



Deer Associates eNews

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



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History of the Cattle Fever Tick

by Chase Currie

If you have been in the livestock business in south Texas for an extended period of time, you are probably aware of the infamous Cattle Fever Ticks and the headaches their presence may bring. Cattle Fever Ticks were first introduced into the U.S. by Spanish colonists on horses and cattle in the early 1700s. But it wasn't until the late 1800s that the livestock industry began to feel their burden. At this time movements of southern cattle into the northern states became prohibited. The prohibition was due to the fact that transportation of southern cattle into northern states had resulted in the death of northern cattle along the roads and pastures in which southern cattle had traveled. The same held true for northern cattle transported to southern states. Once in the south, the northern cattle contracted what was later termed 'Texas fever' or 'cattle fever', which ultimately resulted in the death of the entire herd. The disease was identified at the time to be the most important barrier to an expanding cattle industry. Direct and indirect costs were estimated at \$130 million/year.



Eradication efforts were originally started by cattle producers themselves, followed in 1884 by the U.S. Congress' establishment of the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI). The primary goal of the BAI was to determine the extent of cattle fever tick populations in the U.S. and develop eradication techniques. Along with the help of scientists, the BAI developed a dipping and pasture rotation system, which later became the most widely accepted method for treating large herds of cattle. This method is still used today.

The BAI then established a federal quarantine in 1889 that stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific encompassing 15 states primarily in the southeastern U.S. In 1906, when the Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program (CFTEP) was established, wildlife were not considered hosts. But, as eradication efforts continued with little success, white-tailed deer became the central issue of controversy, particularly in the southeastern U.S. In Florida, eradication efforts were successful until the campaign reached pastures next to a game preserve. Hunter harvested deer on the game preserve were infested with ticks and the decision was unanimous; kill every deer possible within the region. When the smoke cleared in 1945, 20,000 deer in over 6 counties laid dead. Deer were also depopulated at similar intensities in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands for fear they were the primary cause of unsuccessful eradication.

In the late 1940s, the war between cattle fever ticks and livestock producers was over. Cattle fever ticks were officially declared eradicated from the U.S. with the exception of a permanent quarantine zone along the Texas-Mexico border extending from Del Rio to Brownsville. This 'buffer zone' ranges from 200 yards to 6 miles wide and exists because tick-infested livestock and wildlife from Mexico continue to spill over into Texas.

In recent years, studies have indicated white-tailed deer are a suitable host for cattle fever ticks. Furthermore, evidence has already shown that the ability of deer to serve as hosts can have a negative impact on eradication efforts for cattle fever ticks, thus techniques for treating wildlife, specifically deer, are needed. In March 2010, scientists at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, in collaboration with the USDA-APHIS



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Student Highlight



Brandi Crider
Master of Science Candidate
Thesis: *The Effects of White-tailed Deer Population Density and Supplemental Feeding on Vegetation Dynamics*

[Click Here to read Brandi's Bio and Thesis Information](#)

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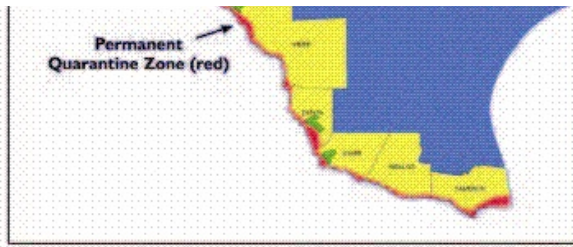


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David G. Hewitt

cooperation with the USDA-ARS, initiated a study to determine the role of white-tailed deer in maintaining cattle fever ticks along the Texas-Mexico border. The purpose of this research is to evaluate current techniques used to treat deer on a large scale and determine the extent of deer movements relative to quarantined pastures. Results will help increase the efficiency of eradication efforts for cattle fever ticks.



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