



Preliminary Chronic Wasting Disease Test Results Indicate Continued Spread

For those who missed it, Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD) released part of the 2012 Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) test results on Feb 8, 2013. Preliminary results confirmed CWD in twenty-four cervids inclusive of 19 mule deer, 4 white-tailed deer and one moose (AESRD 2013A). This marks the first detection of CWD in moose in Canada (AESRD 2013B).

Previous cases of CWD in moose have been reported in Colorado and Wyoming but have been restricted to areas where moose occurrence overlaps infected deer range (AESRD 2013 B). This information, combined with the more solitary nature of moose, is seemingly good news suggesting that transmission in moose populations will likely be restricted and/or slow. It does not, however, diminish the gravity of the situation. CWD transmission to other herding ungulates, such as Elk and Alberta's threatened Caribou populations, remains a real threat and could spell disaster for the latter given recent population trends.

CWD appears to have originated in Canada through importation of infected elk from South Dakota to a Saskatchewan game farm (Kahn et al. 2004). Transmission of CWD to wild cervids may have been an unforeseen and unfortunate result of interactions between infected farmed populations and wild animals (Kahn et al. 2004). For many Albertans disease or parasitic introduction to wild populations from endeavors promoting domestication or commercialization of wildlife remains a deep concern. One only needs to remember the mass cull undertaken during Alberta's initial efforts to control CWD outbreaks to truly understand the risk this disease poses.

While the province has invested considerable time and resources to stem CWD transmission, last months test results are indicative that the battle has yet to be won. Confirmed cases of CWD continue to be clustered around the northern portion of the Battle River watershed and the Red Deer River, including its southern tributaries (AESRD 2013A). Since testing commenced in 2005, infection has been confirmed in 151 wild deer, primarily in these two areas of the province (AESRD 2013A). There is evidence of continued disease spread in these regions, as well as in the South Saskatchewan basin. Results suggest cull programs are unlikely to provide a final solution, as resurgence of the disease has occurred in Wildlife Management Units (WMU) 150 and 163 (AESRD 2013A).

References:

Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Management. 2013A. {website}
<http://srd.alberta.ca/fishwildlife/WildlifeDiseases/ChronicWastingDisease/CWDUpdates/Defa>



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Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Management. 2013B. CWD in moose in Alberta info sheet. {website}

<http://srd.alberta.ca/fishwildlife/WildlifeDiseases/ChronicWastingDisease/CWDUpdates/documents/CWDinMooseAlberta-InfoSheet-Feb2013.pdf>

Kahn, S., Dube, C., Bates, L., and A. Balachandran. 2004. Chronic wasting disease in Canada: Part Canadian Veterinarian Journal. 45 (May). {website}

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC548623/pdf/cvj45pg397.pdf>

