NEWS
WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

G&F Begins Elk Feeding Season and Implements New Disease Management Project

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For Immediate Release
December 20th, 2007

JACKSON-- The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) has commenced feeding on several state-operated elk feedgrounds in northwest Wyoming for the 2007-08 winter season. Elk are currently being fed at Finnegan, North Piney, Jewett, Franz, Black Butte, South Park and Dell Creek feedgrounds. The remaining 16 feedgrounds will begin feeding as winter progresses in northwest Wyoming.

Beginning this winter, the Department will implement a new study, known as the Target Feedground Project, aimed at reducing the incidence of brucellosis in elk. WGFD personnel identified five feedgrounds for the project that have a low risk for elk/cattle commingling along with suitable adjacent ranges, including some that have recent habitat improvements. These feedgrounds include: Fall Creek, Soda Lake, Green River Lakes, Bench Corral, and Forest Park. The WGFD will attempt to reduce brucellosis seroprevalence in elk by altering feeding patterns to help disperse elk and by ending feeding earlier than typical.

Recent research by the Department's Brucellosis Feedground Habitat (BFH) program suggest that shortening the feeding season and reducing elk densities on feed may reduce brucellosis seroprevalence. BFH biologists observed pseudo-aborted elk fetuses on several

feedgrounds and found that contact rates were greatest on single feedlines, indicating that reducing densities by spreading hay over a larger area may reduce brucellosis transmission rates. Researchers also recently established a correlation between brucellosis seroprevalence in elk and the length of the feeding season. This research indicates that reducing the time elk spend on feed, especially during the peak brucellosis transmission period of early spring, may reduce the incidence of the disease in elk.

Additionally, most Target Feedgrounds have been stocked with grass hay along with alfalfa to help facilitate this project. By using less desirable grass hay instead of high protein alfalfa at the end of the season, managers hope to coax elk onto winter range earlier. WGFD personnel will work closely with elk feeders to monitor elk behavior and climatic conditions to decide when elk rations should be reduced to encourage free-ranging.

"This is a cause-and-effect experiment in areas where we can closely monitor the feedground situations and minimize potential for elk-cattle conflicts," said Jared Rogerson, Pinedale BFH biologist. "We're hoping to find a sustainable solution for reducing seroprevalence in elk, specifically addressing our management of elk feedgrounds."

Initiation of feeding is dependent on a wide variety of conditions that make managing elk in the region challenging. Some feedgrounds begin early to hold elk, preventing them from moving to lower elevations where damage and commingling with livestock on private lands could occur. Other feedgrounds are initiated based on human safety, to keep elk off highways where there are risks of collisions. Furthermore, some feedgrounds are initiated once winter habitat has been utilized, where preventing winter starvation and maintaining herd numbers at established population objectives are the goals.

WGFD would like to remind winter recreationists of the hardships on elk, even on winter elk feedgrounds. Winter mortalities do occur on elk feedgrounds and human activity increases stress on the animals. Most feedgrounds have closures to human presence in effect. For those that do have trails

nearby, such as in the Gros Ventre and near Green River Lakes, snowmobiles are asked to maintain low speeds and avoid stopping while passing near winter elk feedgrounds.

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