



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

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NATIONAL ELK REFUGE MANAGER ANNOUNCES SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING START DATE

National Elk Refuge manager Barry Reiswig announced that the supplemental feeding program for wintering wildlife on the Refuge will begin on Saturday, January 13. Biologists have been closely monitoring habitat conditions and elk distribution to determine the start date for the feeding program which generally begins in late January.

Cold weather and storms focus much attention on the supplemental feeding of wintering wildlife. Biologists from the National Elk Refuge and Wyoming Game & Fish Department begin regular surveys of conditions in December, closely examining forage availability, the amount of forage being utilized by elk and bison, and snow depths and consistency. Currently, snow depths on the survey areas in the south end of the Refuge range from 0 to 5.5 inches, with most of the variation due to drifting. The snow water equivalent, which is a common snowpack measurement indicating the amount of moisture in the snow, is also minimal, ranging from 0 to .75 inches. At this time last year, snow depths averaged 6.6 inches and snow water equivalents were 1.7 inches in the same sample areas.

Wildlife managers, however, also routinely calculate the total amount of available grasses and shrubs, even during years when snow and ice conditions are not as significant. Use of forage on the south end of the Refuge dramatically increased this past week as more elk and bison moved out of the Gros Ventre hills and Long Hollow areas into the highest quality forage sites in the McBride, Peterson, Nowlin and Chambers management units. During the last two weeks, Refuge personnel distributed small portions of hay in northern sections of the Refuge to encourage animals to spread out over a larger area, thus allowing native winter range in the southern half of the Refuge to better support a larger number of animals later in the season. Data collected through radio tracking now indicate approximately 90% of the elk expected to winter on the south end of the Refuge are either currently there or in areas immediately adjacent. Managers estimate a minimum of 4,230 elk and 660 bison are now on the Refuge.

Because of recent animal activity at night and in the early morning hours, travelers on U.S. 26/89/191 are encouraged to use caution when driving north of Jackson. Several wildlife vs. vehicle collisions involving both elk and moose have occurred during the last few weeks, both adjacent to the National Elk Refuge and within Grand Teton National Park. Because animals may be difficult to see under reduced light conditions, motorists should pay extra attention to the sides of the roads for wildlife that may be nearby.

–FWS–

www.fws.gov/nationalelkrrefuge
