The Challenge of Deer Management and CWD

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“To waste, to destroy our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.”

- Theodore Roosevelt, 1907

- Rooted in 6th Century Roman Law, strengthened by the Magna Carta, brought to the colonies, and upheld by Legislatures and the Supreme Court
- The Public Trust Doctrine establishes that the sovereign holds in trust natural resources for public use
- Think,
  - Boone and Crocket Club
  - Early laws – Lacey Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act
  - The players – Roosevelt, Pinchot, Muir, Leopold
Also Rooted in Minnesota Law

97A.025 - "The ownership of wild animals of the state is in the state, in its sovereign capacity for the benefit of all the people of the state."

84.027 - The DNR commissioner "...shall have charge and control of all the public lands, parks, timber, waters, minerals, and wild animals of the state..."

84.941 - "It is the policy of the state that fish and wildlife are renewable natural resources to be conserved and enhanced through planned scientific management, protection, and utilization."

Minnesota State Constitution, Article XIII, Sec. 12:

Hunting and fishing and the taking of game and fish are a valued part of our heritage that shall be forever preserved for the people and shall be managed by law and regulation for the public good.
Statewide Surveillance

• Prompted by CWD discovery in Wisconsin and positive domestic elk farm in Aitkin, MN
• 2002 – 2004 statewide sampling
• 28,000 samples taken in statistically-based design
• No positives detected
• Since 2002, we’ve tested ~65,000 deer in MN

MNDNR’s CWD Surveillance History
MNDNR’s CWD Surveillance Strategy

Risk-Based Surveillance
Since 2005, sampling triggers include:

1. Suspect deer - deer exhibiting CWD symptoms

2. New infection found in adjacent state - sampled several times for WI infections and northeast Iowa

3. Association with positive captive cervid farm - surveillance around areas known to have CWD (n = 8)
   - 3 elk, 4 white-tailed deer, and 1 red deer farm

CWD-positive cervid farms in MN (n = 8)

2017 CWD+ Game Farms
Which of these deer is not CWD positive?

A

B

Ear tags say “Don’t” and “Miss”

C
Challenges – Propaganda

- Event sponsored by the Minnesota and Iowa Deer Farmers Associations

- Clear intent was to cast doubt on DNR’s CWD response

- 200 people showed up (800 at DNR meeting)

- "I'm just here to give my advice. I'm not here to beat up on the DNR"

- "I’m not going to suffer fools at a meeting like this,”

- "Eradication has never worked," he said. "Ten years from now, the situation is not going to have changed much at all."
Challenges - Suspicious deer, Where do these come from?

Doe killed by USDA (red tag is from DNR)
Challenges – Captive Cervid Facility Risk

- Regulated by another agency (Board of Animal Health)
- Rectifying farmed cervid inventories. The numbers rarely match.
- Reusing tags from dead animals.
- CWD test compliance (not test results).
- Inspectors calling owners for animal numbers.
- Animal inventories approximated (e.g., ~40); inspector signed form.
- Escapes (>100/year) – reported and not-reported.
- Preston area –
  - 5 miles away - Farm reduced to level 1 (from level 6) the day DNR came to copy records. 3 years in a row of missed tests.
  - 17 miles away – Deer out ~3 weeks prior to report, 3rd time he’s lost deer. CWD testing last 3 years: 2 of 12 (17%).
  - New CWD+ captive facility in next county.
- Captive cervid program recently audited - https://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/pedrep/deerfarms.pdf

Inventory shows this deer died 4 days before the picture was taken

Used without permission from Jim Hefflefinger
Challenges – Captive Cervid Facility Risk (Cont.)

Example: Winona County facility

- 9/9 deer infected
- Owner said his fence has sagged over the years and many parts are lower than 7 feet for years and a small section last year and dipped to as low as 5 feet. The spot still is not fully repaired, he said.
- Facility passed inspection every year. "Yeah, that would be the case," said Michael Crusan, a spokesman for the Board of Animal Health.
- Owner - “The Board of Animal Health has been really nice. Good people to work with,” he said. “If the guy came out and looked at [the farm], he always got very good grades.”

Fence grossly out of compliance

Challenges – Alternative Facts

- Genetic salvation in wild deer
- CWD is usually fatal
- Captive cervid facilities – canary in the coal mine
- Populations decreasing naturally, not CWD related
- Feed and attractants not a problem
Challenges – Deer Ecology

Really don’t know what these deer do on a seasonal basis.
Challenges - Funding

• 500,000 deer hunters contribute $500 million annually to state economy.

• Compares to 420 captive facilities worth $17.6 M.

• CWD surveillance around infected facilities is expensive ($150K/year/3 years each).

• Societal problem, yet deer hunters consistently foot the bill

• Losing hunters - quitting affects management and local economies.

In total, 83% of $7.2M was from hunters
Challenges – Hunter Apathy

- No real change in harvest rates
- Concern over ‘their bucks’, including access problems
- Belief that if they allow DNR to test their deer and we find CWD, we’ll come and kill them all
- Can’t see it, so it’s not happening
- Don’t believe it can happen here

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Average: 3.9, 3.8, 4.8
Pre-CWD: 4.3, 4.3
Post-CWD: 3.4, 3.6
Challenges – Deer Hunters!

• Fighting among hunting groups and conspiracy theories

• Blaming the Agency for responding not enough, too much, or at all

• Conspiracy to lower deer numbers; we’re in bed with insurance companies and farmers

• Buying into captive cervid propaganda

• Failing to recognize the long-term problems – focus on ‘what about me, what about my needs’?
Where do we go from here?

- DNR identified CWD as the #1 priority
- Held focus groups – help us refine the message and gain local support
- New position – Landowner Assistance Specialist
- New ideas?
  - Walk-in Access Program
  - Venison Donation?
2018 is here already …

- Mandatory opening weekend surveillance
- Slightly smaller than last year. Still focused around positive captive facilities
- Enforcement of carcass import restrictions
- Even more Outreach

… and what choice do we have?