

What HB1618 by Ritchey does:

- Allows a person to hunt deer and wild hogs where bait is present on privately owned land.

Current Law:

- Allows for “supplemental feeding” of wildlife, but requires the feed to be removed in advance of hunting over that property.

Why this bill is a problem for hunters:

- Tennesseans have a personal right to hunt and fish
- Wildlife, and certainly game species, are a public resource
- Baiting disadvantages adjacent landowners who do not, or may not be able to afford to, place bait on property by limiting their access to public wildlife and exercising their personal right to hunt.
- This in effect forces property owners that wish to harvest wildlife to bait in order to compete with landowners that do bait.
- Baiting of deer has also been show to reduce home range size and cause wildlife to become more nocturnal because they know where and when food will be available.
- Research has shown this leads to less hunter success.
- Baiting is also bad for wildlife populations, as laid out below, which is bad for hunters.

Why this bill is bad for wildlife:

In general, baiting creates a vector for disease. By baiting wildlife, you concentrate them and create an area where diseases can easily spread through common feeding areas.

A prime example of this was the legal baiting of deer in Michigan, which caused the rapid spread of bovine tuberculosis. This ultimately cost the state of Michigan tens of millions of dollars to eradicate, and continues to cost their state in testing.

- Turkeys
 - Feeds nest predators like raccoons and increases population numbers, which leads to fewer poults in the spring - and therefore fewer mature turkeys to harvest.
 - Concentrates predators around bait sites where target species feed potentially increasing predation of adult turkeys.
 - Certain baits, particularly corn, can develop aflatoxins (a type of fungus) when exposed to moisture as a result of being left on the ground as bait.
 - This can develop in concentrations high enough to be toxic to turkeys
 - Turkeys can develop avian influenza, which can be rapidly spread through baiting. This can jump to poultry houses, potentially detrimental to industry.

- Elk and Deer
 - Concentrates deer into smaller home ranges, and leads to them feeding more at night.
 - Can play role in increased reproductive success resulting in more deer where there may already be more than enough deer.
 - Disease is a major concern with deer, particularly in West Tennessee with CWD.
 - Deer can also carry brucellosis, which can be detrimental to livestock.
 - Draws elk on to property they shouldn't be on, potentially frustrating landowners that graze cattle due to the destruction elk can cause.

In addition to disease concerns, baiting (and supplemental feeding) attracts predators to feeding sites where game wildlife feed, thus making game wildlife more vulnerable to predations.

Lastly, supplemental feeding and baiting feeds predators, and increases their winter survival and reproductive success. Predator populations are arguably too high in many areas. High predator populations, especially nest predators like raccoons, skunks and opossums, lead to low reproductive success and in turn declining populations of wildlife like turkeys. Recent research in Tennessee has shown low to no reproduction by turkeys in the southern middle Tennessee study area. Young turkeys, called poults, are not surviving to adulthood and predation is accepted as one of the key drivers in poult survival - or the lack thereof.