

# Concerns About Baiting and Feeding Game Wildlife

James E. Miller

Extension Outreach/Research  
Professor

Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries  
Mississippi State University

# Perception vs. Reality

- You have all seen the glowing magazine or television advertisements and claims of having the newest and best “silver bullet” that will enable anyone, anywhere, to grow that enormous 160+ whitetail buck, and all you have to do is to provide either through bait or feed their magic formula product, via use in their feeder or by planting their product in your food plots.

# Perception vs Reality (cont.)

- If you have ever seen bags of “deer corn” in the farmers coop stores or in Wal-Mart or other sales outlets, a study where 100 bags were purchased from several vendors and clinically tested, revealed that 44 of these 100 bags contained corn with aflatoxin levels that exceeded the level approved for feeding to animals or humans, yet people buy these bags by the thousands to feed to wildlife.

# Perception vs Reality (cont.)

- There are many case history examples from MI, WI, IL, CO, NY, NE, and other states where baiting and supplemental feeding have caused damage to the wildlife resources of these states, yet our Legislature still wants to make baiting and the hunting of deer over bait legal in MS. They have been misled to believe in “hornography” that baiting and supplemental feed will grow enormous buck deer regardless the soil fertility, the deer genetics or the condition of the habitat.

# Ownership of Wildlife Resources

- Early human tribes regulated access to wildlife, and fed themselves via hunting, fishing and trapping.
- From European Feudalism wildlife was controlled as private property.
- North American settlers rejected the ownership of wildlife as private property returning wildlife to common property.

# Public Trust Doctrine (PTD)

- Establishes state/territory as trustee over natural resources “too important to be owned” critical to society and future generations.
- Includes large bodies of water, rivers, fisheries, wildlife, air and genetic materials.
- Wildlife in the U.S. has been a recipient of PTD protection since the adoption of the Constitution.

# Baiting and Supplemental Feeding of Wildlife

- Baiting and feeding of wildlife regulated by governmental controls under PTD.
- State and federal agencies empowered to limit or ban baiting or feeding if these practices transfers private property rights to wildlife or if it jeopardizes public access to wildlife.
- Agencies can also limit or ban baiting and feeding if it jeopardizes health or well-being of wildlife.

# Ethics and Sportsmanship

- Fair chase is an ethical decree of PTD that makes privatization of wildlife impossible.
- If baiting or supplemental feeding awards unfair advantage to the hunter then it jeopardizes the PTD and violates Fair Chase
- And if baiting or feeding jeopardizes the health or well-being of wildlife it can be banned by appropriate agencies.

# Are Baiting and Feeding Necessary to Sustain Wildlife?

- Unknowing people frequently promote baiting and feeding of wildlife as a suitable replacement for wild habitats.
- Perception that baiting or feeding mitigates habitat loss is one of the most insidious consequences of policies that promote such practices and ultimately leads to privatization of wildlife resources.

# Baiting Definition

- Intentionally placing food or mineral (salt) attractants in the natural environment to manipulate the behavior of wildlife species for the purpose of:
  - Enhancing hunting or trapping opportunities
  - Capturing and treating wildlife for control of infectious and non-infectious diseases
  - Controlling wildlife damage posing a threat to human health or safety, domestic animals or private property

# Baiting Definition (Cont)

- Capturing wildlife for relocation, restoration, or population augmentation by appropriate state and federal wildlife management agencies.
- Capturing wildlife for implementation of research and management programs to improve knowledge and management of how to sustain wildlife for the benefit of present and future generations.

# Supplemental Feeding Definition

- Is the act of providing food (natural or artificial) for use by wildlife on an annual or seasonal basis with the intent of:
- Improving the condition of individual animals (e.g. body mass, growth rate, antler size) or population performance (e.g. survival, fecundity, restoration, reduced home range size and increased carrying capacity).

# Supplemental Feeding (cont.)

- Providing additional food to wildlife in emergency situations when natural foods are unavailable or limited (e.g. periods of severe drought, prolonged ice and snow cover, after wildfires, etc.)
- Attracting or luring wildlife to alternate locations to reduce damage to crops, livestock, timber, etc, and to reduce or eliminate threats to human health and safety.

## Supplemental Feeding (cont.)

- Artificially increasing the carrying capacity of wildlife habitats through supplemental feeding for the purposes of enhancing the recreational opportunities (e.g. increasing hunter harvest, increased wildlife viewing, photography, etc).

# Why Public Baiting and Feeding Should Be prohibited in MS

## Diseases:

- Baiting and supplemental feeding have been proven to have direct links to disease problems in wildlife because they affect risk factors that increase the occurrence, spread and maintenance of infectious and non-infectious diseases, e.g Bovine tuberculosis (BT) in deer and elk, Bovine brucellosis (Bb) in deer, elk, moose and bison, and Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in deer, and elk.

# Other Diseases Transmitted by Baiting and Feeding

- Aflatoxin fungi are immunosuppressive, hepatotoxic, and carcinogenic and may cause disease or death in wildlife, domestic animals and humans.
- Rumenal acidosis (rumenitis) occurs when ruminants consume large quantities of high carbohydrate foods, (e.g. corn, wheat, barley, sugar beets, apples, etc.) causing illness and death in ruminants such as deer and elk.

## Diseases (cont.)

- Enterotoxemia is similar in effect to rumenitis often resulting in death of the ruminant animal in 24-hours or less, and each of these diseases mentioned as well as transmission of parasites is clearly exacerbated by baiting or feeding of wildlife. In fact, the rapid spread of particularly devastating diseases such as Bovine tuberculosis and Chronic Wasting Disease have been proven to be directly linked to deer baiting and feeding.

## Additional Reasons (cont.)

- Baiting or supplemental feeding: are not essential nor have been proven to benefit wildlife or their habitats in the SE U.S.
- Are not cost-effective management practices.
- Will ultimately lead to changes in wildlife behavior and habituation to humans.

## Additional Reasons (cont.)

- Often results in reduced home range sizes, short-term overpopulations, habitat damage and destruction, and reduced long-term carrying capacity.
- Reduces sustainability potential for both target and non-target species population.
- Greatly increases the predation risks and potential disease impacts to non-target and non-game wildlife species. In fact a recent study determined that 98% of visits to wildlife feeders was non-target and non-game species.

## Additional Reasons (cont.)

- Are not Fair Chase nor ethical practices for recreational hunters to participate in and plays right into the hands of anti-management, anti-hunting special interest groups who would like to stop sport hunting
- Are a significant dis-incentive for private landowners to manage habitat for wildlife, e.g. planting food plots, or thinning and prescribe burning timber stands, or disking and fertilizing fallow fields, when their neighbor just places large piles of corn on the ground just before the season

## Additional Reasons (cont.)

- Are not in the best short-nor long-term interest of the wildlife resources sustainability since habitat management and conservation are really the keys to wildlife sustainability.
- The general public (80%) who now support recreational hunting of wildlife will no longer support it if it is perceived that most hunting is done over bait or supplemental feed since they do not perceive that as fair chase hunting.

## Additional Reasons (cont.)

- Will ultimately lead to privatization since the more a person feeds or baits wildlife, the more they assume that the wildlife species they are feeding belong to them since they assume husbandry for that animal.
- Are not the type of stewardship, hunting tradition, and legacy that I want to leave to my children, grandchildren and their children.

# Where is the Pressure for Legislative Decree to Make Baiting and Feeding Legal?

- Regardless what you hear it is not the hunters in MS who want baiting and feeding made legal, it is the manufacturers and sellers of feeders and bait and feed materials who are putting the pressure on MS Legislators.
- If you care about the long-term sustainability of wildlife please tell your representatives and Senators that they will not get your vote in the future if they vote for any bill that would make baiting or feeding legal in your state.



# Our Challenge As Stewards

- Is to educate and convince the various publics that the sustainability and enhancement of wildlife habitats through wise stewardship and management is the key to wildlife abundance and biodiversity, not the placement of bait or supplemental food into wildlife habitats.

# Our Charge to be Wise Stewards

- We all have a charge to be wise stewards, regardless where we live or how much land we own or do not own.
- If you doubt this, I encourage you to read Psalms 8, and Genesis 1:26 in the Holy Bible. There are many other references but these should be sufficient to convince you.