



**BACKCOUNTRY
HUNTERS & ANGLERS
MINNESOTA**

Matt Lee
Chair, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers MN
www.backcountryhunters.org/minnesota
minnesota@backcountryhunters.org

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Dear Chairman Hansen and Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on this issue. Backcountry Hunters & Anglers is the fastest growing hunting and fishing conservation advocacy organization in North America. More than two-thirds of our membership is under the age of 45. We are the next generation of stakeholders and the future of conservation. As hunters and anglers we seek to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting, through education and work on behalf of wild public lands, waters, and wildlife.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) has elected to support the CWD Action Coalition's efforts to reform the cervid industry through a moratorium on new operations and a buyout of existing entities. We encourage your committee to commit to finding a buyout solution that is fair to both the people of Minnesota and its residents who are conducting cervidae livestock operations.

- Since 2016, BHA has opposed the privatization of wildlife and the importation/exportation of live cervids, cervid carcasses, and cervid reproductive materials outside unique management circumstances sanctioned by state, provincial, territorial or federal wildlife management agencies charged with the stewardship of publicly held wildlife resources.
- We also oppose the expenditure of public resources (including those revenues generated by hunters and anglers through license sales and excise taxes) on policies promoting and supporting the private ownership or commercialization of native wildlife species or disease management protocols due to the bad practices of operations.
- BHA recognizes the publicly entrusted responsibility of wildlife management agencies and supports disease management as primary to the protection of free ranging wildlife populations by wildlife professionals operating under agency authority and agencies should not be restricted in the tools necessary to keep wild herds safe from outbreaks.

Most recently, CWD was discovered in Beltrami County in northern Minnesota, which led to a government-placed fence enclosure that prevents access to public land by hunters for a minimum of 20 years. The closure of public land and loss of access, for any reason, is of grave concern to the members of BHA. Moreover, expenditures related to the containment of and testing for CWD have forced the DNR to spend public resources meant for fisheries and wildlife improvement on disease management protocols due to the inadequate practices of a few bad operations, something that BHA strongly opposes.

While there are no studies that have evaluated the cumulative economic impact of CWD to Minnesota, according to the Minnesota DNR whitetail deer hunting generates nearly \$500 million annually as part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation economy. Best estimates reported by the cervid industry's trade organization suggest only a \$25 million impact on the state's economy. Plainly stated, ***wild whitetail deer have at least 20 times the economic impact in Minnesota than all farmed cervid operations combined.*** It is foolish to allow such a modest industry to put at risk \$500 million in economic activities. The demise of the wild herd to benefit the cervid industry is no longer a risk we're willing to tolerate.



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MINNESOTA@BACKCOUNTRYHUNTERS.ORG

For 20 years we have been waiting for the cervid industry to take meaningful action that would protect the wild herd from CWD infested operations. Instead, the cervid industry has chosen to waste their capital generating misleading information, and continually fighting safety reforms and operational improvements that would protect both wild and captive animals. By not holding offenders accountable to following best practices, the captive cervid industry has failed the public by not universally implementing basic cost effective measures like double fencing and has failed to rein in rogue operators. The industry has also supported policies that stripped the DNR of its authority to enforce the laws of the state of Minnesota as they apply to cervid operations by transferring oversight to the Board of Animal Health (BAH). The absence of an enforcement arm in support of the BAH greatly exacerbates the inability of this oversight committee to affect swift and sweeping action governed by evidence based practices and then hold these operators accountable, which is what brings us here today. These failures have left the landscape vulnerable and it may be too late for additional measures to curtail the problem, even if applied belatedly.

Beyond the clear economic numbers, wild deer on our landscape is of deep cultural importance to Minnesotans. Deer hunters find a powerful connection to nature, family, and sustenance through their hunting traditions. In fact, at least three-quarters of Americans who do not hunt still support hunting. Many simply enjoy seeing wild deer on the landscape. The benefits of healthy wild deer to our society far outweigh the benefits of a small industry whose very existence contradicts a great American legal, cultural, and sporting ethic principle: wild animals belong to no private individual, they are held in public trust to be managed for the public good.

Time is up. We cannot and will not wait. The legislature cannot continue to protect the few at the expense of the many. It is time that we place a moratorium on new farms, cease the distribution of cervid bodily fluids, and devise a plan to reduce the economic impact to industrial cervid operations through a reasonable buyout plan as they transition to new and prosperous opportunities. This is why Backcountry Hunters & Anglers joins with our partners in conservation and fully endorses the recommendations of the CWD Action Coalition.

Sincerely,



Matt Lee
Chair
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Minnesota

