

February 22, 2007

Alberta takes action on chronic wasting disease in wild deer

Edmonton... New cases of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Alberta's wild deer have been found further north and west than previously detected near Empress, prompting a significant action plan to limit the spread of this disease.

Testing of the fall hunter samples for CWD has now been completed. Out of more than 2,900 deer heads submitted, four diseased deer were found. This brings the total to 17 cases confirmed in wild deer in Alberta, which was first detected in 2005.

"It's essential for us to take prompt action to deal with the remaining deer in these new locations where chronic wasting disease was discovered," said Minister Ted Morton, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. "We appreciate the assistance from hunters and landowners during the fall hunting season in the CWD control areas. Their help is essential in finding new cases and with the follow-up response."

Fish and Wildlife staff are coordinating a concentrated winter action plan in consultation with local landowners. Starting March 5, deer collection will begin around the latest case on the Red Deer River near Empress. This case is the farthest west along the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan rivers. Disease control actions are critical to limiting movement of CWD upstream and possibly into the National Wildlife Area at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Suffield.

Cases discovered east of Wainwright near Chauvin and Edgerton will be addressed in mid- to late March. These areas are close to CFB Wainwright and the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve where large numbers of deer are at risk if CWD becomes established.

To enable the deer culling operation, the campground, hiking trails and backcountry areas in Dillberry Lake Provincial Park will be closed from March 5 to March 31. The park's day-use and cottage areas, located south of the closed area and access to Dillberry Lake for ice fishing will not be affected by this closure. Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture and Sustainable Resource Development staff are working cooperatively on this program.

Chronic wasting disease is a nervous system disease caused by prions (abnormal proteins), similar to but not the same as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). CWD infects only deer and elk; infected animals cannot maintain weight and slowly waste away. This fatal disease has the potential to significantly reduce Alberta's wild deer population.

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Maps of CWD cases and Dillberry Lake access attached.

Media enquiries may be directed to:

Lyle Fullerton
Fish and Wildlife Division
Sustainable Resource
Development
(780) 625-8044

Dave Ealey
Communications
Sustainable Resource
Development
(780) 427-8636

Cheryl Robb
Communications
Tourism, Parks, Recreation and
Culture
(780) 427-6530

To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000.