CWD Action Coalition Position Statement on Farmed Cervidae Operations and Chronic Wasting Disease Prevention and Management
January 2023

Whereas, the presence of wild cervids (deer, elk, and moose) on the landscape represents an intrinsic value to Minnesotans residing in all corners of our state; and

Whereas, wild cervids hold great cultural value for all Minnesotans, including the Anishinaabeg and [Dakota], among whom deer, elk, or moose are featured within many traditional stories and exemplify generosity and the abundance of creation; and

Whereas, the hunting of wild cervids is a deep-rooted tradition amongst Minnesotans, with around 500,000 people purchasing a deer hunting license each fall and participating in a tradition that connects them to one another, to the land they hunt on, and to the food they eat; and

Whereas, deer hunting generates nearly $500 million annually in total economic activity to the state and is a crucial part of Minnesota's economy;[1] and

Whereas, the hunting of wild cervids was preserved as a tribal treaty right to ensure tribal members had continued access to traditional foods and cultural practices, including for example, the first kill ceremony which celebrates an individual's transformation from child to adult provider, now accountable for one's family and community; and

Whereas, wild cervids continue to be a significant source of lean, healthy protein for Minnesotans and tribal communities and helps address food insecurity and rising rates of chronic disease; and

Whereas, hunting cervids supports healthy lifestyles, traditional and cultural practices, and keeps cervid populations in balance; and

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[1] MINN. DEP'T NATURAL RESOURCES, MINN. WHITE-TAILED DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN: 2019-2028 ii (2019).

Whereas, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a prion based disease that is terminally fatal to all cervid animals who contract the prion; and

Whereas, the spread of the disease presents an immediate threat to our state's wild cervid animals and could lead to the loss of healthy cervid populations throughout the state; and

Whereas, health-concerns related to the consumption of CWD-infected animals is likely to lead to a reduction in hunter retention and recruitment across the state; and

Whereas, a loss of deer hunting participation due to the spread of CWD would have a direct negative impact on business across the state, especially in areas outside the metro, including: sporting goods stores, hospitality businesses, butcher shops, taxidermists, etc.; and

Whereas, the movement of captive cervids for the benefit of captive cervid operators has proven to present an unacceptable risk to our state's wild deer, moose, and elk and those who hunt, photograph, or otherwise value wild cervids on the landscape; and

Whereas, wild cervids are a public resource being threatened by a small private industry;[2] and

Whereas, the state has a duty and trust responsibility to protect said public resource.

Now therefore be it resolved, that the undersigned hereby agree and advocate for:

- An immediate moratorium on any new captive cervid[3] operation in Minnesota, except for cervid facilities created for the following purposes: wildlife research, rehabilitation, reintroduction efforts, or zoological facilities accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.
- The closure of all currently operating cervid operations in Minnesota, except for captive cervid facilities created for the following purposes: wildlife research, rehabilitation, reintroduction efforts, or zoological facilities accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. This coalition advocates for the compensation of captive cervid owners, operating in full regulatory compliance, for the loss of their herd. The process for indemnification and payouts performed by the USDA could serve as a model for compensating operators.[4]

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[2] JOHN KECKHAVER CONSULTING, LLC, MINN. CERVID FARMING AND ITS ECONOMIC IMPACT 8 (2017) (estimating the economic impact of cervid farms in Minnesota in 2016 as $24.2 million).

[3] The use of the word "cervid" is intended to include all members of the *Cervidae* family, including, but not limited to, white-tailed deer, elk, moose, etc.

[4] Based on information provided by the USDA we estimate the total compensation to the operators, under the USDA model, to be approximately $24 million. This number is generated from the $3,000 maximum payout allowed by the UDSA for a cervid animal, multiplied by the

- A ban on the interstate and intrastate transportation of live cervids except to a terminal facility. Provisions may be made for transportation to a terminal facility, but not a "terminal hunt facility." An allowance for the movement of wild cervid animals within the boundaries of the state of Minnesota for the purposes of research, reintroduction, or rehabilitation, or the movement of captive cervids between zoological facilities accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, should be made.
- A prohibition on the sale, transfer, or movement of bodily fluids originating from cervids, including, but not limited to, doe urine and semen straws.

Sincerely,

Minnesota Conservation Federation
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers- Minnesota Chapter
Bluffland Whitetails Association
Minnesota Chapter of the Wildlife Society
Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
Minnesota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America
National Deer Association
National Wildlife Federation
Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters

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roughly 8,000 captive cervids present in the state according to the Board of Animal Health September 2020 Farmed Cervid Program Report.

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Chair Rick Hansen
MN House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy
10 State Office Building
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: HF 1202

The Minnesota Conservation Federation along with the members of the CWD Action Coalition supports the proposed measures to reduce the risk of further infection of Minnesota's wild cervid animals presented by captive cervid operators as described in HF1202.

Included along with this letter is a position statement detailing the position of the groups assembled as the CWD Action Coalition.

Our coalition is very concerned about the potential of Chronic Wasting Disease to negatively affect the health of Minnesota's wild cervids, the important cultural value of deer hunting, and the estimated 500 million dollar economic impact that deer hunting brings to the state of Minnesota.

New measures to strengthen the regulatory oversight of the captive cervid industry may appear to be overly burdensome to folks working to make a living in a legal industry in the state of Minnesota. Our coalition recognizes that burden, but sees potential measures to regulate the industry as bringing Minnesota cervid farms into the modern era and recognizing the very real threat posed to wild cervids in Minnesota by the spread of CWD.

The CWD Action Coalition supports HF1202.

Regards,

Brad Gausman
Executive Director
MN Conservation Federation

Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee

Chair Hansen and Committee Members;

I am Dr. Scott Josephson of the TriCounty Veterinary Clinic in Taunton, Minnesota. I am a graduate of the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine and have been in practice for 38 years in southwest Minnesota. Although I own a general mixed animal rural practice, my focus is in ruminant reproduction. This includes 35 years experience in embryo transfer and in vitro embryo production for cattle, sheep and goats as well as laparoscopic artificial insemination services for 60+ whitetail farms throughout the Midwest.

I am concerned about the language in House Bill HF1202 which will amend Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 35.155 subdivision 12 as it pertains to the import and movement of cervidae semen for use on whitetail deer farms in Minnesota.

The captive cervid industry, coupled with private and public research, have identified 4 resistant gene markers to CWD in certain individual whitetail deer. In addition, research has also produced a 50K genomic scale (50,000 locations on the whitetail genome) that appears to have promise as a predictor of an animals susceptibility to developing CWD.

Most, if not all, whitetail farms are now selectively breeding to introduce and increase these resistant markers in their breeding herds. In addition, the North American Deer Farmers Association is using the 50K genomics to establish CWD resistant breeding values in their registry to assist farms in selective breeding programs. It is worth noting that there are very promising early results in herds that have used and studied these approaches to prevent animals from infection with CWD prions, even in a high exposure environment and adult deer reaching 4 to 5 years of age in that environment. (See "Did We Find a Cure for CWD?" YouTube Video with Greg Flees of Wilderness Whitetails). We must also consider that in the wild population, more than 70% of the wild males carry the least resistant/most susceptible genetic alleles.

By selectively using semen from males carrying multiples of one or more of the resistant alleles this in turn will produce breeding females that are less susceptible hosts to the disease. As I previously noted, recent results from studies on farms that have aggressively introduced resistant genes into their animals and eliminated animals carrying no genetic resistance have shown that disease and infection can likely be prevented with this approach. Males produced in these systems can remain negative to 4 and 5 years of age and as a result should be able to provide prion-free semen. Virtually all of the semen that we use in artificial breeding programs are identified as carrying one or more resistance markers and/or desirable breeding values for resistance. It may be that artificial insemination is indeed safer in controlling the disease than natural service merely due to the known genetic resistance of the male.

In addition, as a comparison, there have been no documented cases of scrapie (the prion/TSE disease in sheep) transmission via reproductive introduction in sheep.

Therefore, by restricting the access of cervid farms to semen from highly resistant males, no matter where those animals are located geographically, we will be slowing the progress of solving the problem of CWD on cervid farms. If our goal is to truly help cervid farms eradicate the disease within their herds, we should support the use of semen from highly resistant animals rather than focusing on what appears to be an extremely low risk source of disease introduction.

I urge you to support the scientific approach using genetics to achieve the goal of removing chronic wasting disease from our farmed deer population by not restricting one of the most valuable tools we have in combating the disease.

Respectfully,

Scott D. Josephson, DVM
TriCounty Veterinary Clinic
Taunton, MN

Please submit the following comment in support of HF1202 (Becker-Finn):

As a lifelong Minnesota resident, adult-onset hunter, and trained conservation biologist, I am writing to indicate my strong support for HF1202 authored by Representative Becker-Finn. White tailed deer are an incredibly important cultural, spiritual, economic, and ecological resource for Minnesotans, whether they are hunters or not, and the utmost priority must be given to ensuring their persistence into the future.

From my perspective as a trained disease risk analyst and conservation biologist, HF1202 is a bill with very reasonable, common sense risk reduction measures for captive cervid facilities. These measures strike a balance between burdensome regulations requiring the wholesale depopulation and dissolution of cervid farms and allowing them to function recklessly, without appropriate risk reduction measures. Chronic wasting disease is by no means solely a farmed cervid issue, of course, but the intensity and extent of high-risk activities undertaken on, around, and between farms warrants serious consideration.

CWD is simply bad for business--whether you're a wildlife manager, a cervid farmer, or a hunter, CWD doing well means we're doing bad. Despite years of surveillance, the total number of positives remains low, and we still have a chance to keep it that way. I encourage the members of the committee to pass this bill and to support strong risk reduction measures for farmed cervids and other stakeholder groups.

Regards,
Meg McEachran, PhD
St. Paul MN

MINNESOTA ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

February 6, 2022

Chair Rick Hansen
House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee
407 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Jamie Becker-Finn
559 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Hansen, Rep. Becker-Finn and Members of the Committee,

The Minnesota Elk Breeders Association represents elk farmers from across Minnesota who are working diligently to responsibly raise elk and support our local small-town communities and economy. We share your passion for a healthy cervid population, both inside and outside the fence and ask you to thoughtfully consider our comments below.

The Minnesota Elk Breeders Association does see several new provisions we can support but also several we oppose relating to H.F. 1202. Most notably, we draw your attention to:

- Section 1 Subd. 6 – We oppose making physical location data publicly available. Allowing public access to farmed cervid location premises data significantly increases the probability for every cervid farmer in Minnesota to experience vandalism to our fences, animals, property and self. There is no reason that deer or elk farmers should be subjected to public exposure any more than producers of cattle, pigs or poultry.
- Section 3 Subd. 4 – We oppose requiring the addition of a physical barrier be added to existing fencing as well as double 120" fences. Data from a recent study by the University of Minnesota does not support the effectiveness of a physical barrier or double fencing to control CWD on either side of the fence. No state in the nation requires the addition of a physical barrier to existing 96" fencing or double fencing of all farmed cervid facilities within its jurisdiction. In addition, there has never been a documented case of a farmed cervid escape being caused by a farmed cervid jumping up and over a 96" fence in Minnesota. Requiring a physical barrier or 120" fence is not warranted.
- Section 7 Subd. 11 (3) – We oppose the 10-year requirement to maintain fences after a CWD detection. There is no data or science to support maintaining fences for 10 years as being more effective than the current five-year requirement. Federal guidelines require five years. There is currently no action taken for public property where CWD positive deer have been taken, nor for dumpster sites where carcass overflow has likely created super-saturated prion sites.
- Section 8 Subd. 11a – This section needs to reflect someone knows their herd is infected or has been exposed to CWD prior to that sale or unlawful disposal. Line 5.27 could read, "…unlawful disposal of farmed Cervidae <u>known to be</u> infected with or exposed to chronic wasting disease."
- Section 9 Subd. 12 – We oppose restricting interstate movement of live cervidae and/or semen into Minnesota from states where CWD has been detected in the wild and/or farm. Under current regulations, we are not aware of any documented farmed cervid moving from an out of state herd to a Minnesota farmed cervid herd causing that herd to later become infected with CWD. The transfer of semen has never been documented either experimentally or on-farm to cause CWD in the receiving animal. This language would severely diminish the ability for producers to utilize A.I. as a means to accelerate CWD-resistant genetics into their herd. Utilizing artificial insemination also lowers live animal movement in order to introduce new bloodlines into the herd. In addition, if the receiving farm is already located in a CWD endemic area, even the most negligible risk semen or animal importation is a mute point.

CWD is endemic in Minnesota and will continue to spread with or without cervid farms. The farmed cervid industry is closer than ever to breeding genetic resistance into our herds, identifying enhanced biosecurity measures and beginning discussions on how to utilize live animal testing when it becomes validated. We are on the verge of being able to manage the threat of CWD in a farm situation with these increased measures. We stand ready to work with you on achieving our shared desire for healthy deer herds on both sides of the fence without eliminating over 200 small family farms through overregulation in doing so.

Sincerely,

Mark Luedtke, President