elk in unnatural densities. Gathering large numbers of elk into small areas creates a serious risk for spreading terminal diseases such as chronic wasting disease, tuberculosis and, in turkeys that feed on “elk corn,” aspergillosis. Mange is another disease that spreads between animals in close contact. The spread of disease within and among species is encouraged by repeated and prolonged contact at feeding sites.

“Feed junkies” threaten people

In winter, elk normally move less and rest more as an adaptation for conserving energy and safeguarding their fat reserves. Activities that increase energy demands, using those precious fat reserves, are detrimental. Feeding lures elk away from protected areas and entices them to move further than they otherwise would, several times a day, often for only a small amount of food or perhaps none at all. Energy-wise it’s a losing proposition, like a motorist burning three gallons of gas to go buy only two gallons of gas. Feeding sites lure elk away from natural wintering areas, increase energy loss, and can lead to malnutrition and death. If the feed is near roadways, it increases the likelihood of elk-vehicle collisions.

Supplemental feeding alters the avoidance behavior of elk toward humans. Animals conditioned to supplemental feed lose their wariness and may become aggressive toward people either in protection of, or in seeking, food. We’ve all heard sobering stories of people suffering the direct attacks of habituated elk and other wildlife.

Feeding kills elk

It takes two to four weeks for elk stomachs to establish the microorganisms necessary to obtain nutrients from a new food source. Rapid exposure to a concentrated grain diet – such as corn – causes a fatal disruption of the animal’s acid-base balance. Numerous elk have died in Pennsylvania from feeding on highly digestible, high energy, low fiber feed such as corn in winter. Those that survive the immediate effects of “grain overload” often die in the days or weeks that follow, due to secondary complications of the disease.

The dead of winter

Winter mortality will never be eliminated; it’s nature’s way of ensuring that only the strongest of the species survive to reproduce. Winter survival is determined by the availability of high quality fall food (to ensure fat accumulation) and winter thermal cover (to conserve energy). By late-fall, elk instinctively reduce their food intake and continue to do so through most of the winter.

During winter elk rely on fat reserves and their ability to conserve energy. They travel less and seek protection in cover with less snow-depth, reduced wind, and warmer temperatures. Winter energy conservation is especially important to growing calves that have smaller fat reserves. If an animal’s fat reserves are used up before the end of winter, it is much more likely to die.

Supplemental feeding can cause elk to expend more energy by coercing them to travel farther and more often, and can increase winter starvation by luring in more animals than the feed can support.



No one should be this close to a wild elk. Elk that are habituated to feed sites put people and elk at risk for injury or death.

The agony of “de feed”

High densities of elk at feed sites create increased competition and stress. Stress from crowding and competitive aggression weakens immune systems. Social hierarchies prevent the elk most susceptible to starvation (calves and those that are already weakened) from feeding.

Most supplemental feed is consumed by a small number of elk, and they are the same elk that got their choice of food in the autumn, and put on a thick layer of fat. Elk in the poorest condition don't get fed, yet waste energy they can't afford to lose by traveling to feed sites with the herd.

When feeding elk, the fat get fatter while the rest look on with empty bellies.

The right prescription

There are better ways to attract elk and other wildlife to an area. Population and habitat management offer long-term solutions. You can help elk survive the winter by creating and maintaining good quality elk habitat and improving natural food resources that benefit all wildlife.

Plant mast producing trees and shrubs, and protect those plantings until they are large enough to survive elk browsing. Plant evergreen trees for winter thermal cover and cut sections of mature forests to create forest openings and increase the amount of woody browse available to elk.

The welfare and future of wildlife depends on the ability of natural habitats to support diverse, healthy and sustainable populations. Wildlife populations must be managed at levels that are compatible with the long-term carrying capacity of a diversity of habitats.

A healthy herd with fewer animals is more productive. The key to productivity is calf survival, and remember, calves feed last, if at all, at feed sites. Calves have a better chance of survival with natural, well-distributed food sources, not feed piles.

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For more information

View The Wildlife Society's final position statement on the baiting and supplemental feeding of game wildlife species at www.wildlife.org.

Download The Wildlife Society's *Baiting and Supplemental Feeding of Game Wildlife Species Technical Review*. Call (301)897-9770 or visit <http://bit.ly/jrsJxS>.

Read *Feeding Wildlife... Just Say No!* A 34-page booklet by the Wildlife Management Institute, \$3.25. Call (202)371-1808 or visit <http://bit.ly/p9T3F7>.

Read the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre's *Comprehensive Review of the Ecological and Human Social Effects of Artificial Feeding and Baiting of Wildlife*, \$25, 51 pages. Go to their website, http://www.ccwhc.ca/wildlife_health_topics/wildlife_baiting.pdf, or call 1-800-567-2033 to order.

Visit the PGC elk web page using this QRcode.



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**Please
Don't
Feed
the Elk**

