

Department of Natural Resource

FY18-19 Biennial Budget Change Item

Change Item Title: Emergency Funding for Disease Response and Escaped Farmed Cervids

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
General Fund				
Expenditures	0	1,560	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact = (Expenditures – Revenues)	0	1,560	0	0
FTEs	0	0	0	0

Request:

The Governor recommends one-time funding of \$1.56 million from the general fund for wildlife disease surveillance and response upon confirmation of disease in livestock (e.g., chronic wasting disease (CWD), bovine tuberculosis). Existing staff will coordinate and carry out the statewide disease response for wild animal monitoring and control, and response to escaped cervids. As this is an ongoing issue with statewide implications, we look to pursue a long-term solution in the next biennial budget cycle.

Rationale/Background:

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a contagious neurological disease that affects deer, elk, and moose and leads to the eventual death of infected animals. We routinely conduct CWD surveillance to keep Minnesota deer healthy. In recent years, we've seen both the prevalence and geographic spread of CWD increasing across North America.

When CWD is found in wild deer, an aggressive response is needed to eradicate the disease, which includes reducing deer densities to minimize the spread of disease and testing as many deer as possible to determine if and where the disease has spread. We have a historical example in Pine Island in 2011 where an aggressive response resulted in the eradication of CWD in the area. When the disease is detected in wild deer, reducing deer densities is accomplished through special hunts, landowner shooting permits, and/or contracted services to remove deer. All deer that are removed are tested for CWD. After the immediate response, annual monitoring continues in the area for three consecutive years because of the long incubation period of CWD.

Where there is a known risk such as a positive Cervidae farm, testing wild deer is imperative to 1) confirm the disease is not present in wild deer and 2) reduce deer densities and minimize the risk of spread, if it is. When a disease is detected in farmed deer, hunter-harvested deer will be sampled around the positive farms for three consecutive years to determine if CWD is present in wild deer. While CWD in Minnesota's wild deer is currently known only in one discrete location and at low levels, four locations in the state require annual disease monitoring due to that known occurrence of CWD.

A less effective approach is "passive" management, which has been utilized by other states such as Wisconsin, and has resulted in CWD infection rates exceeding 40 percent in some areas.

Recent CWD Response

In 2016, CWD was discovered in wild deer in southeastern Minnesota (Fillmore County) as part of routine disease surveillance. Testing in Fillmore County has confirmed CWD in 17 wild deer over the past two years, 11 during the 2016-17 response and 6 in 2017-18. The source of that infection is unknown at this time. A total of 13,388 samples have been collected from hunter-harvested deer this past fall and test results for 1 are pending. Six tests are confirmed positive with CWD, all within the Fillmore County disease boundary. Hunter-harvested deer will be sampled again in 2018 in southeastern Minnesota to continue to monitor disease prevalence and reduce deer populations. Also in 2016, two cervid farms tested positive for CWD (Meeker and Crow Wing Counties).

In late November 2017, a Winona County cervid farm tested positive for CWD and will require hunter-harvested deer to be sampled around the positive farm starting in the fall, 2018. This farm brings the total number of CWD-positive facilities in Minnesota to eight, three of which currently require sampling.

The current workload will exceed existing funds. Currently, disease responses are paid for from general operating dollars from the game and fish fund and from the statutory emergency deer feeding and wild cervid health account in addition to one-funding from the heritage enhancement account in the 2017 legislative session. With increased CWD prevalence in farmed and wild deer, available funds are insufficient to support response of finding CWD in a new area. Continued efforts to monitor wild deer resulting from infected cervid farms require a sustainable funding source, which will be pursued in future legislative sessions. Using funding from the cervid health/deer feeding account to respond to disease in livestock raises a policy concern of continuing to place the burden on hunters for a domesticated animal issue.

Cervidae Farm Escapes

DNR is charged with destroying escaped animals that are not recaptured within 24 hours. DNR is also charged with destroying cervids possessed or imported illegally. Reported escapes from the state’s 10,600 registered farmed cervids on the 420 Cervidae farms number approximately 100 animals per year, requiring DNR staff to spend time investigating and removing farmed cervids from the wild. While some problems are resolved in little time, others take months to resolve involving a field investigation and removal with associated fleet and diagnostic testing costs; some cases are never resolved.

When Conservation Officers respond to reports of escaped Cervidae, it involves a team effort of officers and wildlife staff on the ground and other services such as air support to locate and destroy the animal. Investment of time and monetary resources to escaped Cervidae take away from other responsibilities such and game and fish and recreational vehicle activity. The loss of the investment provided by the other funding sources is both inappropriate and irreplaceable without this funding initiative.

Proposal:

This proposal provides \$1.560 million for known and anticipated needs for surveillance, response, and disease ecology research related to disease outbreak detections in wild and captive deer. Examples of surveillance and response activities include:

- Sample design and disease-area identification;
- Coordination of sampling thousands of hunter-harvested deer;
- Testing of samples by an independent contractor;
- Deer control (as needed) performed by United States Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services; and
- Enforcement related containment efforts, including identifying, locating, and destroying escapes from Cervidae farm facilities.

Testing is required for three consecutive years with no positive tests because of the prolonged period between infection and disease. Based on current information about the prevalence of CWD in Minnesota, hunter-harvested deer will be tested for CWD in Meeker and Crow Wing County locations in FY 2019-2020 since no positives were found in FY 2018. Hunter harvested deer will be sampled in Deer Permit Area 603 and around the Winona County farm in FY 2019-2021.

The 2016-2017 surveillance and subsequent disease response (e.g., managing expanded hunts, landowner shooting permits, USDA deer removal contract, and animal testing) resulted in a cost of \$1.1 million. The estimated cost for surveillance and response in 2017 and 2018 is \$1.3 million provided no additional wild or domestic deer test positive for CWD. Annual costs are approximately 40 percent staff time, 30 percent contracts and 30 percent supplies.

The 2016-2018 costs to date for enforcement actions and activities now exceed \$70,000, and based on what officers are now seeing with Cervidae farms, those costs are expected to continue to escalate.

Proposal	Anticipated FY19 Costs
<i>DNR efforts (fiscal years of required sampling)</i>	
Preston/Fillmore County Wild Deer (2019-2021)	\$500,000
Crow Wing Co. Cervid Farm (2019-2020)	\$200,000
Meeker County Cervid Farm (2019-2020)	\$200,000

Proposal	Anticipated FY19 Costs
<i>DNR efforts (fiscal years of required sampling)</i>	
Winona County Cervid Farm (2019-2021)	\$200,000
USDA Contracting/Land Owner Shooting Program	\$252,000
Enforcement response to escaped Cervidae	\$208,000
Total	\$1,560,000

Results:

Similar to other emergency accounts (M.S. 17.041), this proposal will provide the necessary resources to respond to wildlife diseases.

Type of Measure	Name of Measure	Previous	Current	Dates (CY)
Quantity	CWD wild deer tests	50,000	30,000	2017-2020
Quality	Animals tested positive (goal is zero)	1 Pine Island, MN	17 Preston, MN	2011 2016-17
Results	Deer health- Pine Island	One CWD infection	None	2011-2014
Results	Deer health- Fillmore County	11 CWD infections	6 CWD infections	2016-2018
Quantity	Responses to reports of escaped cervids by the public	2 escape incidents	2 escape incidents 521 officer hours in last six months	2016-2018