

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) occurs in mule deer and white-tailed deer throughout most of eastern and central Alberta. A few cases also occur in 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 and long-term productivity and survival of 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 5455 cervids (4603 MD, 818 WTD, 26 elk, 8 moose) and continues to expand westward from Saskatchewan along major east-west watersheds. The disease now occurs west of Hwy 2 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 results are available at alberta.ca/chronic-wasting-disease.

Moving forward, for the 2023/24 hunting seasons:

Mandatory requirement to submit DEER harvested in the following WMUs: 148, 150, 151, 200, 234, 236, 728, and 730 (see attached map).

For game management purposes, we also are interested in receiving:

- 1) Any deer head from 503, 504, 505, 506, 509, 510, 514
- 2) MULE DEER heads from 108, 110, 212, 216, 221, 224, 246, 247, 248, 250, 300, 302, 303, 306, 308, 310, 312, 314, 316, 320, 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.

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 get all the heads tested, particularly late-season harvests.

Please check the Fish and Wildlife disease web pages prior to the fall hunting seasons to get additional information regarding the 2023/24 CWD surveillance program.

