



THE ALABAMA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

June 14, 2022

Dear Conservation Advisory Board Member,

Founded in 1937, The Wildlife Society (TWS) is an international network of over 11,000 leaders in wildlife science, management and conservation who are dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship. The mission of TWS is to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation. The Alabama Chapter of TWS (ACTWS) was formed in 1978 and has a current membership of approximately 125 wildlife professionals representing academia, state agencies, non-governmental organizations and private industry.

The purpose of this letter is two-fold: 1) to provide members of the Conservation Advisory Board with information regarding our position statement on baiting and artificial/supplemental feeding of game wildlife species and 2) discuss the recent findings of CWD in Lauderdale County and implications to the \$1.6 billion economic impact that white-tailed deer hunting drives in Alabama.

As recently as 2018, ACTWS was requested by the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) to provide a letter (attached) to state senators and legislators regarding our position statement on baiting and artificial/supplemental feeding of game wildlife species. ACTWS was disappointed in the 2020 legislative act that statutorily allowed deer hunting over bait with the purchase of a \$15.00 privilege permit. We understand the legislation was enacted without input or comments through the Conservation Advisory Board. However, we hope you will review the science and peer-reviewed literature to become more knowledgeable regarding the potential impacts of the act to our hunting heritage and wildlife resources.

Some highlights in peer-reviewed literature include:

- Disease Risks Associated with Baiting of White-tailed Deer published in 2005 by the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS) at the University of Georgia stated: "Prevention is the only truly effective method to manage diseases in wildlife populations. Baiting increases risk for multiple diseases in white-tailed deer and other wildlife. As a highly experienced, professional, wildlife health organization, SCWDS strongly opposes legalization of deer baiting".
- Hunters in the low country of South Carolina, where baiting is legal, are less successful than hunters in the upstate, where baiting was illegal at the time of the study despite spending 30% more time afield than hunters upstate.
- Studies from Michigan and Wisconsin indicate that hunter success or man-days per harvest were not significantly different for those hunting over bait as opposed to those not using bait.

- Studies in Michigan and Texas indicate that 90% of bucks' use of bait stations was during non-legal shooting hours. Deer use of bait sites became more nocturnal as the hunting season progressed. Anecdotal discussions within ACTWS seem to agree with these findings for the most part but we do realize property's with very limited hunting pressure may not experience the same level of nocturnal movement patterns.

One positive facet of the legislation was the clause allowing the WFF to discontinue the use of bait in areas to minimize wildlife disease risks associated with an outbreak or serious risk.

As we all know, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been on Alabama's doorsteps for several years and at least two deer tested positive in Lauderdale County during the 2021-2022 hunting season. WFF went to great lengths to develop the well-written and scientifically supported CWD Strategic Surveillance and Response Plan. Information provided at the CWD public meeting in Lauderdale County suggested WFF would be transparent and "follow the science" in its decision-making process regarding CWD.

ACTWS expected all baiting in Lauderdale and Colbert counties to be terminated at the onset of the CWD response after acknowledging the first CWD positive deer in Alabama. Baiting was not terminated until after the second deer tested positive. WFF personnel suggested this was done to allow hunters an opportunity to maximize their harvest and provide samples for CWD testing. Scientific peer reviewed research indicates baiting hampers deer harvest as well as provides environmental conditions for increased transmission of many wildlife diseases. The discovery of CWD in Alabama is without a doubt a highly sensitive issue and one that could have huge impacts to Alabama's wildlife resources for many years to come. Although we disagree with the decision to continue baiting and feeding through March 8th, we understand the need for a large sample size to determine prevalence and distribution.

The timely release of information and baiting closures should follow the CWD Strategic Surveillance and Response Plan for transparency and utilizing the best science to manage what could become one of the most significant wildlife disease issues in Alabama's history. We believe baiting should be terminated immediately if and when CWD is discovered outside of the current management zone. We also believe it might be prudent to review the science and determine if baiting/feeding is truly an activity that is beneficial to Alabama's wildlife resources or hunter harvest.

We appreciate your service as a member of the Conservation Advisory Board and ask you to use your position to ensure transparency and science are the primary inputs of Alabama's response to CWD. The attached list of scientific peer-reviewed documents may be helpful in this endeavor.

Submitted on behalf of the Executive Board of the Alabama Chapter of The Wildlife Society.



Allison Cochran, President
Alabama Chapter of The Wildlife Society

LITERATURE REVIEW

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