

Wildlife Feeding (and why it is so ethically wrong):

March 7, 2025

The Feeding (Baiting) of Wildlife is an unnatural process to the Big Game species involved.

It is extremely disruptive (example presented below); to the land-owners and their families, friends and permissible hunters, that are trying to hunt within a square 4-5 mile radius, wherein feeding/baiting of Wildlife is taking place (in the middle of this area).

Feeding: the application of grains, hay, vegetables, fruits, nuts/seeds and minerals is a natural process to Livestock, not to Wildlife. The “Wild” in Wildlife is there to denote Big Game species that traverse, forage and navigate the land--without regard for property boundaries, and thus they are not to be drawn into an area on a seasonal and periodic basis—in order to be served up “meals on wheels”. The taming-down and domestic-conditioning of Wildlife should be abhorrent to any “real” Hunter.

The State governing bodies are commonly referred to as “Game and Fish”; we all do “hunting” for Game and “fishing” for Fish, we don’t get to fish (nor do we want to) in a Fish Hatchery, and therefore, don’t need (nor do we desire) to hunt in a “Feed Factory”.

So called “hunting” in, on, and around a feeding (baiting) area is not hunting, it’s just killing. Hunters come to hunt the Dakota’s, especially from East of Bismarck, because of our wide-open spaces and the opportunity to see as far as you can. We pride ourselves on “spot and stalking” and usually a lot of “walking and glassing”. We don’t need to utilize a tree-stand, such as is necessary for a heavily forested area, and God-forbid, we don’t need to start hunting with a blind or stand over a feeding/baiting area.

Down on the ND/SD State Line we are living with such an area; with 20 sections of Big Game affected, wherein our neighbor is feeding/baiting during the late-fall hunting period. After over a dozen years of this continued process, they have gotten very good at it: the timing of periodic feedings with the first hard frosts (mid-to late October), the ramping up of periodic feedings and product feed-mix (early to mid November), and then a regular daily feed application (laced with distiller’s grain-referred to as “deer cocaine”) to the end of November and into December. This process: starts with “enticing in”: the does from the surrounding area (4-5 miles in each direction) by late October, and by mid-November with the advent of “Rut”, the bucks are looking around and wondering where the girls went, and in no time all the deer from 20 sections are concentrated on his Ranch/Farm. So, when the dinner bell rings (main feeding application at dusk), there are nearly 300 deer and nearly 100 elk dining within an 80-acre area (elk first and deer second). Many of the bucks used to wander back to the 20-section area to bed-down during the day, but by combining morning/night feeding and special product feed, the deer/elk don’t wander off his property during the day, thus they are being “feed-held” till the lethal gun season is over.

These actions allowed for the desired result; as now, only a few bucks are taken (killed) outside of his property. This situation allows him to retain all the bucks (especially the big bucks) for his own archery hunting (ground blind) program in mid-December, and is shared with a few select (mostly out-of-state hunters after the ND and SD Rifle Seasons end).

The Residents/Big Game Hunters in North Dakota should not want to see this situation become replicated in other areas. The hunting-affect to the neighbors, of which I can provide at least 6 large rancher/farmer neighbors willing to vouch for this letter, has been nothing short of devastating. We are talking about a profound change; where there was 10-20 deer in each adjacent section, there are now none; maybe one or two, and/or maybe a small buck, and elk only passing through. The only bucks shot in the last couple of years by the neighbors; was due to larger bucks escorting does out of the feeding area during the Rut, and trying to hide them on neighbor's land.

The Ranchers/Farmers in the area are at their wits-end over this situation. Their families/and friends have been hunting (successfully) on their own property for 5-6 generations, You want to talk about something "personal" this is it, and indirectly a terrible violation of "property rights" We need at least an "Administrative Rule" similar to SD to help combat this situation, otherwise this could lead to some form of Civil breakdown; why would hunters come out to Bowman County and spend their money and/or buy a license. If the deer are being "sucked out" on a timetable, why wouldn't hunters take it upon themselves to hunt and kill bucks by any means possible--prior to (and after) Rifle Season.

Sincerely, Dave Stearns (and Stearns Ranches), Bowman Co and Harding Co Rancher,
Bowman HS and UND Grad, Retired CA/OR—CEO and MN/CA--CPA

SD Administrative Rule:

Methods prohibited. A person may not establish, utilize, or maintain a bait station from August 1 through February 1 and from March 15 through May 31 to attract any big game animal, including wild turkey

A bait station is a location where grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, hay, minerals, or any other natural food materials, commercial products containing natural food materials, or by-products of food materials are placed or maintained as an attractant to big game animals for the purpose of hunting.