In 2016, chronic wasting disease (CWD) was detected in both elk (Cervus canadensis) and white-tailed deer (Odocoileus virginianus) in 10 counties in northwestern Arkansas (Fig. 1). To evaluate the relationships between proximity to CWD and perceived risk, from 7 March to 8 May 2017, we conducted a statewide telephone survey of Arkansas resident licensed hunters. Up to 12 contact attempts were made to increase the likelihood of hunter participation. A total of 1302 interviews were conducted. The response rate was 82%. Nonresponse bias was not determined. We interviewed 459 hunters residing within a 10-county region where CWD had been detected (red zone), 414 hunters residing within a 13-county region immediately adjacent to the red zone (yellow zone), and 429 hunters located in other counties in Arkansas (green zone; Fig. 1). More than 80% of hunters in each zone indicated they hunted deer during the 2016 season. Of those who did not hunt deer in 2016, most indicated that they did not hunt for reasons unrelated to CWD. Only 8% of hunters indicated they had read, heard, or seen nothing at all about CWD. More hunters in the red zone had read, heard, or seen “a lot” about CWD compared to respondents in the other 2 zones. One of 4 hunters (25%) who hunted most of their time in a county located in the red zone were not aware that CWD had been detected in the county they hunted. Regardless of the zone they most often hunt, hunters shared the same levels of concern about CWD. Most (79%) hunters were very or somewhat concerned about CWD. Hunters in the red zone were not as concerned about consuming untested deer meat harvested in the red zone than hunters in the green zone (39% vs 24%, respectively). Most hunters (56%) strongly supported mandatory CWD testing for deer harvested within the red zone. A higher proportion of hunters supported mandatory testing if it was limited to opening weekend of the modern firearm deer hunting season. Fewer red zone hunters strongly supported mandatory CWD testing than green zone hunters (46% vs. 58%, respectively). Most hunters who initially opposed mandatory CWD testing indicated less of an opposition if it was limited to the opening weekend of the modern firearm deer hunting season. Most (83%) hunters indicated that they were very likely to hunt deer during the 2017 deer hunting season. Hunters indicated that detection of CWD will not affect their choice of hunting locations. Most (66%) hunters in the yellow and green zones indicated they will very likely continue hunting in the same county, even if CWD is eventually detected in that county. We plan to repeat our survey at 3-year intervals to track changes in hunter perceptions of CWD and the relationships between proximity to CWD and perceived risk.
Figure 1. Spatial distribution of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Arkansas, USA, in 2016. For purposes of examining the relationships between proximity to CWD and perceived risk, 3 zones were created. The 10 counties where CWD was detected were considered the red zone. The 13 counties that bordered the red zone were considered the yellow zone. All other counties in Arkansas were considered the green zone.