



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 24, 2006 06-07

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Barry Reiswig
307/733-9212, ext. 223

REFUGE BRUCELLOSIS RATE DROPS DESPITE TOUGH WINTER

National Elk Refuge Manager Barry Reiswig reported today that the brucellosis seroprevalence rate in cow elk dropped to 14% on the National Elk Refuge this past winter.

This continues a long, generally steady decline that started in the 1970's when the rate was more than 40%. Reiswig noted, "This is great news. If we can continue this trend and knock off another 8-10% in the next few years, we will greatly diminish the brucellosis problem on the Refuge." Brucellosis is a bacterial infection which causes elk to abort their fetuses.

The continuous decline of brucellosis seroprevalence is likely due to the use of pelletized alfalfa, began in the 1970s, which tends to spread elk out over the refuge. Nearly six million pounds of dairy-quality alfalfa pellets were fed during the 89 day feed season this past winter to more than 6,500 elk and more than 900 bison. Bison were fed primarily to keep them away from elk feedlines.

The Refuge herd experienced a non-wolf mortality rate of 2.4% while wolf mortality accounted for another 1%. Reiswig stated wolf activity on the Refuge was the most intensive recorded to date with nearly 20 wolves inhabiting the refuge at times. "Our normal non-wolf mortality has run from half a percent to two and a half percent over the years," stated Reiswig.

Reiswig noted two primary causes of non-wolf related mortality: a hoof-related bacterial infection likely caused by high concentrations of elk and extremely hard packed snow and ice conditions on the feedgrounds; and loss of some calves due to starvation. A number of orphaned calves arriving on the feedgrounds after feeding was well under way were unable to adjust to the alfalfa feed ration and perished. "People need to keep in mind we operate a 'supplemental' feeding program that is not designed to get every animal through every winter," Reiswig said.

The cost of the feeding program this winter for the refuge and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department rose to slightly more than a half million dollars. Reiswig noted the refuge is facing tremendous budget cuts in the next couple of years that may cripple many Refuge programs upon which the public has come to depend. Reiswig noted, "We are facing an extremely tight budget situation in the years ahead and all of our current programs are in for some tough sledding."

-FWS-

www.fws.gov/nationalelkrefuge