



MINNESOTA ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

NEWS RELEASE

Chronic Wasting Disease Statistics Study Suggests Minnesota Does Not Sufficiently Test Free-Ranging Deer

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Howard Lake, MN- A new study reviewing Chronic Wasting Disease sampling in Minnesota reveals possible gaps in understanding where CWD exists in free-ranging deer in Minnesota. The Elk Research Foundation (also known as the Elk Research Council) reported its findings in a study entitled, “Report on CWD Surveillance and Outcomes in Free-Ranging and Farmed Cervids in Minnesota.” This study analyzed CWD sampling data performed in free-ranging and farmed cervid herds in Minnesota from 2014-2016.

The Minnesota DNR utilized a variety of sampling protocols over that three year period of time using anything from hunter harvested deer, to road kills, reported sick or dead deer, or a combination of the three. The report showed CWD testing of Minnesota’s free-ranging deer to be incomplete at best. In 2014, out of a total of 644,453 estimated free-ranging deer, only 516 or 0.080% were tested in just 17 of Minnesota’s 130 Deer Permit Areas (DPAs). In 2015, out of an estimated total of 695,330 free-ranging deer, only 25 were tested or .004% in 21 DPAs. In 2016, out of an estimated total of 802,443 free-ranging deer, 3,121 were tested or .389% in 30 DPAs; still not at a 1% testing level and still leaving out an additional 100 DPAs. There were three CWD positives found that year.

Minnesota’s farmed cervid herds participate in the federal CWD Herd Certification Program (HCP) which is a cooperative effort between APHIS, the Minnesota Board of Animal Health and farmed/captive deer, elk, or moose owners. Every Minnesota cervid owner has participated in the federal CWD program since 2004, amassing 15 years of data and testing thousands of farmed elk and deer. Farmed cervid farms are located in 75 of Minnesota’s 87 counties providing CWD test results from throughout the entire state of Minnesota on a yearly basis.

In the three years this study examined, Minnesota farmed deer and elk owners tested much higher percentages of animals compared to their wildlife counterparts. In 2014, of a total of 10,361 farmed cervids, 1,729 were tested (16.69%). None of these tests were positive. In 2015, of a total number of 10,262 farmed cervids, 1,323 were tested (12.89%). None of these tests were positive. In 2016, of a total number of 10,383 farmed cervids, 1,593 were tested (15.34%). Of these tests, 5 (0.31%) were positive.

The study concluded that, “Overall, we have a greater than 99.9% confidence in every year that the prevalence of CWD in the farmed cervid populations was 1% or less, based on testing results.” The same could not be said of the free-ranging test data.

There was no testing done in most of Minnesota’s DPAs during 2014-2016. “Most DPAs are not included in these tables, as there were no deer sampled in the majority of the DPAs.” In many cases, of the DPAs which reported testing in any given year, there was only one test done in the entire DPA. For example, in 2016, of the 30 DPAs which reported CWD results, 15 or 50% of them reported only one test. One such illustration was DPA 214; of the estimated 16,066 wild deer reported that year, only one was tested.

This study concluded, “For farmed cervids, we can be highly confident that there are very low rates of CWD in the population. That is not the case for free-ranging deer, where we are relying on much less information. Estimates at the state level are dubious, as it is unlikely that there is one constant rate of CWD across all DPAs. Many DPAs remain unsampled, and with the exception of a few more heavily-sampled DPA’s, we have scant information and cannot make any precise conclusions about CWD rates in free-ranging deer.”

To read the report in its entirety, go to [http://www.elkresearchfoundation.org/pdf/ERF-Project-1604-Appendix-II-\(MN\).pdf](http://www.elkresearchfoundation.org/pdf/ERF-Project-1604-Appendix-II-(MN).pdf).