

December 21, 2006

Three more cases of chronic wasting disease found in wild deer

Hunters and landowners help surveillance program

Edmonton... Alberta is now about half-way through testing for its 2006-07 chronic wasting disease (CWD) surveillance program. Three more cases of CWD in wild deer have been confirmed out of the 1,609 deer tested. This brings the total to 16 cases in wild deer in Alberta since the first case in September 2005.

The three new cases involve deer taken during the recent hunting season in areas being monitored for the disease by Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife staff. A male mule deer from along the Red Deer River (wildlife management unit [WMU] 151) tested positive for the disease. Two female mule deer were taken west of Edgerton and south of Chauvin (in WMU 234).

One of these animals came from near previously known Alberta cases. The other two came from a high-risk area near Saskatchewan where positive wild and farmed deer have been found. Two of these latest cases were confirmed December 8, and the third (near Chauvin) on December 20.

Hunters and landowners have played a critical role in the success of the CWD control program. Many Alberta hunters have participated in the quota hunts, and landowners have allowed additional hunting on their property. Most seasons are closed now in the target areas, with the final licence season ending on January 15, 2007.

Hunters are reminded that submitting deer heads is a requirement in five wildlife management units along the Alberta/Saskatchewan border. These include WMUs 150, 151, 234, 256, and 500. Any heads taken in these areas and kept frozen since the animal was shot can still be dropped off at a Fish and Wildlife office or at one of the 24-hour freezers. Maps and information are posted at www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/diseases/.

Chronic wasting disease affects the nervous system; infected animals cannot maintain weight and slowly waste away. There is no scientific evidence to suggest that CWD can infect humans. As a precaution, the World Health Organization advises against allowing products from animals known to be infected with CWD into the human food system. The three hunters have been contacted and were offered various alternatives including a replacement tag or replacement meat.