We reached an exciting milestone in the WSU elk hoof disease research program with the arrival of our first resident captive elk. Five-month-old S19, or “Salix,” arrived on the Pullman campus on November 21st. The male calf originated east of Mt. Rainer and at about 2 days of age was submitted to a licensed rehabilitator to be cared for and bottle-raised. We received S19 because he was not suitable for release back to the wild. S19 will be castrated using a technique that is the same as that commonly performed on bull cattle to make them steers. S19 will be safer to keep in captivity and will not grow antlers.

This past summer we attempted to obtain a small group of cow elk calves to bottle-raise and establish our resident captive herd, but no calves were available. S19 begins to fill this gap. He will reside at the research facility to serve as a “host” to help calm wild elk that are brought in for studies and also provide normal, or control, samples for study.

S19 is temporarily housed in a secure wildlife pen on the WSU campus until construction of the elk research facility is finished. The facility is about 90% complete. Following inspection and approval by the WSU Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, we anticipate introducing S19 to the new facility around the first of the new year.

The next step will then be to work with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife this winter to obtain a small group of elk from the wild to use in the initial studies on elk hoof disease. The elk will be cared for by staff and students in the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine. We will use the scientific process, as discussed in the last Update, to design these studies and share more in upcoming Updates.

For now, we thank you for your support in helping the WSU elk research program reach these important milestones. Each step will contribute toward our understanding of elk hoof disease and learning how to reduce the harm done from this devastating disease.