

# Position Statement On The Baiting and Artificial/Supplemental Feeding of Game Wildlife Species

Adopted by the Mississippi Chapter of The Wildlife Society, February 4, 2005

Baiting of wildlife by the public is usually done for the express purpose of luring or attracting wildlife for hunting. Artificial or supplemental feeding is often done for the purpose of baiting and other reasons, including recreational wildlife-watching. Although baiting/artificial feeding of wildlife may be a well-intentioned activity, the ultimate results of such activities have often proven detrimental to the long-term health of wildlife populations, the integrity of wildlife habitat, to agricultural resources, and to property and human health and safety. Additionally, baiting of wildlife results in human/wildlife conflict, abnormal wildlife density, increased opportunity for transfer of disease, and other negative impacts to target and non-target species. Currently 30 states within the United States prohibit hunting deer over bait. A public that associates baiting/feeding with wildlife stewardship is unprepared to understand and act on the real and substantive threats to sustainable use and management of wildlife resources.

Baiting, as used herein, is defined as “any food or food product intentionally placed for the purpose of luring or attracting game species to enhance the opportunity to harvest, not including a decoy, a scent, or a chemical attractant”. Thus, bait would include any food or food products including mineral supplements, salt, or other material representing a food attractant placed in wildlife habitat. Provision of food plots planted within accepted local/regional agricultural guidelines are not considered baiting or artificial feeding.

Artificial/supplemental feeding (henceforth noted as feeding) of game species is defined as “the provision of food that is artificially placed in wildlife habitat, seasonally or year-round, for the purpose of luring or attracting game species to those locations.”

Scientific evidence demonstrates that baiting and feeding: (1) concentrates wildlife at abnormal densities; (2) increases direct and indirect contact among wildlife species; (3) increases

likelihood of disease transmission; (4) maintains endemic disease pools that are capable of causing widespread sickness and mortality of wildlife and domestic animals; (5) cause significant habitat damage; and (6) increase intra- and inter- specific competition and stress among and within wildlife populations. Paradoxically, while baiting/feeding practices are usually intended for the purpose of attracting or luring a specific species of wildlife, these practices may have significant detrimental effects to non-target species attracted to the bait or feed. Common examples of disease problems associated with baiting/feeding to both target and non-target wildlife include *blackhead* (histomoniasis) and (avian pox) in wild turkey, bobwhite quail and other birds, *bovine tuberculosis* (BT) and *chronic wasting disease* (CWD) in wild and enclosed ungulates such as deer and elk, *pseudorabies* and *swine brucellosis* in feral hogs, and *rabies* and *distemper* in raccoons, fox, and coyotes. There are numerous other diseases and parasites that can be readily transmitted at baiting or feeding sites through direct or indirect contact between animals and the bait or feed. The economic costs associated with wildlife disease outbreaks and control can be severe. Costs of disease outbreaks are generally recurring and additive due to annual costs of monitoring and eradicating diseased animals, and can cause a significant decrease in hunting license revenue due to increased hunter/public caution and decreased hunter participation. Such loss of hunting-related revenue to rural economies can be disastrous to the states economic stability and may decrease operating budgets of state wildlife agencies, thus further causing negative impact on wildlife resources. Baiting and feeding of game wildlife species detracts attention, resources, and effort away from wildlife habitat management, which biologists consistently recognize as the foundation of wildlife conservation. Moreover, research has discovered that a majority of hunters in Mississippi oppose the legalization of baiting, and the opinion of baiting among the general public is overwhelmingly negative, primarily because they do not feel that it reflects

fair chase acceptability. Thus the legalization of baiting in Mississippi will result in a reduction of public support for hunting.

The Chapter recognizes that baiting and/or feeding of wildlife can be a legitimate wildlife management tool for use by professional resource managers, research institutions, private industry or conservation organizations and natural resource management agency professionals, or those working under the supervision of wildlife professionals to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To capture wildlife for research, population restoration and/or management purposes by professional resource managers and research scientists;
2. To control or remove overabundant wildlife populations, invasive species, or wildlife that threaten human health or safety, domestic animal health and safety, or cause property losses beyond the threshold of landowner tolerance;
3. To vaccinate wild populations of wildlife to prevent disease epizootics, e.g. establishing geographic barriers against the spread of raccoon or fox/coyote rabies;
4. To address emergency situations to avoid severe population losses of wildlife (particularly endangered or threatened species) caused by severe weather conditions, e.g. drought, ice storms, wild fire, etc.

## Position

The Mississippi State Chapter of The Wildlife Society (MS-TWS) hereby adopts a Position in opposition to the baiting and feeding of game species by the general public. Baiting and feeding of game species by the public are activities that have been proven to be harmful to the long-term health and well-being of both target and non-target wildlife populations. Additionally, baiting and feeding of game species is known to negatively affect human health and safety, the health and well-being of domestic animals, livestock, and other property, and the social acceptability of hunting. As wildlife management professionals, the MS-TWS opposes any proposed legislation that would make it legal for game species to be hunted or harvested over baited or feeding sites.

## Recommendations

1. Professional wildlife organizations, and state and federal wildlife agencies should take a leadership role via public education to discourage baiting and artificial feeding of game species.
2. Professional wildlife organizations and state and federal agencies should renew efforts to emphasize the importance of habitat conservation and management as the primary tool in conserving game species and contributing to bio-diversity of wildlife species and habitat.
3. State and federal agencies should be encouraged to enact regulations prohibiting baiting and feeding of game species on public and private lands except in the case of *bona fide* wildlife research or management activities conducted by or under supervision of wildlife professionals.
4. State and federal wildlife agencies should be recognized and supported in their efforts to restrict baiting and artificial feeding of game species.