

Dept. of Natural Resources: State wildlife representatives agree on top-level priorities for controlling chronic wasting disease

Posted on Friday, Jul 26, 2019

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MADISON, Wis. – Expanded testing research, disease management evaluation and enhanced regional collaboration are among the top-level priorities identified by wildlife professionals from 12 Midwestern states, members of Wisconsin Tribal Nations, plus state and federal conservation groups who met this week in Madison to discuss preventing the spread of chronic wasting disease.

The two-day working meeting hosted by the Wisconsin DNR focused on the latest data available on how CWD is affecting each states' wild deer population as well as disease management strategies and collaboration opportunities. The meeting kicked off Wednesday with opening remarks from DNR Secretary-designee Preston Cole and a video message from Gov. Tony Evers.

“Working together on CWD management and research will help all of us address how CWD is affecting our deer herd and how it’s impacting the sport of hunting we all know and love,” Evers said. “CWD not only impacts hunters, but there is also a ripple effect that touches our residents and economies. By all of us working together, we will more effectively manage this disease and reduce the impacts of CWD.”

CWD is a contagious neurological disease of deer, elk and moose that is caused by an abnormal protein called a prion. These prions cause brain degeneration in infected animals and lead to extreme weight loss, abnormal behavior and loss of bodily functions. This always fatal disease was first found in Wisconsin in 2002 through testing of hunter-harvested deer in November 2001. There are currently 56 CWD affected counties across the state.

“This type of meeting of the minds around CWD research and collaboration is unprecedented,” said Cole. “I applaud the many states, Tribal Nations and conservation groups who joined us in Madison to have a significant dialogue around the management of this disease. I am humbled by what I have heard and am hopeful the promises of a shared commitment to get ahead of this insidious disease will be kept.”

Some priorities the group established are:

- **Expanded research into testing methods** – The group agreed there is a need for more advanced research into testing methodologies that do not require lymph node material. The desire is to develop live animal testing methods that use alternative tissue while still generating scientifically valid results.
- **Evaluation of management actions** – While many states are initiating control actions, such as management zones and restrictions on carcass disposal, few have evaluated these actions to determine efficacy. The group agreed there is a greater need for empirical data to establish whether these actions are sufficiently effective in controlling CWD.
- **Enhanced collaboration on management and communication** – There is a need for more consistent communications across state lines about each state’s CWD management rules and how to inform hunters about how to comply with those rules. This collaboration especially comes into play when new CWD detections are made near state borders.

“We are excited and encouraged by the broad participation in this meeting, not only from the many states but also by the tribal nations, deer farming industry and wildlife organizations who are ready to work together to confront this problem,” said Tami Ryan, acting director of the DNR’s Bureau of Wildlife Management. She added that word of the DNR meeting spread to the South East Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies about the success of the Midwest CWD Collaboration Meeting, which prompted them to schedule a similar event in Mississippi next month.