

Co-management of White-tailed Deer



Why is this bill needed?

The overall intent of this proposed policy is to minimize the risk of Chronic wasting disease (CWD) from Cervidae farming activities. Recent changes to Chapter 35 provide the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources co-management authority of white-tailed deer farms with the Board of Animal Health.

CWD is a neurological disease that affects members of the Cervidae family (deer, elk, and moose). The disease is spread through misfolded proteins called prions and is always fatal. CWD was first discovered in a Minnesota elk farm in Aitkin County in 2002. More recently, the disease was found in wild deer in Fillmore County in 2016, Dakota County in 2020, Polk County in 2021, and in seven deer farms over that time period. Testing of hunter-harvested deer in southeast Minnesota estimates the prevalence of the disease in wild deer is around 1%. The spread of CWD threatens the health of Minnesota's wild deer, moose and elk populations across the state. Approximately 500,000 deer hunters contribute over half a billion dollars to the state's economy and harvest about 200,000 deer annually.

Major program elements

Fence deficiencies may allow farmed Cervidae escapes or wild Cervidae to enter a farm, which is a known risk factor in the spread of CWD. The current statute allows up to 45 days to correct a deficiency. This proposal will shorten that time to 14 days.

This proposal also requires identifying farmed white-tailed deer within 14 days of birth. Having positive identification of white-tailed deer at an earlier age will further agency and producer herd inventory understanding, notably in the event of disease where direct offspring have a higher likelihood of being infected.

Federal indemnification can provide funding for farms with CWD. This proposal would require owners of premises where CWD is detected to depopulate the premises of Cervidae within 30 days if a federal indemnification application is not submitted, and require all premises to maintain fencing for 20 years after the date CWD is detected. All Cervidae that die (natural causes or are slaughtered) must be tested if they are older than six months of age.

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Importing Cervidae or Cervidae semen from other states presents a risk of transporting disease. With no approved live animal test, the discovery of CWD in a farmed herd almost always occurs after an animal has died. At that point, the risk of moving live animals may have already occurred. This proposal would prohibit the importation of Cervidae or Cervidae semen from any state or province that has detected CWD.

Fiscal impacts

This proposal does not have a fiscal impact.

Statute Proposal

Sec 1. Amends M.S. 31.155 subdivision 4 by modifying dates and requiring fence deficiency repairs to be completed within 14 days.

Sec 2. Amends M.S. 31.155 subdivision 6 to require farmed white-tailed deer ear-tag identification within 14 days of birth.

Sec 3. Amends M.S. 31.155 subdivision 11 to require testing of all Cervidae older than six months that die for CWD, and requires the owner of a premises where CWD is detected to depopulate the premises of Cervidae within 30 days if a federal indemnification application is not submitted, and maintain required fencing for 20 years after the date CWD is detected.

Sec 4. Amends M.S. 31.155 subdivision 12 to define from which locations live Cervidae or Cervidae semen may be imported into the state, and to allow the commissioner of natural resources to seize and destroy Cervidae semen (in addition to Cervidae) imported in violation of this section.

For more information contact:

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