

TESTIMONY OF

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Concerning:

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Presented to the

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEES ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
And
FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

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Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittees. My name is Gary Wolfe, and I represent a coalition of three sportsmen's-based, nonprofit wildlife conservation organizations...the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Boone and Crockett Club, and Mule Deer Foundation. I, and the organizations I represent, sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share our concerns regarding Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) with you today. Thank you for giving this serious wildlife disease the Congressional attention it deserves.

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Boone and Crockett Club, and Mule Deer Foundation are deeply concerned about the impact CWD is having, and may continue to have, on North America's wild deer and elk populations. We are concerned about the possible, but currently unknown, threats to other wild cervids, domestic livestock and humans. And, we are also concerned about the impact this disease may have upon millions of Americans' opportunity to hunt deer and elk each fall, and upon their confidence to put healthful wild venison on their families' tables.

In response to these concerns, these three conservation organizations have recently formed an alliance to address CWD. The organizations have agreed to pool resources, share information, and collaborate on strategies and methods to positively impact the CWD issue. Upon hearing of this partnership, other wildlife conservation organizations have expressed an interest in joining our CWD Alliance.

We believe that one of the greatest needs is the dissemination of timely and accurate information regarding CWD to our members, the general public, media and decision makers. It is important to separate fact from myth. Concerns about the seriousness of this disease should not be downplayed; but at the same time, unwarranted fears leading to hysteria and overreaction need to be quelled. To that end, the CWD Alliance is:

- Co-sponsoring, along with the National Wildlife Federation and several state wildlife agencies, a national CWD Symposium, scheduled for August 6 & 7, 2002 in Denver, CO. This conference will provide a common forum for concerned groups and regulatory agencies to discuss issues concerning CWD. The intent is to summarize the current information about the disease and present the status of management programs conducted by various agencies and organizations in an effort to control this disease. Most importantly, information and discussions presented at this conference will help shape recommendations for future management actions.
- Developing a comprehensive CWD website (www.cwd-info.org) to facilitate the public's access to breaking CWD news, scientific literature, ongoing research studies, recommendations from professional wildlife management agencies, links to other CWD information sources, and perhaps most importantly an easy to comprehend CWD overview including "Frequently asked Questions".

- Cooperating on the publication of timely and informative CWD articles in our respective organizations' member magazines.

Other activities of the CWD Alliance include:

- Consideration of grant requests for specific CWD research and management projects
- Working with state and federal agencies to develop policy recommendations for the management and eradication of CWD
- Providing expert testimony to select decision makers such as state wildlife commissions, state legislatures, and the United States Congress.

We would like to offer the following recommendations regarding ways federal agencies and Congress can support state wildlife management agencies and other involved state agencies in the control of chronic wasting disease:

- First and foremost, successful control and eradication of CWD in both wild and captive populations of deer and elk will depend upon a cooperative approach and a well-coordinated effort between federal and state agencies. We encourage you to rely heavily on the recommendations of the state wildlife agencies when considering federal regulations or congressional legislation regarding CWD. Any such actions should recognize and reinforce the principle that state wildlife agencies have the primary responsibility for managing wild cervid populations.
- Secondly, since CWD may be spread to new areas through commercial trade in captive cervids, thus placing wild populations of deer and elk at risk, the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) should work closely with state wildlife agencies in the development of regulations affecting the interstate shipment of captive cervids.
- Third, request that the sponsors of the upcoming national CWD Symposium report back to these congressional subcommittees following the conference with specific recommendations for action.
- Fourth, because efforts to control CWD are costly and are taking critical limited resources away from the impacted states' other wildlife management programs, we would like to see significant federal funding appropriated to:
 - Support additional research into the diagnosis, pathogenesis, and epidemiology of CWD.
 - Assist state wildlife agencies with the costs associated with the surveillance and testing of wild deer and elk populations for the presence of CWD.

- Assist state wildlife agencies with the costs associated with efforts to eradicate CWD from areas where it already occurs, and programs to prevent its spread to new areas.
- Assist state veterinary diagnostic laboratories with the costs associated with becoming properly staffed and equipped so they can quickly and effectively process the significantly increased number of samples being submitted for CWD testing.
- Develop and implement, in coordination with state wildlife agencies, a national CWD public awareness campaign.

In conclusion, America's wild deer and elk populations are priceless treasures. They are a source of beauty, inspiration and recreation for millions of Americans; and, they infuse billions of dollars annually into our national economy. Their health and vitality must be protected! Please remember, there are literally hundreds of thousands of American sportsmen-conservationists that are concerned about this issue and willing to help in its resolution.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and recommendations on this very important wildlife disease issue.

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