

Moonlit Snowshoe hike scheduled

We are planning a moonlight snowshoe hike for Feb 23rd at Hailstone (main marina) starting at 7:30 PM. There is no charge but donations are always welcome. We will be serving cookies and hot cocoa. Please call Hailstone at 435-649-9540 to reserve your spot and snowshoes if needed.

We are also planning a starlight snowshoe hike for March 7th at Hailstone starting at 7:00 PM. Hike under the stars and then join John Petersen for a star show. There is no charge but donations are always welcome. We will be serving cookies and hot cocoa. Please call Hailstone at 435-649-9540 to reserve your spot and snowshoes if needed.

Don't feed the deer

Wildlife biologists have some advice to help Utah's deer make it through the last few weeks of winter:

If you're concerned about a group of deer, call the nearest Division of Wildlife Resources office. If the DWR personnel you talk with aren't familiar with the situation, they'll send a biologist or a conservation officer to check it out.

Keep your dogs inside your yard. If you decide to take your dogs out of your yard, keep them on a leash so they don't chase and harass deer. Don't disturb deer. Keep your distance from them. Don't feed the deer!



Photo by Ron Stewart

DWR biologists are watching deer across Utah closely this winter. They're also monitoring how cold it is and how deep the snow is.

On Feb. 1, conditions in Cache, Weber, Morgan and Summit counties reached a point that biologists decided that the deer in those areas needed to be fed.

The biologists are feeding pellets to the deer that are specifically designed for their complex digestive systems. Sportsmen are helping the biologists feed the deer.

"We're watching deer across the state closely," says Craig McLaughlin, Wildlife Section chief for the DWR. "Parts of northern Utah are the only places where conditions have gotten severe enough that we feel the deer should be fed."

Deer can't eat most foods

Even though the DWR has started feeding deer, biologists are urging people not to feed deer on their own—in northern Utah or anywhere in the state.

McLaughlin says deer have a complex digestive system. Hay and apples are among the items that people often feed deer. "If these items are added suddenly to a deer's diet, and in large quantities, the deer can't digest them properly," he says. "Deer that eat foods given to them by people can develop diarrhea. They can also develop another digestion-related problem that's similar to people getting the trots when they visit a foreign country.

"Either of these can be a death sentence for the deer."

Deer in good shape

McLaughlin says deer across Utah built up good reserves of body fat this summer and fall. "The deer went into the winter in excellent shape," he says.

Deer that go into the winter in good condition can usually survive 30 to 60 days of severe weather.

"We appreciate how concerned people are about the deer herds," McLaughlin says. "That concern shows that people care.

"The best thing you can do to help the deer this winter is to keep your distance from them, and don't feed them," he says. "If everyone across Utah will do that, the state's deer herds should get through the winter in good shape."

Emergency Winter Feeding

Do deer need the extra help?

Mule deer have lived in Utah for centuries, weathering even the coldest, snowiest winters. If the deer live on good range, they usually enter the winter with high reserves of body fat stored during summer and fall. The challenges of winter are part of the deer's normal annual cycle, and except for extremely harsh times of prolonged cold and deep snow, this hardy species will thrive wherever there is high-quality habitat.

How could it hurt for citizens to help feed the deer?

Although well-intentioned residents and sportsmen are anxious to help local deer herds, providing supplemental food can actually be a death sentence. In the wild, deer feed largely on browse—the twigs and leaves of woody plants—and their complex digestive systems cannot adjust to a sudden and dramatic change in diet. Consequently, any new and unfamiliar food (like hay, corn or apples) is not digested unless it is gradually added to the diet. Deer literally die of starvation with full stomachs—sometimes within feet of feeding stations!



A mule deer doe in wintry terrain

There are other important reasons why the public should not attempt to feed deer during the winter months:

- Feeding stations alter deer movements and can affect

migration patterns.

- Deer gather in large groups at feeding stations and become accustomed to handouts.
- Larger, stronger animals obtain most of the food, while fawns receive little or no nourishment.
- Concentrations of deer can degrade habitat in areas near the feeding site and increase the chance of disease outbreaks, particularly chronic wasting disease (CWD).
- Feeding within or close to neighborhoods can damage ornamental shrubs and other landscaping.
- Providing food too close to roadways can increase deer-auto accidents, reduce deer survival and raise concerns about human safety and property damage.

Will the DWR ever routinely feed deer in the winter?

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) is committed to building healthy deer herds. Our winter-feeding policy calls for feeding deer only under *extremely*

critical conditions, when large losses of adult deer are expected. To prevent or minimize such a die-off, we will institute emergency feeding. This happens only after biologists have verified that deer are in poor physical condition, and the winter weather outlook is grim.

Under normal weather conditions, deer entering the winter months in good physical condition can survive 30–60 days of severe cold. As harsh weather arrives, DWR biologists begin weekly monitoring of the physical condition of deer. They also keep a close eye on area temperatures and snow depths.

Winter-feeding research

Research conducted by Utah State University concluded that winter-feeding sites did not help deer achieve higher survival rates or better fawn production (USU MS thesis, Chris Peterson). This research recommended reserving emergency feeding for extreme weather conditions—when snow depths are treacherous and temperatures are very low.

Feeding is also an expensive project. In order to provide population-wide benefits, feeding sites must be distributed over large areas. Once routine feeding begins, it must be continued until spring growth provides deer with natural food sources. The staggering financial cost and logistical challenge of tending a large number of feeding sites daily—for periods as long as three months—is daunting.

Is there a better solution?

The DWR believes the best way to ensure the future of Utah’s deer herds is to protect and improve deer habitat, particularly on winter range. Deer that obtain good nutrition during the summer and fall will be in better physical condition and capable of withstanding longer periods of severe weather. These same deer will produce larger fawns—with higher survival rates—and ensure continued herd growth.

DWR SHUFFLES SHEEP

MOAB — Wildlife biologists recently captured 30 desert bighorn sheep and placed them in a new home.

The Division of Wildlife Resources captured the sheep at several sites in southeastern Utah. After capturing the sheep, the biologists transplanted them to



John's Canyon, a tributary of the San Juan River. The river empties into the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and Lake Powell.

DWR Wildlife Manager Bill Bates says wild sheep once lived in John's Canyon but were extirpated decades ago. The recent transplant is the first step in bringing sheep back to the canyon. The biologists collected surplus animals from healthy herds near Green River and Moab, and then trucked them south.

Bighorns inhabit steep, rocky terrain that is best accessed by helicopter. The



DWR contracted Pathfinder Helicopter Services for the capture project.

Sheep were located by flying over terrain where good-sized populations are known to occur. Once the sheep were located, the capturers fired a net from the helicopter that entangled the animals. The captured sheep were then secured in a nylon sleeve and flown to a staging area for a health inspection, and then transfer to a horse trailer. After collecting a trailer full of sheep, the woolies were trucked to their new home near the Utah-Arizona border.

The new herd consists of five rams, 22 ewes and three lambs. The habitat in John's Canyon is similar to the habitat in the areas they were taken from. The canyon features craggy cliffs and a permanent water source. With some luck, the herd should grow to its former size.