

MANITOBA CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE TESTING SUMMARY FOR WILD CERVIDS

December 2021

Manitoba announced its first positive confirmation of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in the province on November 1, 2021, in a symptomatic mule deer buck found west of Lake of the Prairies in Game Hunting Area (GHA) 22. In response to finding CWD for the first time in the province, Manitoba enhanced surveillance and implemented evidence-based CWD containment measures in an effort to control CWD and prevent spread to other areas of the province. This report provides preliminary results from the department's 2021 surveillance program and management actions.

I. SUMMARY OF 2021 SURVEILLANCE AND MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

Manitoba has monitored for CWD since 1997, following the introduction of the disease to Canada. Surveillance for the disease has generally involved testing licenced hunter harvested deer and elk in high-risk mandatory and voluntary surveillance zones along the Saskatchewan and U.S. borders during the fall hunting seasons. Conservation Officers also routinely submit samples of deer and other cervid species reported by the public as sick or acting erratically. In 2021, Manitoba increased the number of hunter sample depots to enhance surveillance and provide more accessible testing for Indigenous harvesters.

As of December 23, approximately 1,400 samples were collected throughout Manitoba and have been submitted for CWD testing in 2021. This includes samples collected as part of Manitoba's provincial CWD surveillance program and 558 samples obtained through deer population reduction measures implemented around the initial detection in GHA 22. The department is still awaiting some CWD results from the testing labs. Of the results received to date, two additional mule deer have screened positive for CWD.

On December 10, 2021, as part of routine surveillance, Manitoba confirmed a second mule deer infected with CWD was detected in southwest Manitoba 10-km north of the U.S. border and 30-km east of the Saskatchewan border, in GHA 28. On December 21st, the department was advised that a third and fourth mule deer harvested within the initial CWD containment zone west of Lake of the Prairies had both screened positive for CWD, with confirmatory testing ongoing as of December 23. Respective hunters have been advised of the presumptive positive test results and others will be notified if additional positive results are detected.

II. LOCAL COMMUNITY DEER HUNTING OPPORTUNITY

Between November 26 – December 12, a permit-based local community deer hunting opportunity was offered within the closed temporary containment area surrounding the initial CWD finding west of Lake of the Prairies. This controlled hunting opportunity was for local landowners, their families, and local Indigenous communities that actively hunt in the area. This opportunity allowed for some deer harvest in the area that contributed CWD test samples while controlling the movement of carcasses and high-risk material to other areas of the province.

A total of 156 white-tailed deer kill permits for up to 468 animals and 152 mule deer kill permits for up to 456 animals were distributed over the course of the opportunity, with each permit granting the authority to harvest up to three deer. During the 18 days this opportunity was

offered, hunters brought in 113 white-tailed deer and 19 mule deer with CWD test samples collected from all 132 deer. While not all test results have been received as of December 23, two mule deer harvested as part of this management action have screened positive for CWD. Secondary testing is ongoing to confirm the CWD findings. Both hunters have been informed of CWD findings and the department will be collecting the meat for proper disposal.

III. LOCALIZED AERIAL DEER DEPOPULATION

Based on the current understanding of CWD, and best management actions supported by science, experts and the experience of other jurisdictions, the department took steps to significantly reduce local deer populations in the immediate area around the CWD finding. Intensive and timely deer reduction measures have been shown as the most effective measure to control CWD by reducing animal-to-animal transmission, as well as transmission through environmental contamination.

The localized aerial deer depopulation took place between December 13 and 17 within a 10-km radius from the initial CWD finding on Crown land and private land where the department was granted permission to access (totalling approximately 75% of the target area). Work was completed by air by experienced, certified and skilled aerial marksmen, and meat deemed suitable for human consumption was salvaged for distribution once it tests negative for CWD. High-risk material was contained on the processing site and disposed of in a landfill approved to accept this type of material, where it was buried and capped.

During this targeted control program, a total of 503 deer were removed and 426 deer were suitable to provide samples for CWD testing (420 white-tailed deer and 6 mule deer). Results of CWD testing are still being confirmed at the lab. As of December 23, no deer collected as part of this management action have tested positive for CWD. Meat was salvaged from approximately 67% of testable animals, with numbers being finalized as CWD test results come back.

IV. NEXT STEPS

Information gathered from CWD testing will be used to determine what future wildlife management measures will be required. As we move forward, we will continue to maintain ongoing dialogue with wildlife management partners within Saskatchewan, Alberta, and other jurisdictions.

Continued cooperation with local landowners, Indigenous communities, licenced hunters and key stakeholders will be critical in ongoing management, detection and surveillance of CWD. Manitoba will continue to provide CWD-related information and updates and will communicate as further opportunities to work together again in the future will be made available as we strive to protect Manitoba's cervid population for future generations.