

IT'S CRIMINAL TO CEASE DEER FEEDING PROGRAM

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Thank you Cynthia Knuth Fischer for speaking out about the State's ban on feeding deer. (2/18/03 issue, page 4) This ill-conceived and utterly stupid edict was brought to you by the same people who think it's proper to allow logs to be forwarded across wild and scenic rivers at the height of the brook trout spawning season.

This has been one of the harshest winters the Adirondacks has seen in a long time, certainly not the time to institute such a controversial program.

As one who was actively involved in winter deer feeding for over 30 years, I feel as qualified as some 90-day wonder biology student who learned everything he ever knew from a book. Twenty-two of my years were spent administering an extensive feeding program at Bisby Lodge in the heart of the Adirondack League Club. I saw first-hand the daily and yearly results of the success of the program

This is not the first wrong-headed decision made regarding the Adirondack deer herd. Back in the '60's a party permit system decimated the herd to dangerously low levels. Pressure on the legislature from sportsmen's groups wisely ended the debacle.

There is a parallel between that incident and the present deer-feeding ban. The antlerless deer-harvesting program occurred simultaneously with peak numbers of coyotes. They have not recovered.

The League Club's history of a winter deer-feeding program was based on sound scientific studies by leading animal nutritionists in conjunction with DEC personnel. It was documented in a publication outlining the results at a meeting at Paul Smiths. It was included in my files on deer management all during my tenure at the Club.

The Club had several strategic locations throughout the preserve where the deer were daily fed a prescribed maintenance diet. Sites were alternated periodically to prevent over-grazing of indigenous trees and shrubs in the immediate areas. Deer also were fed at two of the main lodges, something that has gone on for over 100 years. To abruptly cease a feeding program after that length of time in my opinion is criminal.

The local wildlife is one of the biggest attractions available to tourists throughout the Adirondacks. It easily rivals or exceeds the dollar value to communities that hunting does. Its propagation should be encouraged in any way possible. Deer and turkeys need all the help they can possibly get in view of the extreme weather conditions they endure here.

Mismanaged state forest preserve lands, where no timber harvesting has been allowed for years, is one more obstacle. They, like vast tracts of reforestation areas, are virtual wildlife deserts.

I do take issue with Ms. Fischer's contention that deer from Pennsylvania could successfully be introduced to the Adirondacks. I believe one basic misconception with New York deer management is that the State lumps all deer into the same category. Similar to cattle such as purebred Jerseys and Texas Longhorns, they may cross, but are born with characteristics unique to each breed.

The Adirondack deer have developed the genes and a constitution honed to deal with the adverse conditions our deer face.

An article in the February/March issue of *Outdoor Life* has this to say about New York's deer feeding ban: "*In a third temporary regulation to prevent chronic wasting*

disease (CWD) from entering the State, the DEC has allowed for habitat management, wild food plots and the cutting of browse to feed wild deer to continue during winter months to help sustain wild populations. But wild deer may not be given feed that contains protein derived from mammalian tissues. Captive or captive-bred deer or elk cannot be released into the wild.”

The deer at Bisby and on the rest of the preserve of the ALC were fed nothing but alfalfa and whole corn. A sustained timber-harvesting program has been in effect throughout the Club's conception insuring plenty of natural browse. The 35,000 acres involved should insure that with the supplemental feeding, they have at least a fighting chance.

Artificial deer feeding programs have to be carefully planned and regulated. It is not prudent or practical everywhere that deer exist. Feeding sites near highways or where there is predation by domestic dogs should not be attempted. Remote areas such as the Club that have the capacity, personnel and ability to start early and continue late into the spring, make ideal sites. Feeding adjacent to the main lodges discourages coyote predation as well.

Ms. Fischer should be commended for bringing a very controversial issue to public attention at this time and place. Truth is not determined by how many people believe it. A picture is worth a thousand words and so, too, is eyewitness experience over long periods of time on a sustained 24-hour basis.