

MORE INFORMATION ON PROPOSED ELK FEEDING

Elkhorn Property Owners,

The following comments regarding the WRET's proposed elk feeding program were received today and are being sent to you to provide additional information on this matter. As always, your comments will be appreciated.

Thank you,
SVEA Board of Directors

SVEA Board Members

My name is Lee Frost and I spoke to you at your July meeting on behalf of the WRET. To reiterate, I was the Conservation Officer for the Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game in this area from August 1972 until November 2001. I cannot be present for the Sept. 29 meeting and would like to submit comments based on my tenure here as a conservation officer.

The Fish and Game Dept. was aware of the wintering elk population in the Elkhorn Valley prior to any development in what is now Elkhorn proper. In 1972 the first development phase was the site of the old Elkhorn Hotel and the Bonne Vie condos. As other phases were proposed the department became concerned as to the affect development would have on wintering elk.

In the early 1980s there were three unusually snowy winters that resulted in a substantial winter loss of elk mostly in Keystone Gulch. I personally documented approximately 25 carcasses due to starvation. As a result of that loss Ed Dumke Sr. initiated a private elk feeding program. Two sites were used, Independence Creek Road at the end of the pavement and the ridge north of Mr. Dumke's horse center. As development continued in Independence Creek that site was abandoned and all feeding operations were centered at the high ridge site north of his horse barn.

It's important to understand that Mr. Dumke did not lure elk down from ridge tops and canyons to his feed site. Elkhorn Valley was and still is the traditional winter range for these elk. It's important to keep this in mind because the Fish and Game Dept. today would have you believe that left unfed the Elkhorn elk would naturally disperse to other available winter range in nearby canyons. In the case of Elkhorn there is no other available winter range. The elk that attempted this in the early 80s in Keystone starved to death.

Several issues have been discussed at length about the pros and cons of feeding. Property damage (mostly landscaping) seems to have been one of the prevailing reason for the 2007

lawsuit brought against the Community School by some of the Sage Willow landowners. During the 20 plus years that Mr. Dumke fed I never received a private property damage complaint concerning wintering elk from any Elkhorn owners. Every winter the elk would settle into a routine. They would feed, move north or northeast onto higher ground and lay there until the next feeding. I absolutely believe that a high ridge feeding site would relieve most of the property damage that has occurred the past two winters.

Vehicle/elk crashes are another consideration. As we all know animal/vehicle crashes are an all too common occurrence in the Big Wood Drainage. Again, during the Dumke feeding era I never had a single car/elk crash reported in the winter. Elk like to use plowed roads to move from point to point. The high ridge feeding site kept the animals from venturing down onto the roadways.

The predator issue seems to illicit the most hysteria. Predators follow a prey base and elk are a prey base for lions and wolves. Prior to last winter when the Phantom Hill pack showed up lions were the only predators the elk had to deal with. During the Dumke and Community School feeding years I would receive an occasional call about a lion sighting or an elk that had been killed by a lion. Lions exist here all four seasons of the year. Lions by nature are solitary, reclusive and certainly not vocal. They are always in and around Elkhorn but most people don't realize that fact. It's out of sight out of mind. Wolves on the other hand are a full on circus. There are lots of them, they are visible and they have a propensity for singing. Plus it takes a lot more elk to feed a wolf pack than it does an occasional lion.

So how does the predator issue fit into the feeding issue? Elk are going to return to Elkhorn every winter regardless of artificial feeding. If there are predators around, they will follow the elk. A high ridge feeding site won't preclude wolves or lions from coming but it should keep them out of the residential areas more than what we saw last winter. Wolves are an unknown variable in the elk feeding equation. They may come or they may not. I suspect that the wolf hunting season that will begin in this area on October 1 will go a long ways towards keeping wolf activity to a minimum.

It appears that the elk feeding issue has been blown out of proportion. The WRET wants to help the elk and the people that live in Elkhorn. I think it's a fairly straight forward mission, reduce property damage, attempt to keep predators out of the residential area, keep elk out of the grills of vehicles and help the elk get through the winter. It basically comes down to the question of: Do you want elk in Elkhorn or not. I think high ridge feeding is a good way for people and elk to co-exist.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments and I hope they are helpful to you in your decision making process.

Respectfully,

Lee Frost