

NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Groups seek to uphold conservation mandate for Elk Refuge by appealing ruling

JACKSON, Wyo. – Conservation organizations announced today that they are trying to prevent the spread of disease and protect habitat on the National Elk Refuge in Wyoming by appealing a recent Washington, D.C. court ruling that allows artificial feeding of elk and bison. The groups want the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to follow its own scientists' advice by creating a plan to protect the health of wildlife and habitat by phasing out artificial feeding.

The organizations appealing the recent ruling are: Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Defenders of Wildlife, Wyoming Outdoor Council and the National Wildlife Refuge Association. Earthjustice is representing the groups.

The practice of densely concentrating elk and bison along feedlines on the National Elk Refuge violates the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, a congressional directive that requires the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to ensure the health of wildlife and National Wildlife Refuges. The agency's own scientists have said that the best way to reduce disease and promote healthy populations of bison and elk is to phase out annual winter feeding and allow wildlife to disperse naturally.

One of the most ominous threats to the National Elk Refuge's elk is the always-fatal Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). In the dense feedlot conditions created by artificial feeding on the Refuge, CWD would spread quickly through the herds. CWD has already been documented as nearby as Star Valley, Wyo., about 45 miles to the south.

“The ruling that we are appealing effectively approves harmful artificial winter feeding of elk and bison on the Refuge for an indefinite period and threatens to harm the biological integrity of Wildlife Refuges,” Earthjustice attorney Tim Preso said.

Added Lloyd Dorsey of Greater Yellowstone Coalition: “We originally brought this case to prevent an ecological disaster from Chronic Wasting Disease sweeping through the Elk Refuge elk population that is densely clustered on feedlines. Chronic Wasting Disease is 100-percent fatal and persists in the environment long after infected animals die. Continued artificial baiting and feeding threatens to turn the Elk Refuge into a toxic environment for elk and other wildlife.”

“The overcrowding caused by artificial feeding creates the perfect conditions for fatal diseases to spread through these great elk herds,” said Mike Leahy with Defenders of Wildlife. “Today’s best science shows as much and continuing to artificially concentrate and feed wildlife is causing more harm than good. The agency needs to follow science and put an end to this program.”

By asking the Department of the Interior to follow the law and its own scientists’ recommendations to carefully phase out artificial feeding, the groups said they seek to ensure healthy, free-ranging wildlife herds for future generations while protecting livestock, hunting and the area’s economy.

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