

**REPORT OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES & WILDLIFE**

L.D. 271

**RESOLVE, TO DIRECT THE DEPARTMENT OF IF&W TO PREPARE A DEER WINTER
FEEDING STRATEGY**

SPONSORED BY: SENATOR JACKSON OF AROOSTOOK

**COSPONSORED BY: REPRESENTATIVE MARTIN OF EAGLE LAKE
SENATOR PATRICK OF OXFORD
REPRESENTATIVE SARTY OF DENMARK
REPRESENTATIVE THERIAULT OF MADAWASKA**

JANUARY 9, 2012

The Department recognizes that 1] deer population numbers are lower than public expectations in northern, eastern and western Maine, 2] supplemental feeding has increased in Maine over the last two decades, 3] some citizens desire a way to help wintering deer, 4] in many areas, supplemental feeding contributes to winter mortality of deer, and 5] there is good biological justification to ban feeding of deer, as described recently in a resolution by the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (appendix I), but collaborative outreach and education might at this time be a more socially feasible approach for Maine to minimize negative impacts of supplemental feeding of deer.

For these reasons the Department has developed the following strategy with a focus of bringing our outdoor partners together to educate the public on the several options for helping wintering deer and the pros and cons for each. This strategy also includes assisting certain communities with modifying locally problematic areas to reduce the negative impacts to deer and empowering the Warden Service to stop certain feeding areas that pose safety hazards and/or contribute to high deer mortality.

We recognize it will take time, significant effort and cooperation to modify public perception and behavior of feeding deer. Each year we will evaluate the success of our efforts and determine if additional legislative action is warranted.

It is important to understand the impact of supplement feeding and past efforts. Consider that we are denying youth hunters and bow hunters the opportunity to harvest a doe where deer populations are low because we know we cannot afford to lose female deer and still recover the population. How can the public support, in any way, a practice that directly causes significant road mortality on the very deer we deny a youth hunter or archer to harvest?

For these reasons Department staff have been reaching out to communities and individuals for many years now educating and encouraging the public to stop feeding or to change their methods to minimize the negative impact. Almost all efforts have been unsuccessful. The limited success stories result primarily from one of two situations; 1] a local effort to educate and work with a community, or 2] witnessing a doe, pregnant with twins or triplets, die from a car collision near their home.

The following strategy builds on these successes by focusing on improving the collaboration with outdoor partners to locally educate and work with communities to gradually discontinue supplemental feeding and implement natural alternatives.

- 1) Work with outdoor partners to develop guidance on deer feeding practices that would be promoted collectively, sending a consistent message to the public. Guidance materials would cover;
 - a) Develop a comprehensive document on the ABCs of establishing and managing food plots, emphasizing how: 1] late fall and early winter crops (e.g. Brassicas) can benefit wintering deer, 2] some fall crops, like turnips and winter wheat, can be used by deer during winter, and 3] spring and summer plots (e.g., bio-engineered clovers or soybeans) can benefit does during late gestation and lactation periods, fawns converting their bellies from milk to vegetation, and antler growth in bucks;
 - b) Herbaceous seeding of forest roads and log yards as another source of spring, summer and fall forage to help fatten deer going into winter and yield early and digestible forage after winter;
 - c) Identifying opportunities to incorporate timber harvesting of hardwoods during winter to provide immediate browse for overwintering deer and stimulating sprouts as available forage for following years into a management plan;
 - d) Complementing the food plot document with information on planting and releasing apple trees and benefits of managing for oak and beech;
 - e) The difference between emergency feeding as a management tool and supplemental or recreational feeding; and
 - f) The drawbacks of supplemental winter feeding and food types to avoid.
- 2) Major increase in outreach regarding the drawbacks of supplemental winter feeding, food types to avoid, and recommended food types
 - a) Annual media blitz in late November informing the public of risks and options for helping deer in the winter.
 - Get info out to all the major newspapers – All the high points from “Living on the Edge” and info from our website.
 - Radio spots, similar to the spring time with newborn wildlife and concerns on moose / vehicle collisions.
 - Schedule public informational meetings on supplemental feeding in some areas.
 - b.) Supply hardcopy materials regarding supplemental feeding to NRCS, Extension offices, town halls, Agways, Paris Farms, Tractor Supply Co., etc.
 - c.) Target areas that have fed lots of deer for years (e.g. Jackman/Moose River, Brownville) for public informational meetings and site visits by Department personnel to determine how things are being done and to offer assistance to augment or improve upon the positives and to minimize the negatives.

- 3) Each region will identify the deer feeding area posing the most risk to wintering deer and work with the community to minimize the negatives. Use road kill data as a starting point (i.e. has already been done to some degree in conjunction with MDOT) to determine where high strike areas exist as the result of supplemental feeding.
- 4) Solicit / identify key stakeholders and members from the public to assist in identifying problem areas and getting a comprehensive / correct message out on supplemental feeding.
- 5) Propose a statutory change providing authority to Maine Warden Service so they could intervene if a chronic problem exists where many deer are being hit by vehicles because of supplemental feeding or where many deer are being fed the wrong food items.
- 6) **Disease Contingency Plan:** As part of a disease contingency plan, the Department will propose a statutory change that would grant our Commissioner the authority to stop supplemental feeding through rulemaking if a Chronic Wasting Disease occurrence is documented in Maine.

Appendix I

MIDWEST ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES RESOLUTION #2011-____ DETRIMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE GROWING PRACTICE OF BAITING AND FEEDING DEER AND WILD TURKEYS

WHEREAS: Wildlife belongs to all citizens equally; method of take is entrusted to the state or province in consideration of the resource for the benefit of the public; and

WHEREAS: Effective communication, education and enforcement are enhanced when rules and regulations are consistent across state and provincial boundaries; and

WHEREAS: Baiting is not necessary to successfully harvest deer or wild turkey; and

WHEREAS: Feeding is not necessary to sustain healthy deer and wild turkey populations; and

WHEREAS: It is not possible to bait or feed deer and wild turkey without increasing the likelihood for the spread of diseases and parasites; and

WHEREAS: Concentrating deer by baiting and feeding can facilitate the transmission, establishment, and spread of diseases such as chronic wasting disease, bovine tuberculosis, brucellosis and Johne's disease and parasites such as ticks, mites and nematodes; and

WHEREAS: Concentrating wild turkey by baiting and feeding can facilitate the transmission, establishment, and spread of diseases such as blackhead, avian pox and parasites such as ticks, lice, tape worms and round worms; and

WHEREAS: Deer and wild turkey pathogens often remain viable at bait or feed sites long after the feed or bait no longer exists; and

WHEREAS: Increased transmission and spread of diseases and parasites in deer and wild turkey may potentially put other wildlife and domestic livestock and public health at risk; and

WHEREAS: Once certain diseases such as bovine tuberculosis become established in a deer population the cost of management dramatically increases thereby diverting limited public funds from traditional wildlife management activities; and

WHEREAS: Feeding deer and wild turkey acclimates these animals to people which creates nuisance animals. Once the general public perceives a species as a nuisance, tolerance for and value of the species to society diminishes; and

WHEREAS: The National Wild Turkey Federation technical committee resolution (1982) discourages the artificial feeding of turkeys, and The Wildlife Society position paper, Baiting and Supplemental Feeding of Game Wildlife Species (2007) discourages supplemental feeding and baiting of all wild game species; and

WHEREAS: We acknowledge that feeding of wild ungulates has been a long tradition with some state, federal and provincial agencies dating back to the early 1900s; and

WHEREAS: We acknowledge that banning baiting and feeding will not totally eliminate the possibility of disease transmission, establishment, and spread in free-ranging deer and wild turkey populations, but it is a positive, proactive step.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies hereby advocates that member states and provinces:

1. Collectively work to educate deer and wild turkey hunters, conservation organizations, the agricultural community and the general public as to the dangers and potential impacts resulting from the intentional baiting and feeding of deer and wild turkey; and
2. Remain resolute in prohibiting the practice of the intentional baiting and feeding of deer and wild turkey in those states and provinces where baiting and feeding bans currently exist; and
3. Prohibit the intentional baiting and feeding of deer and wild turkey in those states and provinces where those practices are currently allowed; and
4. Communicate these concerns to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.