

WHY IT'S ILLEGAL TO FEED DEER IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

In an effort to reduce the possibility of bovine TB transmission among wild deer and elk, recreational deer feeding has been banned this winter in a 4,000-square mile area of northwest Minnesota.

The ban, required by the 2006 Minnesota legislature, is intended to reduce close contact among wild deer and elk over recreational feed in the vicinity of livestock farms where bovine TB has been documented.

White-tailed deer in Minnesota

have several natural adaptations that help them survive the winter. These include a thick winter coat of hollow hairs, reduced metabolic rate and storage of fat reserves for use throughout the winter.

During winter, cover—not forage—becomes the key to survival. Deer seek conifers or heavy wooded cover to avoid deep snow, high winds and extreme cold. Deer move little in these areas and use a network of trails.

RECREATIONAL DEER FEEDING SPREADS DISEASE

Feed sites congregate deer into unnaturally high densities and increases nose-to-nose contact and sharing of saliva-contaminated feed. This

increases the potential for spreading of diseases, such as bovine tuberculosis (TB), among deer. Bovine TB is a bacterial disease that primarily affects cattle; however, other animals may become infected. It is known to occur in Michigan deer but does not persist in deer anywhere else in the United States.

An infected animal will shed the bovine TB bacteria through nasal secretions and saliva, resulting in feed that can become contaminated and spread the disease between infected and uninfected animals. This transmission usually happens when animals are in close contact with each other or sharing the same food sources. The bacteria can survive on a variety of feeds, such as corn, carrots, apples, hay, sugar beets, pelleted feed, and others, for weeks or months.

Scientists, biologists, epidemiologists, and veterinarians have determined that an important factor, related to disease transmission is white-tailed deer congregating at feed sites.

The goal is to stop feeding in an area large enough to reduce the frequency of infected deer coming into close contact with healthy deer, thereby continuing the cycle of infection.

Halting recreational deer feeding and reducing the deer densities in the areas where bovine TB

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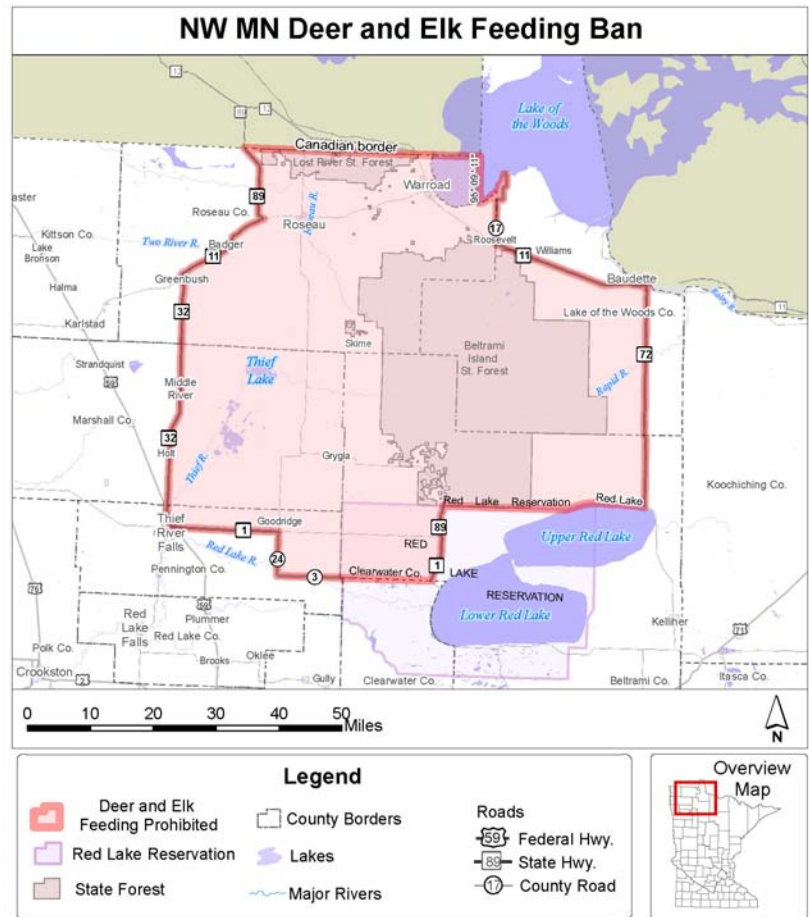
occurs are important steps in reducing the prevalence of the disease in wild deer. These measures will reduce the risk of transmitting bovine TB between animals and will help eliminate bovine TB in Minnesota's wild deer.

Also, the United States Department of Agriculture has required that Minnesota ban recreational feeding of wild deer as part of the steps necessary to regain statewide bovine TB free status for Minnesota's livestock industry. If recreational deer feeding is not restricted, this could negatively affect on both the local and statewide economy.

OTHER AFFECTS OF DEER FEEDING:

Artificial concentrations of deer caused by recreational feeding can also:

- Increase deer-vehicle collisions. Vehicle-killed deer near feed sites can outnumber those that would normally succumb to winter mortality.
- Result in over-browsing of local vegetation and ornamental plants
- Reduce fat reserves as deer use energy traveling to and from the feed site.
- Alter natural winter migration patterns of deer, leaving them more vulnerable to severe weather conditions or predators.
- Deny fawns access to food because they are kept away from feeding stations, and over-browsing by larger deer around feeding sites removes food that would otherwise be available to fawns.
- Attract predators and increase the risk of death by wolves, coyotes, or domestic dogs.



HOW YOU CAN HELP DEER

For the long-term health of deer, the best management strategy is to keep deer dependent on their natural food and cover. A healthy deer population will be sustained with wintering areas, young stands of aspen and forest openings.

Landowners can help by developing a management plan that uses wildlife and its habitat as guiding objectives.

One management tool is sustainable timber harvesting that is compatible with protecting winter deeryards and other deer habitat features.

Also, landowners can recognize the role of hunters as the primary tool for wildlife biologists to regulate deer densities. Allowing hunter access to land is an effective way to maintain a healthy balance between deer and their habitat.