

# Bad Idea Then – Bad Idea Now

Tim L. Gothard, AWF Executive Director



At this writing, the Alabama Legislature is entertaining two bills that would aim to legalize hunting deer with the aid of bait in Alabama. By my count, this is about the tenth time in the last fifteen years, and the fifth or sixth year in a row, that baiting bills have been introduced in the Alabama Legislature. AWF's position on baiting has been clear and consistent since 2001 when the AWF Board of Directors passed a resolution against baiting. It was a bad idea then and it is a bad idea now. Baiting is bad for the resource and it is bad for hunting.

## Bad for the Resource

Absolutely nothing has changed since 2001 that would make any conservationist committed to the wise-use and responsible stewardship of our wildlife resources arrive at a decision that baiting is beneficial. If anything, exactly the opposite has occurred. AWF sounded the bell in 2000 that Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was a significant threat on the horizon and that legalized baiting could set the stage for ideal CWD transmission and spread if it arrives in Alabama. Back then, only six states were known to have CWD. Today, 22 states have CWD, including recent confirmations in Texas and even closer in Arkansas – two states away from Alabama. The risk of CWD reaching Alabama is tremendously higher than it was back in 2000.

It is sometimes stated, “We can shut down baiting if CWD arrives.” Remember this, CWD will not stop at the border and make an announcement that it is about to enter Alabama so that we can stop baiting before it does. If we look at Arkansas for example, when CWD was detected the state did exactly as they should have done – they took steps to identify the extent and distribution of the disease. Within a few months, they determined that the prevalence rate among deer sampled for the disease was so high that they estimated CWD could have been in Arkansas for as much as ten years before it was detected. We can avoid setting the table for that in Alabama and we should do so. Combine that with the potential impact of aflatoxicosis on turkeys, concentration of predators, and a host of other factors and there is no way that a case can be made other than baiting having a negative impact on the resource. For AWF, this has been and remains clear.

## Bad for Hunting

As AWF realized in 2001 and continues to do so today, a super majority of the non-hunting public in Alabama and the U.S. supports our ability to hunt provided they view it occurring in a responsible and ethical manner. Since those of us who do hunt compose only about 10% of the population, it is important that we maintain strong support for our ability to do so among the non-hunting public. In 2004, AWF conducted polling to ascertain the level of support among Alabama Republican Primary voters regarding their support for hunting (89%) and



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## Don't Take The Bait - It's a Bad Bill HB184 and SB189

The Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF), Alabama's oldest and largest citizen's conservation organization, passed a Resolution in 2001 against baiting and our position and recommendation against baiting remains the same.

### **BOTTOM LINE – BAITING IS BAD FOR THE RESOURCE**

- ❖ It increases the chance for wildlife disease transmission and spread – diseases such as: Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and Hemorrhagic Disease in deer, as well as Aflatoxicosis in turkeys (aflatoxins in corn can have major impacts Wild Turkeys)
- ❖ CWD is now found in over 20 states in the U.S. and getting closer and closer to Alabama. Last year it was found in Arkansas – two states away from Alabama. States spend millions of dollars dealing with CWD when it arrives.
- ❖ Shutting down feeding/baiting after disease is detected is not a cure-all; diseases will arrive on the landscape before they are detected. Baiting allows the table to be pre-set for transmission and spread before and after they are discovered.
- ❖ It makes wildlife, especially turkeys, quail and other ground nesting birds more susceptible to predators
- ❖ The notion that legalizing hunting of deer and feral pigs over corn/bait is the answer to controlling feral pigs is absolutely backwards – it will not solve the problem, IT WILL MAKE IT WORSE.
- ❖ RECENT POLLING CONFIRMS TREMENDOUS VOTER OPPOSITION:

1. 80% of the general public objects to hunting with the aid of bait; without the aid of bait they support it overwhelmingly
  2. Opposition/Support for baiting among hunters is about split down the middle. BUT when advised of the risks of wildlife disease transmission and spread, support among hunters drops 23% and OPPOSITION SURPASSES support in every hunter age category.
- ❖ **Don't gamble with our wildlife resources and VOTER support for hunting.**

their support for hunting with the aid of bait. When asked if they supported hunting with the aid of bait if it increases the risk of wildlife disease transmission and spread, their level of support dropped dramatically to about 20%. That polling was over ten years old, so we decided to take another look in 2016. This time, we polled likely General Election voters in Alabama to give a better cross-reference across all political affiliations and a better representation of the voting public at large. The take home message – nothing has changed. The voting public has a very high level of support for hunting in general, but when they understand the risk of wildlife disease transmission and spread associated with baiting, their level of support plummets dramatically. This reality makes baiting bad for hunting.

### Fake News on Baiting

Perhaps the most astounding aspect of the baiting legislation is the preposterous notion being promoted by legislative proponents of the baiting bills, this year and last, is the incorporation of the mantra “this will help solve the feral pig problem.” Let us call it what it is – “Fake News” and a “Ruse.” Placing more feed for feral pigs across the landscape is the last thing you would want to do if you are trying to solve the feral pig explosion. It is simply throwing gas on the fire. But don’t take my word for it. Here’s what a life-long professional in the nuisance animal control arena has to say about it: “Legalizing baiting to help control feral pigs is absolutely backwards. We will never shoot our way out of the feral pig problem, especially over corn piles. It will make a bad problem even worse.” Source: Frank Boyd, 35 years of on-the-ground experience and retired Director of USDA Wildlife Services for Alabama, Mississippi, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. End of Story.

Quite frankly, no pun intended, the feral pig angle added by proponents of the baiting bills is simply fake news and a ruse to sweeten’ the sales pitch and attempt to gain support from legislators and unsuspecting people who simply do not understand the reality of the battle against feral pigs.

### Endless Data

For those within the hunting ranks that think baiting is a panacea for harvesting more and bigger deer with less time and energy invested, we would encourage you to think again. AWF’s Sr. Biologist, Claude Jenkins, prepared a great summary of existing studies and data on the effects of baiting on everything from hunter success to social and ethical implications. To view this and other comprehensive information on AWF’s Resolution on baiting and polling information, visit the AWF website at [www.alabamawildlife.org](http://www.alabamawildlife.org)

## Take Action

AWF encourages our members to contact their Senators and Representatives to amplify AWF’s message that the baiting bills (House Bill 184 and Senate Bill 189) are bad and should not be passed by the Alabama Legislature.

