

## But doesn't Fish and Game feed big game?

The short answer is yes, but only under special circumstances and usually only in extreme winters. Big game typically migrate to lower elevations during winter, and most have enough fat reserves to carry them through mild to moderate winters.

When extreme weather creates conditions where winter forage becomes limited, unavailable, or animals are forced into areas where they're a threat to public safety, feeding may occur.

Three main reasons to start temporary, emergency winter feeding include preventing damage to stored agricultural crops like haystacks, public safety concerns, such as big game congregating near a busy highway, and exceptionally harsh conditions where a high percentage of the adult females are likely to die.

Overall, Fish and Game manages big game herds so naturally available forage can sustain populations, and people can help by not feeding animals and keeping the "wild" in wildlife.



**Feeding deer in town and adjacent to busy streets is hazardous for both deer and motorists.**



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Do Not Feed Big Game Animals, 5/2020 Glenna Gomez

# DO NOT FEED BIG GAME ANIMALS



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## Feeding wildlife causes problems for people and animals

Feeding that cute herd of deer in your yard may seem like a nice way to help wildlife, but it's often harmful to them and can create a host of problems for people. Wildlife are not pets, and shouldn't be treated as such, even with the best intentions.

Feeding some wildlife, such as birds and squirrels, can be a fun way to interact with them, but it's not the same for deer, elk and other wild animals. Those animals have evolved to survive in the wild without human assistance.

When people feed them, especially if they become habituated to hand outs, it can hurt individual animals, grow unsustainable herds, damage property, create traffic hazards, attract large predators, and more. That's why you should resist the temptation to feed them, and discourage your neighbors from doing it, too.



Elk damage on tree.

To better understand the problem, please consider:

### Problems for people

- Feeding elk or deer in town and adjacent to busy streets is hazardous for both deer and motorists. Fish and Game staff responds to dozens of reports of injured or road-killed deer in and near towns. The problem gets worse during winter when deep snow means roads and streets may be the only routes for animals to travel. Fish and Game does not have the capability to rehabilitate injured wildlife, so when a deer is hit and appears unable to recover, it must be put down.
- Deer, elk and moose can be aggressive, especially when they lose their fear of people. Though deer are typically docile, under stressful circumstances they have a flight-or-fight response, and sometimes respond to perceived threats with aggression. Does with young fawns have chased people and attacked dogs, and bucks in breeding season can behave aggressively, including injuring people.
- When deer or elk congregate or repeatedly feed in the exact same spot, predators take a cue from their routine. Deer are mountain lions' primary prey, and the large cats will hunt whatever is most easily available to them. Fish and Game receives multiple reports of mountain lions in towns each year. Mountain lions can pose a threat to people and pets, and lions will be euthanized if they remain in town.
- Deer and elk won't stop eating when you're done feeding. When deer or elk start congregating in an area, they will eat whatever is available, which may be landscaping or ornamental plants. This can damage property and cause conflicts between people who are feeding and neighbors whose property is damaged.



### Problems for animals

- The food that people provide can be harmful to deer. Deer digestive systems are equipped to deal with small bits of low-quality food, especially during winter. Large amounts of highly nutritious food, such as alfalfa or pellets, can overwhelm their digestive system and lead to bloat and potentially death, especially in young animals.
- Feeding elk or deer can stop them from migrating to where natural food is available. Most mule deer migrate to lower-elevation ranges during winter. Feeding over time may cause animals to lose their knowledge of migration routes to winter range.
- Damage to native vegetation near feeding areas can also be a problem. Trees and shrubs, especially aspen and willow, can become heavily damaged and take a long time to recover.
- Crowding creates conditions that can lead to disease outbreaks.
- Wild animals need to remain wild. It's understandable that people enjoy seeing them close to their homes, but when animals lose their wildness, they're likely to lose their innate fear of humans and become too comfortable around people and in towns. That behavior can also be passed on to the next generation.