

## **Backgrounder**

### Chronic Wasting Disease-CWD

#### **Where will the survey take place?**

The survey has three target areas: central Alberta north and west of Edmonton, and including part or all of Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) partial 248 (NORTH of Hwy 16), 250, partial 349 (EAST of Hwy 32), 507 and 508; two areas along the Alberta/Saskatchewan border, from the North Saskatchewan River to Provost, covering WMUs 234, 236, 256 and 500; and from Acadia Valley to Irvine, covering WMUs 148, 150 and 151.

#### **What are the signs of CWD?**

Animals with CWD display a number of different signs as the disease slowly damages their brain. There are no clinical signs early in an infection. As the disease progresses, excessive salivation, trouble swallowing, difficulty in judging space and distances, lethargy, drooping ears, and emaciation (marked weight loss) are other common signs. Unfortunately, these signs are not specific to CWD and can occur with other diseases. The most practical way to diagnose whether or not elk or deer are affected with CWD is to examine the brain tissue after the animal has died.

#### **How is CWD transmitted?**

The exact transmission mechanism of CWD is unclear at this time. However, it is known that the disease can pass from one animal to another, and females can pass it to their offspring. Infectious material can also persist in the environment for an unknown period of time.

#### **Are humans at risk?**

There is no scientific evidence to suggest that CWD can affect humans. As a precaution, the World Health Organization advises against allowing any products from animals known to be infected with CWD into the human food system.

#### **Where has CWD occurred?**

Chronic Wasting Disease occurs in the wild in Colorado, Wyoming, Illinois, Wisconsin, Utah, South Dakota, New Mexico and Nebraska and was detected recently in 32 wild deer (mule and white-tailed) in Saskatchewan. It has been diagnosed in farmed elk or deer in South Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Montana, Colorado, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Saskatchewan and in one elk and two white-tailed deer on two farms in Alberta. CWD has not been detected in wild deer or elk in Alberta.

#### **What if CWD is diagnosed in a wild deer or elk?**

In the unlikely event that CWD is detected in the wild in Alberta, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development will increase surveillance in the vicinity of any confirmed case. As well, the public awareness of CWD, specifically among hunters and big game guides, will be enhanced. If the animal was submitted by a hunter, the hunter will be notified directly by the Fish and Wildlife Division as soon as the diagnosis is confirmed.

#### **What other surveillance activity is taking place to monitor for Chronic Wasting Disease?**

Within the target areas, Fish and Wildlife staff of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development collect heads from deer and elk that become available during routine field programs (e.g., found dead wildlife, road-kills, animals in distress).

Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development continues to monitor farmed cervids for evidence of CWD. A mandatory program is now in place that involves the testing of any game-farmed elk or deer over one year of age that dies or is slaughtered.

The public is encouraged to notify the department of any deer or elk displaying the clinical signs described above. Cooperation and communication with Saskatchewan and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will continue to ensure that all concerned parties are aware of results of all surveillance activities.

## Target Areas for 2004 CWD Survey

### How will the deer and elk be tested?

All deer and elk heads submitted for the survey will be tested through the lab facilities of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development based in Edmonton. Diagnostic tests involve a well-established protocol that examines the brain tissue of the test animal. The total number of specimens required for the 2004 survey is approximately 250 deer or elk from each target area, which is a small proportion of the deer and elk available for harvest in the target areas. If any infected elk or deer are found, the public will be notified as soon as the test results are confirmed.

For more information, visit the wildlife diseases web site at

<http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/diseases/index.html>.

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