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## Colorado giving hay to wild elk in deep snow



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Wed Jan 19, 5:30 PM

By Keith Coffman

DENVER (Reuters) - Elk in northwestern Colorado cut off from food supplies by deep snow will be provided hay to prevent the wild herds from raiding livestock feeding operations, state wildlife managers said on Wednesday.

Heavy snows in the Yampa River valley, about 250 miles northwest of Denver, have the Colorado Division of Wildlife concerned the elk will move into areas where ranchers leave feed for cattle and sheep in the winter.

Randy Hampton, spokesman for the agency, said workers will place hay at two sites upriver from cattle grazing lands to lure elk away from haystacks and livestock feed lines.

Hampton said the goal is to stave off problems that occurred in the valley during the winter of 2007-08 when hungry elk ravaged cattle and sheep ranches, injured livestock, and trampled newborn calves.

Calving season for cattle begins in February.

Ron Velarde, the wildlife division's northwest regional manager, said the situation is unlike 2008, when the agency rushed feed to deer in the Gunnison Valley in west-central Colorado.

That winter, the 20,000 deer in the basin faced starvation from snow drifts up to their necks, making them unable to migrate to areas where food was available.

"This is not a feeding operation," Velarde said. "That's a last resort when large-scale starvation is likely, and we don't anticipate that. What we're trying to do is bait elk away from the ranches."

Colorado has the largest elk population in the United States, with an estimated 292,000 within its borders, according to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

Hunters cull between 40,000 to 50,000 elk, or wapiti, in Colorado each year, according to the division of wildlife.

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The estimated annual economic impact to Colorado from hunting and fishing is \$1.8 billion, which is generated by licensing fees, transportation, lodging, outfitting, and related goods and services.

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