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## Game Farm Dilemma Deepens—Huge Illegal Trade Revealed

By Shirley Bray

Poaching of wild deer by game farmers is a serious problem. At a recent meeting of the Midwest Deer/Turkey Group Meeting, Conception, MO August 19-20, 2002, the extent of the illegal laundering of wild deer into the captive cervid trade industry was discussed. Terry Dougherty, a warden with Missouri DOC, offered some insights. Much was based on the testimony of a former deer hauler who has turned states evidence. He had hauled numerous loads of illegal deer and elk that were shipped to many states by Michigan brokers.

Untested deer bring premium prices on shooting preserves because they can be laundered for entry into Boone and Crockett Hunting Preserves, a full service, 2000-acre wildlife habitat for the managed field hunting of upland game birds and trophy whitetail in the Midwest. TB-tested deer with ear-tags and shaved necks show evidence of being from game farms and cannot be entered in Boone and Crockett. Gate hunts are going for \$40-50,000 and no record of these hunts appears on the books.

Most of the deer that the deer hauler moved were wild caught deer from Ontario. Ontario deer farmers baited wild deer into pens, and veterinarians supplied false health certificates for wild deer. Twenty-nine were shipped into Wisconsin without testing. Major destination states were Texas, Pennsylvania, Missouri and Mississippi. Deer were brought into the U.S. at a friendly border crossing in Montana. The driver carried two sets of papers, one for the authorities and one for the ranch owner. Untested loads were hauled at night to minimize stress on the animal and to minimize the number of inspections at the border. In Texas, wardens can stop cattle haulers on the interstate for inspection.

Five thousand prosecutable violations have been documented, many from discrepancies between the age of deer and the age on tags. The illegal market is dependent on veterinarians supplying false papers for a cut of the profit. Illegal shipments will continue until there is no market for trophy deer on shooting preserves. Brokers prefer deer from Canada because of the good exchange rate and lax border enforcement. It is estimated that 25,000 deer per month are being moved throughout the U.S.

One of the largest poaching cases in Canada involved Saskatchewan veterinarian and game farmer John Phillip Murray, who faced charges of fraud this summer for allegedly trapping and selling as many as 1000 white-tailed deer over three years. IFAW has requested that the RCMP expand its investigation into the alleged poaching of wildlife by game farmers. The Canadian Cervid Council has stated that game farming is not a valid wildlife issue. The poaching of public wildlife, in addition to the problems of disease, habitat loss and genetic pollution, clearly refutes this notion.

In the summer a significant number of game farmers approached well-known game farming opponent, Darrel Rowledge, a director of the Alliance for Public Wildlife, and asked for help in getting out of the industry. Conservation groups agreed that game farmers should be compensated provided the industry was shut down. Now these game farmers are considering a class action lawsuit against the federal government and have consulted with one of Canada's leading class-action lawyers.

While Alberta Agriculture encouraged the growth of the industry without a proper analysis, they have attempted to limit their liability by putting a weasel clause into the Livestock Industry Diversification Act, the legislation that legalized game farming. Section 25 reads: "No right of compensation exists against





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the Crown, the Minister, the Director or any inspector for any act done, or any failure to act, pursuant to this Act.”

One of the accomplishments that the Alberta Elk Association listed on their website under “liaison between Government and farmers” is that they “halted [an] environmental review.” When game farmers were challenged on this point in one of their web forums, this item was quickly removed. “Why would the industry association boast of NOT protecting the best interests of the Canadian people?” demanded the whistle-blowing participant.

