



## Deer Associates eNews

News from the Deer Research Program at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute

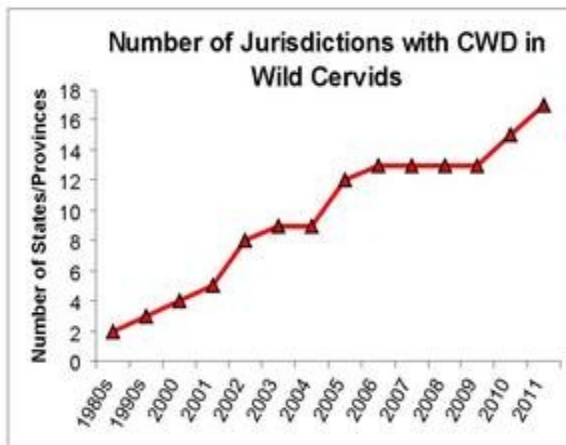


April 2011

### Remember CWD?

by David Hewitt

It has been nearly a decade since 2002 when the deer management world was turned upside down because chronic wasting disease (CWD) was being detected in a new location seemingly every month. Concern about eating infected animals kept people from hunting and the future of deer herds and deer management seemed uncertain. Since that time, CWD has fallen out of the news in Texas and is no longer on most people's minds. Agency and public responses to CWD have changed. Does this mean CWD is no longer a concern? The steadily growing list of states dealing with CWD suggests otherwise.



Chronic wasting disease was first described during the late 1960s in captive mule deer in Colorado and was recognized as a type of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy in 1978. The disease was first identified in wild mule deer in the 1980s in Colorado and Wyoming, and was found in elk and deer in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Saskatchewan during 1999–2001.

A crisis mentality erupted in 2002 when six states/provinces, including Wisconsin, were added to the list of jurisdictions with CWD. The disease seemed out of control. Wisconsin decided on a bold response to CWD by trying to eradicate white-tailed deer from the infected area or to at least dramatically reduce deer populations. This approach was controversial and ultimately deemed unfeasible. The next year the federal government became involved with funding and coordination efforts.

During the last five years public concern over CWD and management approaches taken by state agencies have been tempered. Actions by wildlife agencies in states where CWD has been found have focused on monitoring the disease's spread through surveillance and trying to reduce the rate of spread by 1) regulating transport of deer, 2) reducing the likelihood of infected materials (e.g. bones from harvested animals) being deposited in a CWD-free area, and 3) limiting or eliminating baiting and feeding. Meanwhile the number of states known to have CWD in wild deer or elk populations continues to grow.

What does this story mean for deer management in Texas? Concern about CWD seems unfounded for managers in Texas because the disease has not been detected in the state, despite testing over 30,000 deer. However, the consequences of introducing CWD onto your property are profound. Once the disease develops in an animal, it is 100% fatal. Even scarier, once CWD is established there is no known way to eradicate it. Removing deer for over a year and sterilizing the soil with chlorine does not work. Therefore, if CWD is found, deer management on that property, and neighboring properties, will change forever. Just as toothpaste cannot be put back into the tube, there will be no going back to pre-CWD days. Given the consequences, the following precautions are common sense:

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- If you hunt in an area of North America where CWD is known to occur, leave all bones and nervous system tissue possible at the kill site. Do not dispose of bones that you bring home in a place where they are accessible to deer. Such waste should be buried or sent to an appropriate landfill.

- Consider the risk of introducing disease before embarking on a management program involving release of deer to your property. Movement of deer native to Texas under the TTT program is currently low risk, especially given Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) testing requirements. However, the history of the source herd should be checked; disease risks increase if deer from outside the area have been released into the source population.

- Producers with captive deer herds should be exceedingly careful about the source of animals they bring into their herds. The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and TPWD administer programs that provide verification of a deer herd's CWD status. Inquire if herds are Movement Qualified through TPWD or enrolled in a Monitored Herd Program through the TAHC.

- Landowners seeking to release deer from a captive facility, or to temporarily use a deer in a breeding program, should vet sources of deer. Seek proof of the herd's CWD status relative to TPWD or TAHC monitoring programs.

For more information about CWD, visit the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance at <http://www.cwd-info.org>.

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Image courtesy of Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance

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