

## Fish and Game Information- Feeding Wildlife (Turkeys)

I spoke with our wildlife manager in our McCall office, Regan Berkley, and this is an issue she's aware of. I encourage you to reach out to her if you have questions or concerns moving forward. I think it would be helpful to get her take on the issue as you consider options, including a city ordinance.

In general, IDFG discourages feeding of wildlife at any time of year. Turkeys can sometimes be an exception because people have put them in places that may provide good spring, summer, and fall habitat, but not good winter habitat which, as you can see, can cause problems because turkeys don't usually migrate long distances. In some of these situations, landowners and agencies have taken steps to improve winter habitat conditions in certain areas in order to sustain turkey populations through the winter. IDFG would prefer this approach over winter feeding operations.

People who care about wildlife can make the biggest difference by helping to improve natural habitat conditions which provide natural cover and year-round natural food sources for wildlife. In general, winter cover can be enhanced by planting shrubs and low growing trees in shelterbelts or riparian areas and by protecting those areas from livestock with wildlife friendly fencing. Food plots for wild turkeys can serve as an alternative to direct feeding on private land but may still result in unwanted congregation of wild turkeys around residential homes.

Through decades of experience in Idaho and elsewhere, winter game bird feeding has not been shown to have a measurable long-term effect on population numbers because there are many other factors that influence population sizes. Starvation can happen during extended periods of deep snow and low temperatures, but it is not common and feeding does little to save birds under severe conditions. Game bird populations are adapted to survive through a high rate of reproductivity. Where spring and summer habitat is adequate, a relative few adult birds will produce large numbers of chicks.

IDFG does not sanction non-emergency feeding of wild turkeys or other wildlife. Our goal is to keep wildlife populations both wild and healthy.

Here is a list of some unintended consequences of winter feeding:

- Taming local populations of wild turkeys and increasing the probability of nuisance complaints in the community.
- Disease. The recent epidemic of highly pathogenic avian influenza can be transmitted from wild birds to domestic populations and can kill wild and domestic birds very quickly. If HPAI is found in domestic poultry flocks, the USDA recommends euthanizing the entire flock to prevent potential spread to other domestic or wild flocks. Although not common, HPAI can also infect humans and pets.
- Predation. When wild turkeys congregate it can attract predators. If turkeys congregate near humans and residential homes, there is potential for predation on domestic livestock and pets.
- Damage to existing habitat.
- Concentrating turkeys on private lands where hunting may not be allowed, which can exacerbate the problem.