

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) occurs in mule deer and white-tailed deer throughout much of eastern and central Alberta, and spills over into a few elk and moose. The disease is associated with protein changes in the brain that result in weight loss, behavioural changes, and premature death within two years. Recent field data from long-term infected populations of mule deer and whitetails indicate a gradual shift towards younger deer, lower productivity, and fewer adult males. Dynamic real-world models and field data indicate CWD has significant effects on age/sex profile, long-term productivity, and survival in local deer populations.

Alberta has monitored CWD in wild deer since 1998. It was first detected in 2005 on the Alberta/Saskatchewan border. Since then it is documented in 6163 cervids (5179 MD, 930 WTD, 39 elk, 15 moose) and continues to expand westward from Saskatchewan along major east-west watersheds. The disease now occurs west of Hwy 2 from Athabasca south and into the southern foothills.

The CWD Surveillance Program continues to monitor CWD in designated wildlife management units (WMU) along the AB/SK border, CFB Wainwright, and along the leading western and northern edge of the known distribution. Previous annual program summaries, details, and CWD distribution maps, are available at alberta.ca/chronic-wasting-disease.

For game management purposes, we have the following requirements for 2024/25 hunting seasons:

- 1) **Mandatory requirement to submit DEER harvested in the following WMUs: 148, 150, 151, 200, 234, 236, 728, and 730 (see attached map).**
- 2) **Mandatory mule deer and Voluntary white-tailed deer from WMUs: 503, 504, 505, 506, 509, 510, 514.**
- 3) **Mandatory MULE DEER ONLY from WMUs: 108, 110, 212, 216, 221, 224, 246, 247, 248, 250, 300, 302, 303, 306, 308, 310, 312, 314, 316, 320, 334, 402, 404, 508.**

Our data over the last 25 years clearly indicate that CWD occurs primarily in mule deer in Alberta and thus they provide the best surveillance sample for tracking the disease. However, we also are interested in tracking CWD in whitetails in some areas.

Hunters and outfitters play a vital role in CWD surveillance. As in previous years, the CWD program accepts the head of any cervid legally harvested in Alberta. Deer heads submitted for testing and examination of emaciated deer help define the area where the disease occurs. Hunters who take advantage of increased hunting opportunities and remove deer from CWD high risk areas contribute to fewer deer on the landscape and less opportunity for disease transmission. The cooperation and assistance of all stakeholders and interested parties is important and greatly appreciated.

Logistical timelines limit lab testing capacity to a maximum of ~2500 heads per month. While most cervids are harvested in November, it generally takes until March to test heads from late-season harvests.

Please check the CWD web pages prior to the fall hunting seasons to get additional information regarding the 2024/25 surveillance program.

