



Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society

P.O. Box 863, Madison, WI 53701-0863

<http://wildlife.org/Wisconsin>

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Position Statement: Baiting and Feeding of Deer

**By
the Deer Issues Committee
Of
the Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society (WCTWS)**

Status: Baiting of deer for hunting purposes and recreational feeding of deer has increased in Wisconsin during the 1990s raising a number of biological concerns. These concerns have prompted the Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society to adopt a position on this issue. This position statement results from the following concerns raised by baiting and supplemental/recreational feeding of deer:

- a) Concentrating wildlife at artificially high densities;
- b) Increasing direct and indirect contact within and among wildlife species;
- c) Increasing wildlife habituation to humans, and detracting from wild behavior;
- d) Habituating wildlife to repeatedly return to potentially contaminated sites thereby increasing the likelihood of disease transmission within and among species, and maintaining endemic disease reservoirs;
- e) Reducing home range size, increasing fecundity, and artificially inflating natural carrying capacity;
- f) Causing significant habitat damage in areas of baiting and feeding sites;
- g) Significantly affecting populations of non-target wildlife species including bear and turkeys;
- h) Increasing intra-and inter-specific competition and stress among and within target and non-target wildlife populations;
- i) Redirecting attention, resources, and effort away from wildlife habitat management on private and public lands;

- j) Forcing management agencies to divert resources from habitat and population management to address disease outbreaks, eradication efforts, and related monitoring of affected populations;
- k) Altering deer behavior and distribution such that harvest management and population control is confounded.

In Wisconsin, wildlife professionals are particularly concerned about minimizing disease risks and maintaining responsible deer numbers. The discovery of bovine TB in free-ranging deer in Michigan and Minnesota and CWD in Wisconsin has heightened concerns. TB is known to be transmitted through saliva and the infectious agent for CWD is found in saliva of infected deer. The repeated replacement of bait and feed to a location distinguishes these practices from all other natural foraging by deer. Deer become habituated to return to a site that is progressively contaminated with nasal droppings, saliva, feces, urine and pathogens. Human practices that foster the establishment or transmission of any of the dozen or more communicable diseases of deer, some of which are shared with domestic livestock, should be prohibited.

Supplemental bait and feed also confounds deer population management by artificially changing productivity and survival. Chronic over-population of deer since 1984 has caused unacceptable damage to agricultural crops and forest vegetation. Over-goal deer populations have led to special rules for hunting that cause unrest among some hunters and other resource users, thus making it difficult to achieve harvest goals. Distribution and behavior of deer have been unnaturally altered making some deer inaccessible to harvest as they are attracted to residential clusters or private land. This also causes some hunters to use bait that prefer otherwise.

Current Wisconsin law allows 2 gallons of bait or feed to be placed at a location. This law does not address the disease concern as multiple family-groups of deer will visit such sites, nor is the law easily enforced. Baiting violations have led the list of most common hunting violations during recent years. Baiting and feeding leads to conflict between hunters on public lands and among adjacent private landowners, it privatizes the deer herd, undermines herd control efforts, alters natural movement patterns, increases vulnerability of deer to poaching, and consumes enormous resources of the warden service. The current law should be repealed and recreated to fully authorize the Natural Resources Board to regulate (including prohibit) baiting and feeding of deer.

THEREFORE IT IS THE POSITION OF THE WISCONSIN CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY that:

We support legislation that would authorize the Natural Resources Board with guidance from the scientific community to regulate, including prohibit, baiting and feeding of deer so that these practices:

- a. do not contribute to abnormally large deer populations;
- b. do not result in increased contact among wild deer;
- c. do not contribute to transmission of infectious diseases among wild deer;
- d. do not alter the normal range of deer demographic parameters (e.g., fecundity, mortality etc.), deer behavior and distribution;
- e. do not increase expenditure of valuable funds on enforcement or management efforts due to feeding and baiting; and
- f. do not confound proper harvest management of deer.

The Wildlife Society is an international organization of wildlife biologists that has chapters in every state and many countries. It is the largest organization of professional wildlife biologists in the world and exists to promote excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education.