

January 19, 2023 TO: ND House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

FR: Robbie McQueen CWB®, M.S. Wildlife Behavior

RE: Concerns with HB 1151 Regarding Supplemental Feed Sites

This letter is to express support of HB 1151.

I am a Certified Wildlife Biologist® with a wildlife and habitat consulting company, M4 Outdoors LLC, located in Texas. Texas had the highest number of hunting participants with approx 1.12 million licenses being sold during 2022. We have also been dealing with Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), with the first case being discovered in 2012, for a decade, with the current majority of cases being found in captive herds. Texas also allows supplemental feeding programs, which many refer to as baiting, which is wordplay that carries a negative connotation, but only when hunting is involved, not when any other interaction with wildlife is intended.

The driving factor for the opposition of this bill is said to be minimizing the spread of CWD in North Dakota by banning supplemental feed sites, but only for the hunting community, not for the wildlife viewing community as a whole. In order to increase the spread of a disease within a population you must increase the densities within an area where the disease is known to be present, then those newly exposed animals must move to a location where there is no known presence of the disease, therefore introducing and spreading the disease.

Hunting is one of the five tools described by Aldo Leopold, who is considered to be the father of wildlife management, in order to sustain a healthy and thriving population of wildlife. Hunting allows for the harvesting of what would be surplus individuals so that the carrying capacity of the habitat is not exceeded. Once carrying capacity is exceeded then we see the negative impact of higher densities in an area, not only on the habitat itself, but also the wildlife that is present. With over population we see increased starvation, increase of predators present, and increase of the spread of disease. By decreasing harvest opportunities, the opposition of this bill will in fact, create a situation in which it is intended to minimize.

The average home range for a male white-tailed deer is approximately 650 acres, with the core range being between 50 - 75 acres, this is where a buck will spend the majority of their life, and as they mature this tends to get smaller and smaller. Of course these ranges are directly impacted by available resources: food, water, cover, along with the space and arrangement of these limiting factors.

Supplemental feeding programs are utilized by game managers nationwide in order to allow for increased encounters and the opportunity for survival during the more harsh times of the year; the end of the summer and winter. Supplemental feeding programs, in essence, allows for increased food resources spread about the landscape, minimizing the impact on the habitat on a local scale, and decreasing densities within a specific area. If we are providing additional food sources across the landscape we are already addressing the increased density potential which would directly impact the potential for the spread of a disease, by minimizing the need for movement outside of this core range. As we see above with the core range being 50 - 75 acres, if we are able to provide supplemental feed throughout the year, within these core ranges, the white-tailed deer would continue to maintain its presence within this core area. Minimizing the need to search for food will allow for the minimization of the spread of any disease.

I have conducted research on “attractants and baiting techniques”, which are said to draw deer to a certain location in order to increase encounters. In these studies it was concluded that attractants/baits, of any form, do not draw deer from distant locations, nor change their day to day behavior on any scale. One study was performed on a captive herd with known densities, known travel patterns, and multiple species of ungulates present. This study showed there was no significant change in their daily movements to suggest attractants or “baiting” would cause an animal to change their behavior. Therefore to say supplemental feed sites would unequivocally lead to the increase of the spread of any disease is misleading at best.

The opposition to this bill appears to be targeting the hunting community alone, if supplemental feed sites increased the potential for the spread of disease, wouldn't “attracting” these animals to a site, without removing any individuals, increase the potential of transmission. Whereas harvesting the surplus would only contribute to the minimization of the spread of any communicable disease.

Thank you for your time,  
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