

Meeting Date: January 27, 2022

Agenda Item No. 8

Agenda Item: Chronic Wasting Disease Update

Bureau Chief Approval: JR

Prepared by: Rick Ward, State Wildlife Manager

Background:

In November 2021 chronic wasting disease (CWD) was confirmed in two hunter-harvested mule deer bucks taken during October in the Slate Creek drainage in Unit 14. These were the first confirmed positive tests for CWD in Idaho. Beginning November 19, 2021, IDFG staff conducted supplementary check stations to collect additional samples for testing from deer and elk harvested during on-going hunts in Unit 14 and surrounding units. The Commission approved a temporary CWD management zone consisting of Units 14 and 15 on November 22 and authorized IDFG to implement emergency surveillance hunts to collect additional samples from deer, consistent with IDFG's *2021 Strategy for Chronic Wasting Disease*.

IDFG staff identified a CWD surveillance area as the geographic area where additional CWD samples were to be collected to allow estimation of CWD prevalence levels and distribution in both mule deer and white-tailed deer. The CWD surveillance area consists of all of units 14 and 15 and portions of units 11A, 13, 18, and 23. The CWD surveillance area is divided into three sampling areas: 1) all of Unit 14; 2) all of Unit 15 and a portion of Unit 11A; 3) portions of Units 13, 18, and 23. Staff targeted 200 CWD samples per sample area for each deer species as the total needed to estimate the CWD prevalence rate and geographic distribution with a high level of precision and confidence. CWD samples for both mule deer and white-tailed deer were sought for the Unit 14 and Unit 13/18/23 sample areas, while the Unit 15/11A sample area was designed to focus on collection on only white-tailed deer samples. In total, our goal was to collect 1,000 deer samples for testing across the CWD surveillance zone.

Our CWD sampling period begins July 1 each year, and samples collected over the 12-month sampling period are counted toward the total sample need. Approximately 260 deer samples were collected from the surveillance area by early December. To collect the additional samples needed to meet the identified target of 1,000 and to facilitate sample collection across the surveillance area, IDFG offered 1,527 deer tags, stratified by area, deer species, antlered and antlerless, and land ownership (private land-only and public land-only). Hunts opened December 7, 2021 and closed on December 19/20, 2021. Successful hunters were required to follow specific steps to facilitate sample collection and to minimize the potential spread of CWD-positive animal parts. Staff conducted two hunter check stations daily for sample collection during the entire hunt period.

In December 2021, CWD was confirmed in two white-tailed deer bucks, both from the Slate Creek drainage in Unit 14. One deer was harvested by a general-season hunter during November, while the other was observed in late November exhibiting unusual behavior and later died on private property. The landowner brought the carcass to an IDFG check station.

As of January 7, 2022, 524 samples have been collected for CWD testing from deer across the surveillance area:

- 4 positive samples (2 mule deer, 2 white-tailed deer)
- 448 negative samples
- 72 pending samples

Staff will present current CWD data and information, including CWD prevalence estimates by deer species for the surveillance area.

Staff will also present post-detection monitoring and management considerations identified in IDFG's *2021 Strategy for Chronic Wasting Disease* and discuss next steps in CWD data gathering and management, including:

- Deer population and movement monitoring in the CWD management zone
- Potential hunting season frameworks within the CWD management zone and surveillance area
- Public outreach
- Agency partners and stakeholder involvement

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Monitoring and management of chronic wasting disease is described in the *Idaho Department of Fish and Game 2021 Strategy for Chronic Wasting Disease*.

Carcass import into Idaho or import of any part of a wild deer, elk, or moose from another state, province of Canada, or country with any documented case of CWD is prohibited with specific exceptions (IDAPA 13.1.10). Carcass transport or transport of any part of a wild deer, elk, or moose out of a CWD management zone designated by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission to any part of the state not designated a CWD management zone is prohibited (IDAPA 13.1.10). Purposeful supplemental feeding of deer and elk within any CWD management zone designated by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission is prohibited, except supplemental or emergency feeding conducted by or authorized by IDFG (IDAPA 13.01.18). The use of natural cervid urine for hunting big game is prohibited (IDAPA 13.01.17).

Public Involvement Process:

The Department has engaged the public with outreach on CWD at check stations and through news releases and social media posts for many years, including on the restrictions on transportation of carcass parts from CWD positive states adopted in recent years. Intensive outreach was conducted to share the information regarding confirmation of Idaho's first positive cases of CWD and to engage hunters to assist the Department in collecting additional samples for testing in the CWD surveillance area following the positive test results. The public is invested and keenly interested in the results of our CWD testing efforts and will have opportunities to provide input on the Department's future management direction.

Justification:

This agenda item is for Commission information on the status of chronic wasting disease in Idaho.

Staff Recommendation:

None. This agenda item is for Commission information only at this time.

Action Requested:

No action is requested at this time.