

# **DEER CULL AIMS TO SLOW SPREAD OF WASTING DISEASE**

Saskatchewan Wild Deer Herds Already Infected

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The Alberta government plans to kill 300 wild deer near the province's eastern boundary in an attempt to ward off chronic wasting disease found in neighbouring Saskatchewan.

The targeted deer are not infected with the fatal disease, but Alberta Sustainable Resource Management spokesperson Dave Ealey said the slaughter is necessary to prevent CWD from spreading to wild animals in this province.

"The intent is to reduce, as much as possible, the chance of (CWD) being transmitted to Alberta deer and being spread on our side," Ealey said. Nearly 60 wild Saskatchewan deer in the area were identified with CWD. One cluster was found less than two kilometres from Alberta's border.

Public meetings will take place in the communities of Lloydminster, Provost, Chauvin and Wainwright from March 7 to 10 to seek landowner permission and inform the public about the cull.

Ten two-person teams from Alberta Fish and Wildlife will shoot deer in townships 41, 42 and 43, a 300-sq.-kilometre area east of Chauvin. The cull should be finished by the end of March. The province did two surveillance culls of similar sizes in 2001 and 2003 to find out whether any wild Alberta deer were infected. But provincial wildlife disease specialist Margo Pybus said this planned cull is the first of its kind.

"We're working from the assumption that (CWD) is in the local population and we need to start reducing that population in order to limit any spread of the disease," Pybus said.

"This time, we're not monitoring. The Saskatchewan data are telling us that it is in the population, so this is a response program."

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

Alberta has never had a case of CWD in a wild animal and government officials hope the cull will help prevent the disease from destroying this province's wild deer population. "The models tell that local deer populations cannot survive in the long term with chronic wasting disease," Pybus said.