

# Baiting to Kill:

## Wildlife Baiting Harms Vermont's Wildlife, Public Safety, and Conservation



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### What is Wildlife Baiting?

Wildlife baiting is the **deliberate placement of food or other attractants with the intent to lure animals to specific locations, typically in order to hunt, trap, or otherwise contain wildlife.** The most common wildlife baiting practices are used in trapping or poisoning of animals deemed “pests,” but baiting is especially controversial in hunting. Common baits used in hunting include animal carcasses, leftover scraps from butchering, dog food, fish guts, and mineral blocks or grain used to bait herbivores. In one of the most infamous global examples of wildlife baiting, Cecil the Lion was poached by an American trophy bowhunter in 2015 after he was reportedly lured out of Hwange National Park by the deliberate placing of an elephant carcass in an unprotected zone.



**Bait dispensers set by hunters for ungulates can attract carnivores that prey on deer and small animals.**

### Wildlife Baiting Spreads Disease

Baiting and other forms of wildlife feeding can **increase disease transmission by congregating animals together, spreading infection either by animal-to-animal contact or via contaminated feed, water, or soil.** For example, hay bales and feeding stations in Michigan and Manitoba were implicated in the spread of bovine tuberculosis from cattle to wild bison, deer, elk, and carnivore populations. In Michigan, before local bans, up to 87% of hunters used bait. Scientists are now concerned that baiting will likely increase the transmission risk of the highly pathogenic avian flu virus (HPAI). Crowding from baiting and deliberate feeding of wildlife can also potentially increase animals’ stress, which could further contribute to disease spread.



**Attracting animals in groups using bait can increase disease spread through contaminated food or contact.**



## Ecological Disruption and Public Safety Concerns in Vermont

Wildlife baiting and feeding can cause a variety of dangerous disruptions to wildlife dynamics by altering natural wildlife movement, behavior, and population dynamics. Animals become easy targets after being intentionally drawn in groups to a food source, leading to mass culling. Alternatively, baiting can lead to unnatural population increases due to food availability; for example, **baited bears have been documented producing litters more frequently and with more cubs**. Baiting also can draw wildlife like bobcats and coyotes into human-populated areas, thereby **increasing safety risks for livestock, pets, and the public**.

Non-target species, including pets, can also be drawn to bait sites and put in danger. For example, a study on bear baiting in Michigan found that 82% of species visiting bait sites were animals other than bears, increasing these animals' susceptibility to hunting. In 2022-2023 in Vermont, **two domestic dogs were shot and killed over bait piles** when hunters mistook them for coyotes or other wildlife, demonstrating another public safety concern. **A third dog was killed over a bait pile in an animal cruelty case, which the state prosecuted** on behalf of the military veteran who was the dog's owner.

Importantly, **baited animals can become habituated to human-provided food sources rather than maintaining their natural foraging behaviors and wariness of human spaces**. This can interfere, for example, with animals' abilities to prepare for winter survival due to altered feeding patterns, increasing their chances of starvation. **When wild animals are drawn closer to human communities by food, they can become problematic for residents**, leading to lethal removal or relocation by authorities responding to community concerns or other conflicts.



Bear baiting has already been made illegal in Vermont due to ecological and public safety risks.



Coyote killed over bait carcass set by hunters.



## Baiting Violates Conservation Principles and Fair Chase

Wildlife baiting **fundamentally contradicts the mainstream conservation principles outlined by the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation**. The practice **undermines the philosophy of ‘fair chase’** by giving hunters an unfair advantage over unsuspecting animals. Many hunters criticize baiting because it **gives certain hunters (who bait) disproportionate access to animals** that are considered to be part of the “public trust.” Furthermore, baiting **interferes with scientific wildlife conservation efforts** and disrupts the natural ecosystem dynamics that conservationists seek to preserve.

## Many States and Federal Law Already Prohibit Wildlife Baiting

Many states have recognized the harmful effects of baiting and taken action against the practice. **Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota** have completely banned deer baiting. **Arizona** has banned the intentional feeding or baiting of wildlife. **Colorado and Montana** have extended their bans on baiting to all “game” animals, including coyotes, bears, bobcats, beavers, deer, moose, turkeys, and more, including banning the use of salt or mineral licks to feed deer or other wildlife. Citing spread of disease and ecological damage, New York has prohibited all intentional feeding of wild deer and moose. In 2024, the Department of the Interior took steps to protect Alaska’s bears by banning baiting in National Preserves in the state. Federal law maintains a strict prohibition on baiting migratory birds, recognizing the practice's harmful effects on bird populations.

For more information and resources on protecting wildlife from harmful practices, visit [ProjectCoyote.org](https://www.ProjectCoyote.org).



Baiting can contribute to the spread of diseases like mange.



Baiting puts iconic wildlife like foxes at risk.

