



# Confronting the Issues

## Deer in the Headlights: Increasing CWD Prevalence in Pennsylvania

PFB Policy Development

June 2021

### Issue

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an always fatal neurological disease that affects members of the cervid family (deer, elk, moose, and reindeer/caribou). Like mad cow disease in cattle, scrapie in sheep and goats and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) in humans, it's caused not by a virus or bacteria, but by abnormal prions, or proteins. To reduce CWD prevalence, the response plan states that "the best management strategy" is to "reduce deer abundance in infected areas." The methods put forth in the plan include a reliance on increased hunter harvest through increased antlerless tag allocation, concurrent seasons, and removing antler point restrictions within the areas with high CWD prevalence. What other solutions should be considered to control the spread of CWD?

### Questions

1. What other solutions should be considered to control the spread of CWD?
2. How can private land owners get involved with preventing CWD from spreading?

### Background

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an always fatal neurological disease that affects members of the cervid family (deer, elk, moose, and reindeer/caribou). Like mad cow disease in cattle, scrapie in sheep and goats and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) in humans, it's caused not by a virus or bacteria, but by abnormal prions, or proteins. Infected animals may not show outward effects for 18 to 24 months, but always die. Infectious CWD prion are shed in saliva, urine, and feces, and animals can be infected via animal-to-animal contact or through contaminated environments.

Since it was first discovered in captive and free-ranging deer in PA in 2012, CWD has spread to more than 20 counties. This has led the Pennsylvania Game Commission to implement a CWD Response Plan to contain and control the spread of CWD. The plan created Disease Management Areas (DMA) and regulations including bans on moving high-risk parts of deer out of the DMAs or importing them from other states, feeding deer within DMAs, and use of deer attractants.

One of the stated goals of the CWD Response plan was to keep the prevalence of CWD in the Established Area (EA) at or below 5%. As of July 2020, there is only one EA in Pennsylvania, which is centered in Blair, Bedford, and Fulton counties, where the majority of cases have been detected.

CWD case prevalence in wild deer has been rising in Pennsylvania. During the 2019-2020 hunting season, the PGC collected and tested 15,820 samples from deer around the state, and found 209 cases of CWD. The sample prevalence statewide was 1.30%.

In 2020-2021, the PGC tested only 12,544 samples, but discovered 232 positive cases of CWD. The statewide prevalence increased to 1.85%. In the EA over that same timeframe, the case prevalence has increased from 5.91% to 9.86%, well above the stated goal of 5% or less. In fact, 219 of the 232 positive cases were within the EA.

To reduce CWD prevalence, the response plan states that "the best management strategy" is to "reduce deer abundance in infected areas." The methods put forth in the plan include a reliance on increased hunter harvest through increased antlerless tag allocation, concurrent seasons, and removing antler point restrictions within the areas with high CWD prevalence. The Game Commission has already implemented increased tag allocation and concurrent seasons, though they have hesitated on removing point restrictions. The PGC has also hosted a series of webinars recently to try to encourage greater hunter participation in taking more deer in these areas.

The use of targeted removal (sharpshooters), which is also outlined in the plan, has not yet been implemented. The method would involve small-scale operations carried out by trained USDA-APHIS-WS professionals, who would go into a specific area, sometimes on private land, and remove as many deer as possible. The PGC has resisted the use of sharpshooters, and most hunters hold an unfavorable view of it, but it is a highly effective method.

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) oversees captive deer operations in the state, including breeding farms and hunting preserves. Pennsylvania deer farms must participate in one of two available programs; either the federal Herd Certified program, or the state Herd Monitored Program. Both programs require record-keeping on all animals moved on or off farms; annual herd inventories; reporting of CWD suspects, testing of animals over a year old that die for any reason; maintaining a minimum 8-foot high fence; obtaining permits to import animals from out-of-state; and other measures.

In 2020, PDA established a CWD Core Captive Management Zone (CCMZ), which made changes to quarantine requirements for farms in Blair, Bedford, and Fulton counties. The new requirements state that farms within the zone are not allowed to move high-risk parts out of the zone, but they are allowed to move out low-risk parts like antlers, clean skull caps and deboned meat. Farms within the zone may also continue to import deer and offer hunts.

Farms in the Herd Monitored program within the zone are not permitted to move live deer out of the CCMZ, and Herd Certified farms must have a permit and must screen their entire herd to be permitted to sell live deer to other parts of the state.

As of July 2020, there have been 21 farms placed in quarantine because of positive CWD detections in 8 counties, and 18 farms placed under quarantine due to exposure to CWD.

In May of 2021, a new positive case of CWD was detected on a hunting preserve in Warren county. This detection will lead to the creation of a new DMA and the implementation of the regulations that go along with it.

## **Farm Bureau Policy**

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### **Chronic Wasting Disease**

We recommend:

1. State agencies assist in funding for genetic resistance research to eliminate Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in cervidae. ('16)
2. A CWD eradication program which utilizes state and federal assistance and provides compensation for cervid and livestock producers affected by CWD. ('15)

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### **Licenses**

We support an increase of \$5 for the general hunting license dedicated to combatting CWD. ('18)

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### **Wildlife Management**

We recommend:

12. White tailed deer antler restrictions be removed in CWD Disease Management Areas. ('17)

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### **302 / Animal Health Emergency Management Preparedness**

5.10. Funding for emerging infectious animal disease research on scrapie, Johne's, porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS), anthrax, chronic wasting disease, porcine circovirus type 2 (PCV2), influenzas and similar respiratory diseases affecting domestic livestock and poultry, and cryptosporidiosis, which is a critical component to a national animal health emergency management system;

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### **307 / Livestock and Poultry Health**

10.9. The development and identification of a swift and accurate live animal diagnostic test for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and an eradication program;

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## **FEDERAL LANDS**

### **510 / General Management**

1.23. The disposal of deer and elk, due to chronic wasting disease on federal land, being the responsibility of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS);