Issue Statement
Baiting and Supplemental Feeding of Wildlife Species

Baiting or supplemental feeding attracts wildlife for capture, harvest, or viewing; may augment food resources in population restoration or reintroduction; and may help monitor population trends. Although there is continued uncertainty about the effects of baiting and feeding on wildlife populations, basic ecology principles and research does indicate potential negative effects of these practices on native wildlife species. Regulations for baiting and supplemental feeding of various wildlife species vary widely based on species and political jurisdictions.

Here, baiting is defined as the act of intentionally placing food or nutrient substances to attract wildlife to a specific location to increase opportunity to kill, capture, or view wildlife. Several important wildlife management functions of baiting include:

a) capturing or treating animals for control or surveillance of infectious and non-infectious diseases and vectors;
b) capturing wildlife for relocation, population augmentation and restoration, or research;
c) luring wildlife to alternate locations to reduce damage to agricultural crops, rangelands, timber stands, and livestock;
d) reducing threats to human health and safety.

Supplemental feeding is defined as the act of intentionally placing food for consumption by wildlife on an annual, seasonal, or emergency basis with the intent to:

a) provide additional resources to wildlife in emergency situations when natural foods become unavailable or severely restricted due to natural or human-induced perturbations (e.g., periods of severe drought, deep snow, or wildfire);
b) improve the condition of individual animals (body mass, growth rates, antler size);
c) improve population performance (e.g., survival, fecundity, population growth) or restore populations.

Baiting or supplemental feeding of wildlife species may create several management concerns, including:

a) concentrating wildlife at greater than natural densities;
b) altering natural movement patterns;
c) increasing direct and indirect contact among wildlife species;
d) increasing wildlife habituation to humans and detracting from wild behavior;
e) increasing the likelihood of disease transmission within and among species either by direct contact or through environmental transmission and maintenance of endemic disease reservoirs;
f) increasing fecundity or survival or both resulting in population increases that exceed acceptable population levels;
g) causing significant habitat damage in areas of baiting and supplemental feeding sites;
h) unforeseen effects on non-target wildlife species;
  i) redirecting attention, resources, and effort away from other wildlife management actions
to address problems resulting from baiting and supplemental feeding.

Regional differences in wildlife management objectives and activities, and species-specific
differences, preclude development of a uniform baiting and supplemental feeding policy for
adoption by federal and state or provincial wildlife management agencies in North America.
Policies that allow or promote baiting or supplemental feeding may convey to the public that
such practices are suitable replacements for science-based habitat and wildlife management.
Moreover, those practices may lead to the habituation of wildlife to people, potentially causing
conflict, and in some cases necessitating the removal of animals that become a public safety risk.

The position of The Wildlife Society regarding baiting and supplemental feeding of wildlife
species is to:

1. Encourage federal, state, and provincial fish and wildlife agencies to cooperate in
reviewing and revising their baiting and feeding policies to ensure that they address
science-based assessment of program costs and benefits to wildlife management and
conservation.

2. Encourage fish and wildlife agencies to inform the public, professional natural resource
managers, administrators, and policy-makers about the potential consequences of baiting
and supplemental feeding of wildlife species, emphasizing the importance of habitat
conservation and management being the primary conservation approach for sustaining
wildlife species and biological diversity.

3. Encourage research on effects of baiting and supplemental feeding on distribution,
fecundity, behavior, habituation to people, harvest, and disease transmission on the full
spectrum of wildlife species.

4. Encourage public agencies, where appropriate, to replace existing baiting and
supplemental feeding practices with habitat and population management to improve
productivity and availability of food resources for native wildlife populations where
needed.

5. To reduce potential disease transition risk, strive to minimize or eliminate baiting and
supplemental feeding, especially when research indicates baiting or feeding facilitates
disease transmission and encourage wildlife agencies to confine its use to agency
management or research.

6. Advocate for retaining and strengthening of authority of federal, state, and provincial fish
and wildlife agencies to regulate baiting and supplemental feeding.

*The Wildlife Society’s* Standing Position on Responsible Human Use of Wildlife *states that TWS
supports and promotes “the position that humans are responsible for promulgating and
enforcing laws and developing management programs essential to sustaining the long-term*
welfare of wildlife, as well as developing good stewardship understandings and values, leading to a good ethical standard of use. Wildlife laws, management policies, and programs should enhance the values and benefits of wildlife resources, while minimizing liabilities associated with wildlife populations, species, and habitats.”

The Wildlife Society’s Standing Position on Wildlife Disease states that TWS “encourage[s] investment and support in collaborative prevention, surveillance, management, monitoring and research of wildlife diseases, using multi-disciplinary approaches to better understand both anthropogenic and natural causes of disease.”

Approved by TWS Executive Committee December 2019