

BOARD LETTER NO. 21 - 403

ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE NO. 1

BOARD AGENDA NO.

DATE: September 7, 2021

RE: Supporting Legislation
Prohibiting New Captive Deer
Farms

FROM: Kevin Z. Gray
County Administrator

RELATED DEPARTMENTAL GOAL:

To exercise responsible stewardship of county resources.

ACTION REQUESTED:

Several Commissioners have requested that the St. Louis County Board consider calling on the Minnesota State Legislature to enact legislation prohibiting new captive cervid farms in Minnesota, and further calling on state agencies to immediately prohibit the transport of farmed cervids within the state and halt the registration of any new captive cervid farms in the state of Minnesota until such time that the legislature enacts such legislation. Several commissioners have also requested that the County adopt an interim zoning ordinance placing a moratorium on any new captive cervid farms in the County until such time that the County Board is able to study and consider enacting a permanent ordinance relative to this issue.

BACKGROUND:

Several years ago, the St. Louis County Board became engaged in discussion associated with Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and its potential negative impact on the wild deer population. Since that time the disease has spread and has now been found in farmed deer located in Beltrami County. It is through these farms that the disease is propagated and spread to the wild deer herd.

CWD is a contagious fatal neurodegenerative disease that afflicts cervids (whitetail deer). The impact of this disease has been felt throughout the state of Wisconsin and southern Minnesota and now, unfortunately, has moved to northern Minnesota. This is concerning as the financial impacts of deer hunting for the businesses of St. Louis County are significant. The expansion of this concerning problem has resulted in a variety of legislative actions and considerations being discussed during this past state legislative session as well as during legislative committee meetings this summer.

Equally important is the impact of the disease on the environment and health of other animals and humans. It has been shown that the prions of diseased animals will remain

viable in the soil after the death of the animals, and there is significant concern regarding the transmission of CWD to other animals and potentially even humans.

Due to these concerns, it is proposed that the County Board consider actions to protect our region from the expansion of the disease and its devastating economic impacts on our business community and the tradition of deer hunting that is so important to families and friends. Specifically, the resolution would call on the state legislature to enact legislation prohibiting new captive cervid (deer) farms in the State. The resolution would also call on state agencies to, until such time that the legislature enacts such legislation, immediately prohibit the transport of farmed cervids within the state and halt registration of any new captive cervid farms in the state. Further, the resolution would set a public hearing relative to the County Board's possible adoption of an interim zoning ordinance placing a moratorium on any new captive cervid farms in St. Louis County until such time that the County Board is able to study and consider enacting a permanent ordinance relative to this issue. The County Board's consideration of an interim zoning ordinance later this month would require a waiver of County Board Resolution No. 85-103 and moratorium guidelines adopted in connection therewith. While the resolution does not directly address the following issues, it would be a goal to have the State also address the double fencing of all cervid farms and that if CWD is found on a cervid farm, the entire herd on that farm must be slaughtered with proper disposal of each carcass.

Dr. Peter Larsen of the University of Minnesota and Craig Engwall of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association will be present at the Committee of the Whole meeting to provide a more in-depth background of CWD and its impacts on the wild deer herd.

RECOMMENDATION:

A resolution is attached should the St. Louis County Board wish to (1) request that the Minnesota State Legislature enact legislation prohibiting new captive deer farms, (2) request state agencies to prohibit the transport of farmed cervids within the state and immediately halt the registration of any new captive cervid farms, and (3) set a hearing to consider an interim zoning ordinance placing a moratorium on any new captive cervid farms in St. Louis County.

Supporting Legislation Prohibiting New Captive Deer Farms

BY COMMISSIONER _____

WHEREAS, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a contagious fatal neurodegenerative disease afflicting white tailed deer (cervids); and

WHEREAS, CWD is caused by misfolded proteins called prions, which attack the brain of infected animals, resulting in death; and

WHEREAS, CWD has spread to 26 states, three Canadian provinces, several counties in Southeast Minnesota, and now one county in Northern Minnesota (Beltrami); and

WHEREAS, Nearly all CWD-infected cervids (deer) originate in captive commercial farms, of which 259 are located in Minnesota, including three in St. Louis County; and

WHEREAS, Minnesota wild deer are an important source of food, recreation, and tradition for our nearly 500,000 firearm and archery hunters who in turn, generate over a half billion dollars in economic activity in rural counties; and

WHEREAS, CWD spread reached a crisis level in Minnesota this spring after several CWD infected deer were found on a Beltrami County deer farm; and

WHEREAS, The owners of the Beltrami County deer farm disposed several CWD-infected deer carcasses on nearby tax-forfeited land where disease carrying prions were found in the soil, allowing for their ongoing and indefinite viability.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the St. Louis County Board calls upon the Minnesota Legislature to, as soon as possible, enact legislation prohibiting new captive cervid farms in the state, and further calls upon state agencies to immediately prohibit the transport of farmed cervids within the state and halt the registration of any new captive cervid farms until such time that the legislature enacts such legislation.

RESOLVED FURTHER, That, for purposes of this issue only, the St. Louis County Board waives County Board Resolution No. 85-103 and related guidelines, and hereby sets a public hearing to occur on Tuesday, September 28, 2021 at 9:35 a.m. at the Alborn Community Center, 6388 Hwy 7, Alborn, Minnesota 55702 to consider and receive public input in connection with an interim zoning ordinance placing a moratorium on any new captive cervid farms in St. Louis County until such time that the County Board is able to study and consider enacting a permanent ordinance.

RESOLVED FURTHER, Copies of this resolution shall be sent to: Governor Walz, House Speaker Hortman, Senate Majority Leader Gazelka, the SLC Legislative

Delegation, the House & Senate Environment Committees, the Commissioners of DNR, Agriculture, and PCA and the Minnesota Board of Animal Health.