



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 8, 2008 08-01

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Lori Iverson
307/733 9212, ext. 227

NATIONAL ELK REFUGE MANAGER ANNOUNCES SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING START DATE

National Elk Refuge manager Steve Kallin announced that the supplemental feeding program for wintering wildlife on the refuge will begin by January 14 this year, approximately one week earlier than the 10-year average start date.

Supplemental feeding is a management practice which enables the National Elk Refuge to maintain a larger number of elk than the winter range would otherwise sustain. The feeding usually starts in late January but can vary depending on conditions and the number of elk on the refuge. Managers weigh the need for the additional feed with the increased risk of disease brought on by higher concentrations of animals on the feed grounds.

Cold weather and January 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 conditions such as forage availability, the amount of forage being utilized by elk and bison, and snow depths and characteristics. The current depth and consistency of the snow on the refuge, averaging five to eleven inches, has not prevented elk from grazing on the available natural feed. However, forage production was down 30% on the refuge this year due to limited rainfall. Elk have been heavily using high quality irrigated and native wet meadow areas where forage is still available at approximately 750 pounds per acre. This is approaching a threshold where natural forage can no longer support the herd.

Refuge management actions this fall, including two new special hunts, helped distribute elk throughout more of the refuge and onto neighboring Federal lands. "This conserved forage on the south end of the refuge where winter concentrations of elk are highest," Kallin explained. "It effectively delayed the need for supplemental feeding and will reduce both the length of time elk are concentrated on feedlines and the potential for the spread of diseases." Late last week, approximately 3,700 elk were on the south end of the refuge, compared to an estimated 4,900 elk this time last year.

Persons driving along Highway 26/89/191 that wish to view or photograph elk on the refuge are encouraged to use highway pullouts to increase safety on winter roads.

–FWS–

www.fws.gov/nationalelkrefuge