

June 9, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20228

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to ask that you take immediate action to curb the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD). Our organizations represent millions of hunters, conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts concerned with the unabated spread of CWD in captive and wild herds across the U.S. and its impact on the nation's \$40-billion annual deer hunting economy. Deer hunting in America depends on well-managed wild deer populations, and these populations are increasingly threatened by the spread of CWD.

Since the start of May 2021 alone, several states have undertaken immediate and costly actions to address potential contaminations in the wild resulting from CWD outbreaks originating in captive breeding and hunting facilities.

- The Texas Department of Parks & Wildlife Department has undertaken a full epidemiological investigation to track spread from three endemic breeding operations that shipped deer to more than 260 sites across the state.<sup>1</sup> Despite the agency's diligent efforts to combat the spread of CWD, tracking and testing so many animals once they have been shipped is extremely difficult, particularly since, according to reports, breeders have refused to test some of the suspected deer.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the potential for unchecked transmission to wild herds remains.
- In late May, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture announced a CWD detection at a hunting facility in northwestern PA, the first along the NY border and outside of existing CWD management zones.<sup>3</sup> The state is working hard to trace the deer's origins but cannot say at this time if additional quarantines at any of the state's 760 deer farms or hunting preserves will be necessary. While the detection will result in the establishment of a new disease management zone, the movement of deer between facilities will not be halted while the investigation moves forward.
- Lastly, on June 1, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources imposed a two-month ban on the movement of deer after 13 tested positive at a captive facility in Minnesota's north woods—hundreds of miles from the states endemic area.<sup>4</sup> Biologists have determined the deer were transported from an endemic facility in the southeastern corner of the state. Most shocking, while investigating the outbreak, the agency found infected carcasses dumped by the facility

---

<sup>1</sup> "Chronic Wasting Disease Discovered at Deer Breeding Facilities in Matagorda and Mason Counties." Texas Parks & Wildlife, 14 May 2021, <https://tpwd.texas.gov/newsmedia/releases/?req=20210514a>

<sup>2</sup> Planas, Roque. "Texas Breeder Deer May Have Spread Brain Disease Into The Wild." HuffPost, 3 June 2021, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/texas-deer-breeders-cwd\\_n\\_60b55044e4b0f2a82eed2d52](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/texas-deer-breeders-cwd_n_60b55044e4b0f2a82eed2d52)

<sup>3</sup> "Warren County Deer Tests Positive for Chronic Wasting Disease, First Confirmed in PA Northern Tier." PA Department of Agriculture, 26 May 2021, [https://www.media.pa.gov/pages/agriculture\\_details.aspx?newsid=1091](https://www.media.pa.gov/pages/agriculture_details.aspx?newsid=1091)

<sup>4</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, "DNR to protect wild deer health through temporary ban on movement of farmed deer in Minnesota," June 1, 2021, <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/news/2021/06/01/dnr-protect-wild-deer-health-through-temporary-ban-movement-farmed-deer-minnesota>

owner over the course of several years on nearby public lands. The dead deer had since been scavenged and spread across several acres.<sup>5</sup> Following the action taken by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources this week, the Minnesota Deer Farmers Association put out a statement in opposition to the moratorium.<sup>6</sup>

The need for federal leadership and coordination on this crisis that crosses state boundaries is highlighted by the fact that even a state like Texas, which has tough rules on CWD and an extremely capable wildlife management agency, has been unable to prevent the spread of the disease.

We are calling on you to take two immediate steps to control the spread of CWD. First, the USDA should implement a moratorium on the interstate movement of all live deer, as recommended by the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council as recently as last year. CWD has now been found in 26 states and on the borders of several more. We need to protect those states that have not yet detected the disease.

Second, we urge the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior to convene an emergency meeting of the CWD interagency task force authorized by Congress in 2020 to develop an immediate federal response to contain CWD. This should include a third-party, independent review of the USDA Herd Certification Program, expedited research into the transmission pathways of CWD, recommend strategies for reducing the spread of CWD, and direct assistance for state surveillance, monitoring and testing for CWD.

CWD is 100% fatal to deer and elk, and once established, it is near impossible to erase from the landscape. The disease has not jumped from deer to humans, as mad cow disease has, but is still considered to be a threat to human health<sup>7</sup>, and experts advise against the consumption of meat suspected of infection with CWD.<sup>8</sup> Between 75-80% of hunters pursue deer and research has shown that CWD prevalence discourages hunter participation, ultimately threatening our national deer hunting tradition and Pittman-Robertson model of conservation funding. Now is the time to use all resources at the disposal of the federal government to work with the states and hunters to curb this troubling spread of the disease.

Sincerely,

Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies  
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers  
National Deer Association  
National Wildlife Federation  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

---

<sup>5</sup> "To Control CWD Outbreak, Minnesota Bans Moving Farmed Deer." AP News, 1 June 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/mn-state-wire-minnesota-deer-business-health-634710c79c6a0a6688eb407f0f202c45>

<sup>6</sup> Gunderson, Dan, "Deer farmers reject DNR's emergency rule pausing movement of deer amid CWD spread." MPR News, 2 June 2021, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/06/02/deer-farmers-reject-dnrs-emergency-rule-pausing-movement-of-deer-amid-cwd-spread>

<sup>7</sup> Watson, N., Brandel, JP., Green, A. *et al.* The importance of ongoing international surveillance for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. *Nat Rev Neurol* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41582-021-00488-7>

<sup>8</sup> [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases \(NCEZID\), Division of High-Consequence Pathogens and Pathology \(DHCPP\)](https://www.cdc.gov/prions/cwd/prevention.html), "Chronic Wasting Disease Prevention," <https://www.cdc.gov/prions/cwd/prevention.html>