



# WGFD

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## News Release

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### South Park Feedground Targeted For Elk Capture

JACKSON- The Wyoming Game and Fish Department trapped 123 elk at South Park feedground on Wednesday for a new research project examining wildlife diseases. Wildlife biologists routinely trap and test elk for brucellosis seroprevalence on the State's 22 winter elk feedgrounds, but this research plans to go beyond brucellosis. Of the elk trapped, 22 adult females were tested for brucellosis while being handled, but the goal of this project was to capture 40 female calf elk, which were transported to the Thorne/Williams Wildlife Research Center near Laramie for *Yersinia* research.

There were three elk mortalities associated with the capture. When handling such a large number of elk, capture mortality is always a possibility.

The purpose of this study is to determine if one or more diagnostic tests can be used to accurately differentiate between bacterial infections caused by *Yersinia enterocolitica* and *Brucella abortus* in elk. *Yersinia* infections have been shown to indicate "false positives" in brucellosis studies in Montana. In this case a "false positive" is an animal that tests positive for brucellosis but doesn't have the disease. At the research facility, elk will be infected with *Yersinia* and Strain 19 *Brucella*, which isn't restricted as a classified agent by the federal government but reacts the same as field strain *Brucella*.

"We don't know how these two organisms interact or how they affect our test results," said Terry Kreeger, Wildlife Veterinarian for Game and Fish. "With so many management decisions resting on seroprevalence, this research is vital so we know with certainty a seropositive elk is showing an immune response to *Brucella abortus*. This study is supported by researchers from the federal government and various universities and has been partially funded through the University of Wyoming."

This research is taking advantage of the robust elk population in the Fall Creek elk herd unit. Managers have struggled keeping the population of elk on South Park feedground at objective because of minimal opportunities for hunters to obtain a harvest on animals that spend the majority of their time on private lands along the Snake River. Elk have historically been captured on the National Elk Refuge for Department research.

"This is a win-win situation for our researchers and managing this elk herd," said Tim Fuchs, Jackson Regional Wildlife Supervisor. "The removal of 40 females from this population will not be a problem for sustaining this herd." The objective for elk on feed at South Park feedground is 1,000 animals, and 1,267 were classified last week.

The elk were baited into the corral style trap using alfalfa where elk were sorted and blood was drawn from females for brucellosis testing. Because brucellosis transmission is a concern to nearby cattle operations and because of the feedgrounds proximity to the highway, disturbance to the feedground was kept at a minimum.

"South Park is a very small but highly valuable fragment of remaining habitat available to wintering wildlife in Jackson Hole," said Fuchs. "We're actively hazing elk back towards the feedground to avoid a commingling or elk damage situation."