

## Wildlife officers kill 486 deer to prevent spread of CWD

Some cases expected to be found near Saskatchewan border  
ELIZABETH WITHEY Journal Staff Writer

### EDMONTON

A cull of wild deer in eastern Alberta to prevent the spread of chronic wasting disease found in Saskatchewan animals is over. Alberta Fish and Wildlife officers shot 486 deer between March 11 and March 22. Ninety per cent of the animals were white-tail deer, while the rest were mule deer.

The number of deer shot in the 300-square-kilometre area east of Chauvin was higher than anticipated. Before the cull began, the province estimated 300 deer would be collected. But Alberta Sustainable Resource Development spokesman Dave Ealey said exact counts are not possible despite aerial surveys. "It's hard to make estimates on some of these animals," he said. "This is definitely well within the number we could have expected. It's not a surprise." Ten two-person teams, each with a shooter and spotter, shot the deer with hunting rifles during daylight hours after baiting specific areas with hay. An additional five people processed the carcasses in a warehouse set up in the area.

Chronic wasting disease, or CWD, is a contagious disease in the same family as bovine spongiformencephalopathy. Unlike BSE, which cattle develop after eating contaminated feed, CWD is spread from animal to animal including both farmed and wild deer and elk.

Alberta has never had a case of CWD in a wild animal, but infected animals have been found in parts of Saskatchewan along the border with this province.

Brain tissue from the deer is now being tested for CWD at an Alberta Agriculture lab in Edmonton. The testing will be completed by the end of April, Ealey said. "I don't want to prejudge it but we wouldn't be surprised if there are some deer in there that do prove to be positive (for CWD)," Ealey said. "But right from the beginning that's what we've expected and we have to be prepared for that."

The carcasses will be kept frozen pending the test results. All meat that tests negative for CWD will be distributed to low income residents registered at a Fish and Wildlife district office, in particular to people living in the area of the cull, including Lloydminster and Provost. Ealey said plans for long-term CWD prevention will be made once the test results are known.

[ewithey@thejournal.canwest.com](mailto:ewithey@thejournal.canwest.com)