

Wyoming Game and Fish Department Chronic Wasting Disease Activities for 2004

Methods:

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) conducted its second statewide surveillance for chronic wasting disease (CWD) in 2004. The WGFD divides the state into seven administrative regions. Considering each region as a "population," the surveillance goal was to test 500-600 deer from each region. This number provided a 99% probability of detecting CWD if it existed at $\geq 1\%$ prevalence. The overall goal was approximately 4,000 samples statewide.

Samples were collected at points of concentration, i.e., meat processors and check stations. Samples were taken by WGFD personnel from all divisions (wildlife, fish, services, administration). Only retropharyngeal lymph nodes were sampled because these nodes are easily and rapidly taken. Statewide training of WGFD personnel on sample and data collection was conducted prior to the start of the hunting season. The WGFD uses the BioRad enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) to analyze lymph node samples. This allowed much more rapid processing and reporting of results.

Results were reported to hunters in less than three weeks of sample submission. Hunters could obtain results by accessing the Department's web site. Hunters submitting a sample were given a unique bar coded number. The hunter could then access the web site, enter the unique number and obtain test results. Hunters having deer or elk testing positive for CWD were also individually notified by letter. The WGFD also notified other wildlife agencies by mail if a hunter from their state or province harvested a CWD test-positive animal.

Results:

A total of 3,958 deer and elk samples were analyzed. Of these samples, 78 tested positive for CWD representing: 61 mule deer, 5 white-tailed deer, and 12 elk. CWD was discovered in two new deer hunt areas (30, 33) and one new elk hunt area (125).

Other Issues:

On a personal level, the death of Beth Williams and Tom Thorne is a tragic loss. On a professional level, their loss will be profound. Nationally and in Wyoming, they were the "go to" people on wildlife diseases including CWD. The ramifications will be substantial.

The Department is currently considering methods to limit or control the movement of deer and elk carcasses out of the CWD endemic area to areas where CWD is currently not found. Management of carcass movement may be necessitated by recent findings that intact carcasses can transmit CWD.

The Department is also developing a management plan in the event that CWD is found on or near one of the state or federal elk feedgrounds in northwestern Wyoming. The concern is that feedgrounds concentrate animals which could increase the probability of disease transmission, which may necessitate special management actions.