



Colorado Wildlife Commission Policy

Subject: Chronic Wasting Disease
Effective Date: September 13, 2001
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INTRODUCTION

In January 2002 the Colorado Wildlife Commission (CWC) adopted the 2002-2007 Strategic Plan. That plan established the agency's priorities for the next five years and lists disease management and elimination among the highest priorities for the Colorado Division of Wildlife (Division). Chronic wasting disease (CWD) poses a threat to the health of deer and elk populations throughout Colorado. The CWC, therefore, desires to adopt a comprehensive policy to address CWD in the state.

Definitions

Class III CWD Discovery Area – Those areas of the state where CWD has been discovered in captive or wild cervids and where the status of the disease in wild populations is unknown. If CWD is discovered in a previously unexposed area of the state, the Division shall respond aggressively to determine the status of the situation and operate on the assumption that the disease can be eradicated unless or until the new area is classified as a Class I Area.

Class II CWD Elimination Area– Those areas of the state where CWD exists in wild cervid populations and there is a reasonable possibility of eliminating the disease in the area.

Class I CWD Established Area (Endemic) – Those areas of the state where CWD has existed in wild cervid populations for a long enough period of time to determine there is currently no reasonable possibility of eliminating the disease in the area.

CWD Management Area – Those areas of the state within Class I, II or III CWD Areas. Each CWD Management Area shall be evaluated periodically by the Director to determine if changes in the classification or management plans are warranted.

DISEASE MANAGEMENT

It shall be the CWC's policy to manage the disease with three objectives. First, minimize the potential for the disease to spread beyond currently infected areas of the state.

Second, reduce the level of prevalence within the Class I CWD Established Areas. Third, to eliminate the disease in Class II CWD Elimination Areas. CWD has been present in wild cervid populations since at least 1981, but probably much longer. Within the last 5 years Colorado has seen the concern over the disease increase due to a number of factors. The CWC is committed to reducing the impact of this disease on wild and captive cervid populations in Colorado. The Division shall use the best scientific information available and take all reasonable and necessary steps, consistent with this policy, to achieve these three policy objectives. Further, the Division shall develop a process to monitor wild cervid populations and respond to new discoveries of CWD and annually report to the Commission the status of the disease and management efforts in Colorado.

A. Development of DAU Plans for Class I CWD Established Areas

The CWC recognizes the challenges inherent in managing wild species populations. The CWC has previously approved Data Analysis Unit (DAU) planning as a viable and necessary method of wildlife management planning. Because of the added difficulty in managing wildlife populations possessing a potential for inter-species communicable disease, the CWC believes that the development of DAU plans for Class I CWD Established Areas is critical to the long-term management of CWD. Therefore, the Division is directed to expedite the development or revision of DAU plans for areas where CWD exists and there is currently no reasonable possibility of eliminating the disease from wild cervid populations in the area (Class I CWD Established Areas). The plans shall be consistent with this policy and will focus on management objectives designed to limit geographical dispersal and to reduce the prevalence in endemic area. The DAU plans will seek to reduce the prevalence rates in deer and elk populations in the endemic area to no more than 1% by DAU or 2% in any Game Management Unit (GMU). The CWC will review this policy to provide additional guidance if those prevalence rates are achieved.

B. Development of Site Specific Plans for Class II CWD Elimination Areas

In any area where CWD is discovered outside of Class I CWD Established Areas and there is a reasonable possibility of eliminating the disease from wild deer and elk in the area, the Division is directed to develop and implement plans consistent with the objective of eliminating CWD from these Class II CWD Elimination Areas. These plans shall consider and incorporate all reasonable and available resources in determining which approach to eliminating the disease is most appropriate in each area.

RESEARCH

It shall be the policy of the CWC to support, on a priority basis, research that will facilitate the continued expansion of knowledge of CWD. The CWC is committed to furthering the public's understanding of CWD. The management of CWD requires a more thorough understanding of how the disease is spread between ungulates of the same species, the relationship between CWD, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and other transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE), whether the disease has the capability to penetrate species barriers, and other critical components. The Division is directed to revise its CWD Research Plan consistent with this policy. The plan will identify ongoing and planned research to be performed by Division personnel and through contracts with external research facilities, if appropriate. The plan will also include a component for continued monitoring of research that is occurring throughout the world on CWD and TSEs to ensure that the CWC and DOW have the most current and comprehensive data available.

THE ROLE OF HUNTING IN CWD MANAGEMENT AREAS

It shall be the policy of the CWC that hunting opportunity in areas that may be exposed to CWD will continue to be available to assist in the management of deer and elk herds to reduce the prevalence of CWD. Further, **it shall be the policy of the CWC that conflicts between disease management and recreational hunting opportunity shall be resolved in favor of disease management.** Hunting has historically provided the primary means of wildlife population management in Colorado. The CWC supports the use of hunting to manage herd populations and herd densities in Colorado. The CWC recognizes that some risks are inherent in hunting, including the consumption of wild game meat. The CWC does, however, understand that CWD raises human health concerns beyond those normally associated with the consumption of wild game meat. According to public health experts, there is currently no evidence that CWD poses an additional health risk to those who choose to consume animals from the endemic area. The CWC cannot, however, guarantee that no risk exists relative to

human consumption of animals that may have contracted CWD. Further, the Division will continue to work cooperatively with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to monitor the health risks of CWD to humans. Because of the unique health questions posed by CWD, the Division is directed to undertake additional steps to inform and educate those who are considering hunting in CWD Management Areas. The Division will develop a plan to inform and educate both potential hunters and those who have received licenses to hunt in GMUs where CWD is known to exist in wild deer and elk. (see Hunter Information below). Additionally, the Division shall continue to research and monitor research to assure that the assumptions regarding transmissibility are consistent with the best available science. (see Research above). The Division shall inform the Commission when any credible evidence reveals a significant modification in the current understanding of the transmissibility of CWD.

HUNTER INFORMATION

At this time there is no evidence that CWD poses a risk to human health. The CWC, however, recognizes that each potential hunter should make an informed decision prior to hunting in CWD Management Areas. Providing information relative to CWD to those who choose to hunt in these GMUs is critical. Individuals contemplating hunting in GMUs where CWD is known to exist in wild deer and elk should have access to the best scientific information available. This information must be accurate, current and understandable by the general public. As a component of the comprehensive Communication Plan (see below), the Division shall develop specific plans to ensure that current information relative to CWD is available to all prospective hunters in these areas. These plans will include, at a minimum, the dissemination of information through application brochures, traditional media press releases, Internet postings and direct mail to successful deer and elk license applicants in GMUs where CWD is known to exist in wild deer and elk. Information about the availability and logistics of testing animals taken in these areas and precautionary guidelines provided by public health experts should be provided to those choosing to hunt in these GMUs.

USE OF DIVISION STAFF TO REMOVE ANIMALS FROM THE ENDEMIC AREA FOR MANAGEMENT AND/OR RESEARCH

Although regulated public hunting is the preferred method of deer and elk population control, the presence of CWD necessitates the consideration of using Division staff or agents to reduce deer and elk populations in the process of CWD management and research. Because of the unique threat posed by CWD in ungulate populations, the CWC authorizes the use of Division staff or agents to reduce ungulate populations, consistent with disease management, research and/or DAU plans, where such reductions are determined to be necessary to manage or research CWD. Decisions regarding specific methods of removal will be made after consideration of geographic constraints, landowner cooperation and human density in the removal area, risk to Division staff or agents and public input regarding the proposed removal technique. The CWC recognizes that effective management of CWD will require cooperation from private landowners throughout the endemic area. Consistent with existing law, the Division will work cooperatively with landowners, respect private property rights and provide the appropriate level of information to landowners during development and implementation of any management or research plan. The CWC acknowledges that the use of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft may be utilized in the culling process to achieve research or management objectives.

ANIMAL TESTING

It shall be the policy that animals killed by Division personnel for research or management purposes shall be tested for CWD. In addition, the Division is directed to work cooperatively with public and private testing facilities to increase testing capacity and to provide information regarding testing facility locations and costs for public

hunters who choose to have their animals tested at their own expense. The CWC recognizes that testing of animals provides two primary benefits. First, testing provides critical data for management and research. Second, testing allows hunters to minimize the risk of consuming an animal that has contracted CWD. Both of these important, yet distinct, benefits are recognized by the CWC. The Division may, as a component of a management or research plan, by rule, require that animals taken by public hunters be submitted for testing in specific areas. If the DOW requires mandatory submittal and testing, the DOW shall be responsible for the cost of these tests.

THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN CWD MANAGEMENT

The CWC is committed to minimizing the impact of CWD on both wild and captive populations of cervids in Colorado. The CWC recognizes, however, that its ability to impact CWD is limited by statutory authority to wild ungulate populations and specific commercial facilities. Because the Division shares statutory and regulatory responsibility for managing captive cervids with the Colorado Department of Agriculture, continued cooperation between the two agencies is required to successfully manage CWD in Colorado. Therefore, the CWC directs the Division to work cooperatively with the Department of Agriculture to address the policy and regulatory aspects of CWD relative to captive cervids in Colorado. The Division and Department of Agriculture should strive to develop consistent and comprehensive regulations aimed at reducing disease prevalence in areas where CWD is known to exist and minimizing the risk of the disease spreading.

MOVEMENT OF LIVE ANIMALS (UNDER DOW JURISDICTION)

It shall be the policy to restrict the movement of captive cervids between commercial facilities, under the control of the Division, in Colorado. The CWC recognizes that managing wild cervid populations in the endemic area addresses only part of the potential threat to deer and elk populations in Colorado and throughout the United States. The movement of live captive animals between commercial facilities poses a significant threat to Colorado's wildlife resources. The Division is directed to begin promulgation of regulations to facilitate enforcement of this policy.

REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL OF CARCASSES

CWD poses a threat to cervid populations in Colorado and throughout the United States. While the CWC understands much more about the disease than we did just a few years ago, there is still much we do not completely understand. One of the areas of ongoing research is the transmission of the disease from animal to animal. Although many theories exist, no research exists to prove conclusively how the disease is passed from one animal to another. We do know that high levels of infected tissue exist in specific organs and body parts of diseased animals. Therefore the Division is directed to begin promulgation of regulations to restrict the movement and disposal of carcasses and portions of carcasses harvested in GMUs where CWD is known to exist in wild deer and elk. These regulations will address, at a minimum, acceptable locations for meat processing and taxidermy of animals harvested in these areas.

SURVEILLANCE

The CWC directs the Division to be diligent in its efforts to find CWD wherever it may exist in wild cervid populations in Colorado. The CWC also acknowledges that it is impractical and unnecessary from a scientific surveillance standpoint to test every animal killed in Colorado for the presence of CWD. Therefore, the Division shall continue to gather data using appropriate methods to monitor the occurrence and distribution of CWD based on a prioritized assessment of risk and available resources.

COMMUNICATION

CWD is of interest locally, nationally and internationally. As the public agency charged with managing CWD in wildlife populations, the Division has an obligation to provide timely, complete and accurate information about all facets of the disease to the public in Colorado and throughout the United States. The CWC recognizes the difficulty in providing accurate and up to date information regarding this rapidly changing issue. Because of these challenges, the CWC believes that continuing and effective communication is paramount to any plan to manage CWD in Colorado. Therefore, the CWC directs the Division to place as a top priority effective communication with the general public, constituent groups and the press about CWD. The CWC also directs the Division to develop a Communication Plan using all available communication tools to provide timely, complete and accurate information about CWD to all impacted constituencies. The CWC directs the Division's Chief of Information to determine and use the appropriate communication medium to inform the public about specific aspects of CWD and its relevant issues.