

**MULTI-STATE GUIDELINES
FOR CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE MANAGEMENT
IN FREE-RANGING WHITE-TAILED DEER, MULE DEER AND ELK
November 2004**

INTRODUCTION

Chronic wasting disease (CWD), a naturally-occurring prion disease, poses a threat to the health of deer and elk populations in areas where it already occurs as a self-maintaining disease and potentially to native deer and elk species throughout their North American ranges. Therefore, the signatory states mutually agree to adopt comprehensive guidelines for addressing CWD in their respective jurisdictions.

GOALS

It is the collective desire of the represented states to manage CWD with five specific objectives:

- (1) Minimize the potential for CWD to spread beyond current affected areas.
- (2) Manage infection rates (prevalence) within existing affected areas using results and techniques provided by ongoing and future research according to objectives set by each state. Based on current understanding of CWD in free-ranging deer and elk, eradication of CWD may not be a justified or realistic management objective within endemic areas.
- (3) Determine the status and extent of CWD when the disease is discovered in a previously unknown location and, if determined to be feasible, attempt to eliminate the disease.
- (4) Support and conduct, on a priority basis, applied research that will facilitate continued expansion of knowledge of CWD.
- (5) Provide timely, complete and accurate information about all facets of CWD to personnel of participating agencies and the public of involved states and throughout the United States.

CWD has infected free-ranging elk and deer populations since at least 1981, but probably much longer. Within the last 5 years, concern over CWD has risen due to a number of factors. The represented states are committed to reducing the impact of this disease on free-ranging and captive deer and elk populations within their jurisdictions. States will use the best scientific information available and take all reasonable and necessary steps, consistent with these guidelines, to achieve these five objectives. Further, representatives will meet periodically on the status of the disease and management efforts in their respective states. Representatives will also periodically review these guidelines and associated objectives to provide additional guidance as needed or as dictated by new information.

DEVELOPMENT OF POPULATION OR HERD PLANS FOR AFFECTED AREAS

There are numerous challenges inherent in managing free-ranging wildlife populations. In light of the added difficulty in managing wildlife populations with CWD, detailed population or herd plans appear critical to successful long-term management of CWD. Therefore, represented states will expedite the development of management plans for areas where CWD has been found. The plans will focus on management objectives designed to limit geographic spread, to manage CWD prevalence consistent with state objectives and to eliminate it where feasible. At a minimum, artificial feeding and baiting of deer and elk should be discouraged or banned throughout CWD-affected areas, unless authorized by the wildlife agency specifically to facilitate the management or eradication of disease. Where feasible, adaptive approaches to CWD management should be applied.

In situations where infected deer or elk populations span jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., state lines, federal lands and tribal lands), either seasonally or year-round, these common deer and elk populations should be

managed cooperatively with respect to achieving CWD-related goals. Additionally, represented states will develop contingency plans for managing new foci of CWD detected through passive or active surveillance programs based on statistically sound sampling. In such cases, the preferred objective will be to define and eliminate these foci wherever feasible. Depending on success or failure of these contingency management efforts, states may need to redefine boundaries of endemic areas or declare presence of a new endemic area.

RESEARCH

Represented states will conduct, support, and/or otherwise encourage, on a priority basis, research on CWD. Management of CWD requires a more thorough understanding of CWD transmission, ecology, natural host range, and relationship to other TSEs, as well as development and refinement of diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventive tools. States will continue to participate in ongoing and planned research conducted by agency personnel and through contracts with external research facilities, as appropriate. Representatives also will continue to monitor research that is occurring throughout the world on CWD and TSEs to ensure that the most current and comprehensive data are available.

THE ROLE OF HUNTING IN AFFECTED AREAS

It is our collective goal that hunting opportunities in existing affected areas, or in areas that may be exposed to CWD in the future, will be continued to assist in managing deer and elk herds to limit or reduce CWD prevalence and its spread. In endemic areas, however, conflicts between disease management and recreational hunting opportunity goals will be resolved in favor of the health and long-term viability of deer and elk populations. Hunting has historically provided the primary means of managing deer and elk populations throughout most of the United States. The represented states support the use of hunting to manage herd populations and herd densities.

In some cases, the occurrence of CWD in an area can raise human health concerns beyond those normally associated with the consumption of wild game meat. According to public health experts, there is currently no evidence that CWD poses an additional health risk to those who choose to consume animals from affected areas. No one, however, can guarantee that no risk exists relative to human consumption of animals that may have contracted CWD. Represented state wildlife management agencies will continue to work cooperatively with their respective state and local public health departments, as well as federal public health officials, to assess and monitor the health risks of CWD to humans. Representatives will also continue to ensure that the assumptions regarding transmissibility are consistent with the best available science, and will recommend reconsideration of relevant policies in the event that credible evidence reveals a significant modification in current understanding of the transmissibility of CWD.

HUNTER INFORMATION

At this time there is no evidence that CWD poses a risk to human health. However, it is important that prospective hunters make an informed decision prior to hunting in affected areas. Providing information relative to CWD to those who choose to hunt in an affected area is both appropriate and necessary. Individuals contemplating hunting in affected areas should have access to the best scientific information available. This information must be accurate, current and understandable by the general public. To this end, represented states will continue developing and sharing specific strategies for ensuring that current information relative to CWD is available to all prospective hunters in affected areas. Such strategies may include dissemination of information through application brochures, traditional media news releases, Internet postings and direct mail to successful deer and elk license applicants, particularly those hunting in affected areas of a state. In addition, information about the availability and logistics of testing animals and precautionary guidelines provided by public health experts should be provided.

USE OF AGENCY STAFF TO REMOVE ANIMALS FROM AFFECTED AREAS FOR MANAGEMENT AND/OR RESEARCH

Although regulated public hunting is the preferred method of deer and elk population control, the presence of CWD may compel agencies to consider using professional staff or agents to assist in the process of CWD management and research. Because of the threat posed by CWD in deer and elk populations, represented states should establish necessary authorities for using agency staff or agents to manipulate ungulate populations, in a manner consistent with disease management, research and/or herd management plans, where such manipulations are determined to be necessary to manage or research CWD. Decisions made regarding specific methods will be left to the discretion of represented states, and may be influenced by geographic constraints, landowner cooperation and human density in the management area, risk to staff or agents and public input regarding the proposed technique(s). Effective management of CWD will require cooperation from private landowners both within and outside of affected areas. Consistent with existing laws, states should work cooperatively with landowners, recognize and respect private property rights and provide the appropriate level of information to landowners during development and implementation of any management or research plan.

SURVEILLANCE

Represented states will conduct surveillance to determine if CWD exists in wild deer and elk. Surveillance should be based on a prioritized assessment of risk and available resources. In those states that have CWD, continued surveillance will allow the monitoring of CWD distribution and prevalence. It is impractical and unnecessary from a scientific surveillance standpoint to test every animal killed for the presence of the disease. Surveillance data should be gathered using appropriate biological and epidemiological standards to assure the reliability of results and inferences drawn from the data. At a minimum, efforts to collect any free-ranging deer and elk exhibiting clinical signs of CWD should continue. Examining road-killed deer and elk may also provide information on CWD in areas where hunter-provided samples numbers are low. Road-kill information can also be used to augment other surveillance approaches designed to detect new CWD foci or better define distribution of known foci.

TESTING OF DEER AND ELK KILLED

Deer and elk killed by agency personnel for research or management purposes should be tested for CWD wherever feasible. In addition, states will work cooperatively with public and private testing facilities to provide information regarding testing facility locations and costs for public hunters who choose to have their deer or elk tested at their own expense. These guidelines do not infer that states should accept responsibility for testing unrelated to surveillance or for providing carcass quality assurances of deer and elk harvested by recreational hunters in their respective jurisdictions. In fact, it is recommended that state wildlife agencies do not assume responsibility for assuring food safety. With respect to affected areas, testing of deer and elk provides two primary benefits. First, testing provides critical data for management and research. Second, testing allows hunters to minimize the risk of consuming deer or elk that have contracted CWD. These two benefits are distinct. States may, as a component of a management or research plan, by rule, require that deer or elk taken by public hunters be submitted for testing in specific areas; in such cases, an agency may choose to bear the costs of testing. Additional sources of federal or other funding to support increasing CWD surveillance demands should be pursued.

THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURAL AGENCIES IN CWD MANAGEMENT

Represented states are committed to minimizing the impact of CWD on both free-ranging and captive populations of deer and elk. However, the ability to manage CWD in some states may be limited by statutory authorities of state wildlife management agencies. In states where statutory and regulatory responsibility for managing disease in captive or free-ranging deer and elk is shared with state agriculture agencies, continued cooperation between the two agencies is encouraged to ensure comprehensive and successful CWD management. States should strive to develop consistent and comprehensive regulations

aimed at reducing (or preventing increases in) disease prevalence within affected areas, minimizing the risk of the disease spreading beyond established affected areas and eliminating localized outbreaks.

MOVEMENT OF LIVE DEER AND ELK (UNDER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AGENCY JURISDICTION)

Live free-ranging deer and elk will not be translocated from areas where CWD exists, either for management or rehabilitation purposes; exceptions may be made for acquiring deer and elk for research purposes. Given the uncertainty about the complete geographic distribution of CWD, states should exercise caution when contemplating deer and elk translocations from other areas as well.

In addition, to the extent allowed by existing laws, movement of captive deer or elk between commercial facilities will be restricted to minimize opportunities to spread CWD. Managing free-ranging deer and elk populations in affected areas addresses only part of the potential threat to deer and elk populations within our jurisdictions and beyond. The movement of live captive animals between commercial facilities poses a threat to native wildlife resources. Therefore, prior to the authorization of movement, captive herds should be monitored for at least 60 months. Monitoring should include, among other things, a requirement for record keeping (including an annual accounting of all additions to and subtractions from the herd), individual unique animal identification, reporting all mortalities and testing them for CWD. Where they do not already exist, states should support and encourage such regulations to facilitate enforcement of these guidelines.

REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL OF CARCASSES FROM AFFECTED AREAS

No research exists to prove conclusively how CWD is transmitted from one deer or elk to another. However, because high levels of the infectious agent apparently accumulate in specific organs and body parts of diseased animals, some restriction on movement and disposal of carcasses and portions of carcasses harvested in affected areas should be considered through either recommendation or regulation. These recommendations or regulations should address, at minimum, acceptable locations for meat processing and taxidermy of deer and elk harvested in affected areas and proper disposal of discarded carcass materials. States should also attempt to adopt carcass transportation recommendations and regulations that are as uniform and consistent as possible to avoid confusing hunters and to minimize conflict with regulations from other states.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

There are many unknowns regarding CWD. However, much is being learned as research and management progress. Given the rapidly changing nature of CWD, it is important for state wildlife agencies to train all staff involved, directly or indirectly, in CWD issues. It is also important for state and federal agencies to communicate often enough to ensure actions are coordinated as much as possible.

COMMUNICATION

CWD is of interest locally, nationally and internationally. As the public agencies charged with managing CWD in wildlife populations, the represented state agencies have an obligation to provide timely, complete and accurate information about all facets of the disease to the public in respective states and throughout North America. There is inherent difficulty in providing accurate and up-to-date information regarding this rapidly changing issue. Because of these challenges, continuing and effective communication is paramount to any plan to manage CWD on a regional basis. Therefore, represented states will continue to maintain, as a high priority, mechanisms for effective communication with the general public, constituent groups and the media about CWD. As appropriate, all available communication tools should be enlisted to provide timely, complete and accurate information about CWD. Communication resources and strategies should be coordinated and shared among represented states wherever feasible.

Although these guidelines should not be construed as binding on any signatory agency, all states are encouraged to follow them to the extent possible. Cooperating CWD management partners are:

Kevin C. Duffy, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Scott Henderson, Director
Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

Robert C. Hight, Director
California Department of Fish and Game

Bruce McCloskey, Director
Colorado Division of Wildlife

Pat Emory, Director
Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife

Noel Holcomb, Director
Georgia Wildlife Resources Division

Steve Huffaker, Director
Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Jeffrey R. Vonk, Director
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

J. Michael Hayden, Secretary
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

C. Tom Bennett, Commissioner
Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources

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Gene Merriam, Commissioner
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Gerry Barnhart, Director
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