

Support and Assist States in Addressing Chronic Wasting Disease and Wild Sheep Pneumonia

Two wildlife diseases have become priority problems for sportsmen and women. Chronic Wasting Disease is threatening the legacy achievement of restored deer, elk, and moose populations – referred to as “cervids” from the Latin name for the deer family. Pneumonia is preventing restoration of bighorn sheep (Desert and Rocky Mountain) and threatening other wild sheep (Dall’s and Stone’s). Both diseases threaten not only the wildlife, but the enormous economy driven by hunting.

Implement Congressional Direction for Controlling Sheep Pneumonia

- Elevate ongoing congressional direction for reducing risk of pneumonia on federal lands to a formal policy in law or rule. Congress; Interior/BLM; Agriculture/FS
- Evaluate federal agency management separation strategies that are intended to address the risk of pneumonia outbreaks, assess their effectiveness, identify and implement new solutions, and integrate them into federal land management agency grazing programs. Interior/BLM; Agriculture/FS

Domestic sheep in the U.S. tolerate several species of bacteria that cause fatal pneumonia in wild sheep. In addition to potential contact on private-land hobby herd/farm flock operations, the two types of sheep can encounter each other on federal lands where domestic sheep grazing is permitted within wild sheep ranges. State wildlife agency goals for maintaining wild sheep herds and restoring herds in unoccupied habitat are thwarted by die-offs of infected wild sheep herds and occupancy of suitable ranges by domestic sheep.

Sportsmen and ranchers have worked together for decades to address these risks collaboratively. In several cases, stakeholders have resolved problems through agreements and voluntarily waived, re-designed, or converted grazing permits to other types of livestock. In other cases, where solutions have not been found, the agencies have been compelled by policy or litigation to close domestic sheep grazing allotments. In too many cases, the difficulty of finding solutions and the controversy around imposed solutions has left the disease risk unmanaged by taking no action at all.



Brett Wiedmann/North Dakota Game & Fish Dept.

In keeping with sportsmen’s long-held commitment to multiple use, we have worked with ranchers to promote a federal policy driving collaborative solutions. Since fiscal year 2016, congressional appropriations have directed the USFS and BLM to implement a variety of solutions to address the risk of deadly pneumonia outbreaks where wild and domestic sheep encounter each other on grazing allotments. This congressional budgetary direction must be formalized into the grazing programs of the USFS and BLM.

Create a Comprehensive Chronic Wasting Disease Response

- Enact a federal CWD program that authorizes appropriations for state management and prevention of the disease, applied research, and coordinated roles for USDA and DOI working with state fish and wildlife agencies. Agriculture/APHIS; Interior/GS; Congress
- Appropriate \$50 million annually to support state efforts to manage, monitor, and prevent CWD and studies of disease management actions, improved detection, impacts of CWD on hunters and wildlife enthusiasts, and pathways of CWD transmission. Congress
- Conduct a third-party evaluation of, and modernize accordingly, the USDA Herd Certification Program to better control CWD, improve surveillance, eliminate risks that spread the disease, penalize non-compliance, and ensure indemnification for depopulation of infected herds. Agriculture/APHIS

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has become an imminent risk for all cervid populations in North America. As of March 2020, CWD has been found in 26 states: in wild populations in 24 states and in captive populations in two additional states. Three Canadian provinces have detected CWD as well. In captive cervids, the disease appears even at farms in compliance with the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) CWD Herd Certification Program.

Chronic Wasting Disease is unique among diseases of deer, elk, and moose in North America. It is ALWAYS fatal, its causative agent is a non-living protein that is shed by infected animals and can persist and remain infectious for years in the environment (thus, it is unaffected by vaccines, high heat, and common sterilization chemicals), and it is easily transmitted from animal to animal or via contaminated feed and habitat. Infected animals may appear healthy for months until symptoms appear. If unchecked, CWD can spread rapidly within a herd, with prevalence rates exceeding 80 percent in some captive herds. There is no viable, reliable live-animal test to determine if an animal is infected, and no practical decontamination methods for removing the infectious proteins from habitats of wild cervids. Consequently, it is nearly impossible to eradicate the disease once it becomes established within wild cervid herds.

Management of currently infected herds and prevention

of further spread of the disease are the only options. One of the principal management tools now available to slow transmission is to reduce the size of wild populations and eliminate infected captive herds. This can be done only at the high cost of culling wild cervids and eliminating captive ones. Smaller wild populations mean less hunting, less economic benefit from hunting, and loss of participation in hunting. Prevention will require taking strong, proactive measures to eliminate the risk of spreading the disease to new herds or areas. States are currently funding CWD control out of their base budgets at the expense of other wildlife management priorities and programs. No persistent long-term commitment of federal funds has been made to support management or prevention.

Research is the other priority. Some state and federal funds, and a rising contribution of private funds, are going toward discoveries of better means of management, prevention, and a more thorough understanding of the disease's epidemiology that may lead to management breakthroughs.

Based on recent technical papers and recommendations from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Congress and the Administration should authorize a comprehensive CWD program, appropriate funding for that program, and implement a coordinated effort between USDA and DOI that supports states' needs and actions.



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