Elk hoof disease research activities are off to a busy start in 2020. On January 31st, construction of the elk research facility on the WSU, Pullman campus was completed. The facility includes 10 individual pens where studies will be conducted, a handling facility, and two 1.5 acre holding pastures. The facility is enclosed within a secure perimeter fence. Coordination with the WSU environmental safety and animal care programs contributed to ensuring compliance with applicable standards and regulations for a safe and biosecure facility. Due to animal welfare and biosecurity concerns the facility is not open to the public.

**Elk S19**, was moved into the facility as its inaugural resident. Shortly thereafter, we coordinated with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to capture four healthy wild elk from central Washington to bring to the facility for use on an upcoming study. The four subadult elk, two males and two females, were darted with immobilization drugs for examination and sampling prior to being loaded onto a trailer. Immobilization drugs were reversed to safely transport the elk to Pullman. The elk are currently adapting to life at the research facility. We started with just four because we were not certain how the elk would respond to captivity and to iron out any wrinkles in the handling techniques. After a week in captivity, the elk are doing well and we expect to capture the remaining elk needed for the first study in the coming weeks.

Following an acclimation period, the study will begin. The objective of the initial study is to determine whether elk hoof disease is infectious and transmissible to otherwise healthy elk through natural routes of transmission in captivity. We will expose healthy elk to elk with hoof disease and monitor disease progression. Based on findings from this trial we will plan the next studies to be conducted at the research facility.
We appreciate that conducting disease research on animals is a serious responsibility. All animal research at WSU is overseen by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. Throughout the capture, acclimation, and study periods we will take steps to minimize disturbance and discomfort to the captive animals and maximize what we learn from them. This includes the use of anti-anxiety and pain-relieving drugs administered by veterinarians as part of well-designed studies. It is incumbent upon us as researchers to adhere to these ethical and scientific standards.

The study is scheduled to last through the summer with analyses conducted in the fall. We look forward to sharing preliminary results as the study progresses and we have confidence in interpretation of results.

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