

Dear Governor Reeves,

Mississippi [House Bill 382](#) (H 382), sponsored by Representative Scott Bounds (R-Neshoba) was passed in the Mississippi House of Representatives and Mississippi Senate on March 30, 2021, after substantial changes to the bill were made at the last minute during the second conference committee meeting. The report was not issued to the public until minutes before the votes took place in both chambers, which did not allow the public to review those changes or weigh in with their representatives. The bill, in its final state, amends existing statutory language with respect to chronic wasting disease (CWD) sampling requirements for deer harvested by hunting or dying from other causes within any enclosure. The bill also loosens the fine structure for failure to provide samples or register a high fence enclosure, and most alarmingly, attempts to legislate Mississippi's CWD Management and Response Plan. Doing so will dictate who will and who will not be placed into a CWD zone upon a positive test on adjacent land within an enclosure, taking jurisdiction of such decisions away from our state wildlife agency and the scientists who make informed decisions about such matters based on extensive scientific research on both deer and CWD from across the country.

Among those provisions listed above, the bill establishes a minimum submission of samples for testing from inside a high-fence enclosure of at least one deer per 200 acres of land under fence, but only authorizes the Executive Director to send agency personnel inside an enclosure to collect samples if CWD has been found within a 5-mile radius. Additionally, the bill eliminates the agency's ability to depopulate an enclosure if CWD is found inside (which, to date, is the only known and established method of containment and control of captive CWD positive animals). And, in the most puzzling and alarming amendment, the bill mandates that adjacent and surrounding land within a 5-mile radius CANNOT be placed into a CWD Zone if a

positive test is found within an enclosure, unless CWD is positively identified within that adjacent or surrounding area. This provision goes against the very premise of establishing “zones.”

In Mississippi, all white-tailed deer are considered wildlife, and the jurisdiction for captive deer belongs to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP), including the jurisdiction to require and conduct disease sampling in captive herds. It is always important that the jurisdictional agency has a role in crafting regulations and rules that affect the agency’s ability to track and manage CWD. House Bill 382’s language softens penalties for enclosure violations and failure to submit samples, and also includes contradictory or ambiguous provisions that may hinder MDWFP’s ability to collect the number of samples required to effectively monitor and manage CWD in the state. The bill eliminates the agency’s authority and ability to control the spread of CWD once it is detected in a captive herd.

The National Deer Association (NDA, f/k/a the National Deer Alliance and the Quality Deer Management Association) outlines deer diseases as a critical focus area, and slowing the spread of CWD is of primary concern. Undoubtedly, CWD is one of the largest threats to wildlife conservation that we have encountered over the last century. As many states have learned, preventing the spread of this always-fatal disease is a daunting task and early detection and rapid response once the disease is found is critical for long-term management.

The following organizations oppose HB 382 as written. The bill’s current version takes jurisdiction of Mississippi deer and the laws that conserve them away from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks and threatens the future of wild deer herds in Mississippi. The bill threatens Mississippi’s wild deer - a public resource shared by all of our citizens - by softening penalties and including

contradictory or ambiguous provisions that may hinder MDWFP's ability to effectively monitor and manage CWD in the state.

Please consider vetoing this bill, for the sake of all of Mississippi's over 700,000 hunters, and the future of our state's wild deer population, or if you are unwilling to veto the entire bill, please veto lines in the bill numbered 35-40 and 161-177.

Sincerely,

- The National Deer Association (formerly the National Deer Alliance and the Quality Deer Management Association)
- Mississippi Wildlife Federation
- Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
- Rural Property Rights Association of Mississippi
- National Wildlife Association