CWD STATUS UPDATE

UTILIZATION OF BEST SCIENCE AND URGENCY

By Dick Zook, Jan 2020

Before year end 2019 Wisconsin had recorded over 1200 new CWD cases in the wild and free ranging whitetail deer herd, and over 6000 cases reported since 2000. They have tested over 240,000 deer in the twenty years and have found positive cases in 28 counties. This includes 2 counties with at least a 20% positive prevalence rate, and 8 counties with at least a 10% positive prevalence rate. If that does not cause alarm then nothing will. The CWD situation in Wisconsin has progressed beyond disaster to multiple levels of severity above that. This really substantiates the trend that the CWD prevalence rate increases over time and that it expands geographically over time unless drastic measures are taken to stem the tide. This drastically emphasizes the need for URGENT preventative action which would include deer density reduction and eliminating baiting, primarily where CWD has not yet been found in the wild and free ranging whitetail deer herd. Then consider these results as a prime example of a state legislature interfering with the wildlife agency and preventing the application of the best available science in urgently managing the situation. Apparently the need for URGENCY in implementing preventative measures in Wisconsin did not occur. Is Michigan on a similar path?

As a comparison CWD has been present for about 4.5 years in Michigan and now has 181 positive CWD cases. The latest MDNR data for 2019 shows 65 new positive CWD cases from 20,047 deer tested. Michigan has eight counties with positive CWD cases in the wild and free ranging Whitetail deer herd. The 2018 data show 62 new cases from 30,751 deer tested. The 2019 CWD positive cases is 3 more than the 2018 results, but from a much smaller test sample. This reflects a continued increase in the prevalence of CWD in Michigan’s wild and free ranging whitetail deer herd. The hunting community in Michigan has been reluctant to accept the best science and deer management requirements for URGENT preventative action outside the CWD Zone, and support efforts to reduce the deer density and eliminate baiting.

Then consider that the big picture is compounded by the limits of the available CWD testing science. The test can only prove a positive and cannot verify or prove a negative. The CWD must be present in a deer for a period of about 9 to 12 months before the prions can accumulate to a detectable level. The positive cases identified only begin to determine the real extent of the situation. How many CWD infected deer are on the landscape? How many CWD infected deer have died on the landscape and been consumed by predators. How many CWD infected deer did not prove positive because the prions had not accumulated enough to be detected. This is a DISASTER and URGENT preventative action has been delayed to long. What will Michigan’s record look like in 15 years?

Consider the magnitude of the scientific resources available that are referenced and lead to critically important CWD and deer management decisions. Start with the MDNR’s Chronic Wasting Disease Response Plan which was issued in 2002 and references 240 separate scientific studies/articles considered when preparing the plan. The Alliance for Public Wildlife in 2017 published a report that referenced 232 separate scientific studies/articles considered when preparing this public communication document. The Chronic Wasting Disease Symposium arranged by the MDNR and MDARD at MSU in Oct of 2017 included presentations by 7 academic institutions, 6 state wildlife agencies, USDA, and others that emphasized the urgency, communications/support, density reduction and eliminating baiting. The Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance, managed by the Wildlife Management Institute and supported by 16 major wildlife/hunting organizations, is a very good information resource covering CWD and support for scientific management. A 2016 report by two major research professionals titled “The First Five Decades of Chronic Wasting Disease: Lessons for the Five Decades to Come” references 47 scientific/professional reports in supporting scientific management of CWD. There is more, however this provides a clear perspective of the volume of scientific personnel and resources available for applying the best science available in managing the CWD situation. As a comparison, where is the research, the scientific reports, or the qualified professionals that support baiting and restrict does from harvest? Is there any? Or is it all subjective opinion based on farmers and retailers revenue, or hunters convenience.

Preventative action for reducing deer density in the wild and free ranging deer herd and eliminating baiting are critical needs identified by the vast majority of the professionals working on the CWD problem or managing the deer herd. The URGENCY of taking immediate action to help stem the spread of CWD has been a primary concern of the professionals for over 20 years. The URGENCY was needed over four years ago in Michigan but the MDNR has been stymied in trying to implement drastic preventative measures outside of the CWD zone, like no baiting and deer density reduction. This work was included in Michigan’s CWD Action Plan initially adopted in 2002. Increasing the understanding, support, and participation from the hunting community is critical. It is the single most important factor in achieving success in implementing URGENT measures in minimizing the spread and prevalence of CWD. The risk to the wild and free ranging Whitetail Deer herd is a total loss within our lives, and where deer hunting as we know it will cease to be a major deer management tool. The hunting community has supported the MDNR in use of scientific management in protection of Michigan’s natural resources, and now has a huge responsibility in URGENTLY applying the best science to minimize the spread and prevalence of CWD.

Will our future mirror Wisconsin’s experience? What is your perspective of the picture in 15 years?

Doing nothing only assures the quicker demise of the wild and free ranging deer herd and our deer hunting heritage. The time for URGENCY in Michigan will soon pass with the geographic expansion of the CWD positive areas.