



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

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NATIONAL ELK REFUGE ENDS SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING FOR THE SEASON

Supplemental feeding on the National Elk Refuge ended for the season on Wednesday, March 21, due to the production of new grasses and the recent movement of elk off feedground areas. This year's feeding season began on January 13, one week earlier than the average start date, bringing the total number of supplemental feed days to 68. The average supplemental feed season is 73 days long.

This year, warm March temperatures and a below average snowpack resulted in earlier snow-free conditions on the Refuge. This resulted in an early greening of grasses, particularly on south facing slopes and the Poverty Flats area of the Refuge. Refuge managers explain the elk showed a decreased interest in supplemental feed and "voted with their feet," with many of the animals leaving Refuge feedlines prior to the end of the supplemental feed season. Eighty percent of radio collared elk left feedlines between March 15 and March 18, shifting their distribution to snow-free areas on the north end of the Refuge. Additionally, bison have been largely off feed and foraging on native range on the north end of the Refuge since March 16.

Ending the feed season two weeks earlier than the average date can bring benefits to the herd, including a reduced risk of disease transmission. Elk are less concentrated when they move off feedground settings and begin foraging on native range, moving them away from areas contaminated by manure through heavy winter use. In addition to distributing elk away from concentrated areas, spring green-up provides a more nutritious food source than supplemental feed.

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www.fws.gov/nationalelkrrefuge
