

Experts Warn That Elk Feedgrounds Are Breeding Grounds For Disease

In two recent reports, Bruce Smith, the senior wildlife biologist at the National Elk Refuge in Jackson, Wyoming, and Markus Peterson, an expert on wildlife diseases from Texas A&M University, conclude that elk feedgrounds are spreading brucellosis and putting Wyoming elk at risk of a major chronic wasting disease (“CWD”) epidemic.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY:

“... it appears certain that the decades-long practices of high population densities, supported by annual feeding in winter, have only served to perpetuate brucellosis and led to transmission of *B. abortus* to cattle herds and loss of Wyoming’s brucellosis free status.” – Bruce Smith (p. 23)

“1) crowding of elk on feedgrounds maintains brucellosis in southern GYA elk, 2) time spent on feedgrounds and feedlines increases exposure to and transmission of *B. abortus*, 3) vaccination of elk with Strain 19 is unlikely to reduce seroprevalence rates of feedground elk sufficiently to satisfy the concerns of government administrators and the livestock industry about the risk of brucellosis transmission from elk to livestock.

... we are left with elimination of elk feedgrounds as the most practical means of greatly reducing brucellosis” – Bruce Smith (p. 8)

“Feedground elk in the GYA are highly vulnerable to a CWD outbreak.” – Markus Peterson (p. 7-8)

“Based on what is currently known about CWD in elk, prevalence in a chronically infected feedground herd could exceed 50% if feeding programs remain unchanged ...” – Markus Peterson (p. 9)

“It is difficult to justify winter feeding that congregates thousands of elk for several months year after year if preventing or managing infectious diseases (e.g. CWD, bovine brucellosis, bovine tuberculosis) is the primary objective. As detailed above, feedgrounds provide nearly ideal conditions for CWD transmission among free-roaming elk ... There is no question that discontinuing winter feeding now would greatly reduce the risk of CWD transmission among elk in the GYA [Greater Yellowstone Area]...” – Markus Peterson (p. 15)

“Currently, however, there is no CWD management approach that has been shown to reliably eradicate CWD [outbreaks] or eliminate the spread of the disease to new areas. ... Again preventing CWD from becoming established in the GYA is a far better option than dealing with it once it is there.” – Markus Peterson (p. 15)

“... once well-established, our current understanding and available tools are insufficient to eliminate CWD, short of depopulation.” – Bruce Smith (p. 16)

Contact Information:

Bruce Smith – (406) 842-5995

Markus Peterson – (979) 845-5777