

Chronic Wasting Disease Management



Related Facts

Each year in Minnesota:

- Approximately 500,000 people hunt deer.
- About 200,000 deer are harvested.
- About 5,000 tons of healthy venison are generated.

Summary

Chronic wasting disease (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 threatens the health of Minnesota's wild deer, moose and elk populations. Minnesotans treasure wild deer for their intrinsic value. In addition, many Minnesotans rely on venison as a source of healthy protein. Expansion of CWD in the state may result in fewer Minnesotans willing to hunt deer and consume venison, which will have significant impacts to the state's economy and the ability to manage the size of the state's deer herd.

CWD was first discovered in a Minnesota elk farm in Aitkin County in 2002. The first wild deer infected with CWD was found in 2010 in Olmsted County, which was associated with a CWD-positive elk farm. Intensive sampling of wild deer did not detect more cases in southeast Minnesota until 2016, when wild deer in Fillmore County were discovered to have CWD. The infection persists in wild deer in this area at a very low rate (~1%). More recently, the disease was found in a single wild deer in Polk County in 2021, a single wild deer in Crow Wing County in 2021, two wild deer in the City of Grand Rapids in Itasca County in 2022 and two wild deer in northern Hubbard County in 2022. To date, there have been 13 farmed cervid operations with animals testing positive for CWD with the latest being identified in Winona County in 2022. A total of 198 wild deer have tested positive for the disease as of February, 2023.

Recent changes to Minnesota Statute Chapter 35 provide the DNR with co-management authority of white-tailed deer farms with the Board of Animal Health (BAH). In February 2022, the DNR and BAH submitted a Concurrent Authority Regulating Farmed White-tailed Deer report to the legislature. The report summarizes how the agencies work together under concurrent authority, describes ongoing challenges to managing CWD and provides recommendations for moving forward.

Proposal

The proposed changes will reduce the risk of CWD infections within, and spillover from, farmed white-tailed deer facilities. These proposed changes are based on the latest research and understanding of this disease.

Fence deficiencies (for example, insufficient fence heights, lack of redundant gates, or damaged fences) may allow farmed white-tailed deer escapes or wild deer 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 clarify that any fence deficiency that risks farmed white-tailed deer escaping or wild deer entering a pen must be fixed immediately, while other deficiencies must be remedied within 30 days.

Tagging captive white-tailed deer is currently required by October 31 of the year the deer is born or before an animal is moved. This proposal requires identification of farmed white-tailed deer within 14 days of birth. Better identification will improve management of herd inventories and can assist with epidemiologic investigations in the event of disease detections.

Depopulating infected herds and isolating areas of infection are needed tools for reducing the spread of CWD. As there is currently no federally approved live animal test, this proposal



will require owners of premises where CWD is detected to depopulate their herd after a federal indemnification is complete or within 45 days if a federal indemnification application is not submitted. In addition, all CWD-positive premises must maintain fencing for 15 years after the date CWD is detected. This proposal also requires all farmed white-tailed deer that die (natural causes or are slaughtered) to be tested if they are older than six months of age, compared to the current requirement to test all animals 1 year and older .

Importing farmed white-tailed deer or white-tailed semen from other states presents a risk of transporting disease. With no approved live animal test, the discovery of CWD in a farmed herd occurs after an animal has died. At that point, live, infected animals or semen may have already been moved. This proposal will prohibit the importation of live white-tailed deer or white-tailed deer semen from any state or province that has detected CWD in either farmed deer or wild populations in the previous 5 years.

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