
Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance and Detection Response Plan for Cervids in Florida



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Implementing Partners:

**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Captive Cervid Technical Assistance Group
Deer Management Technical Assistance Group**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is responsible for managing the state's fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and benefit of people. Of the species managed by the agency, white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) is the most sought-after game in Florida. Florida's estimated 187,000 deer hunters average approximately 4 million days in the field annually, while contributing to the nearly \$715 million in expenditures generated by the hunting industry as a whole.

Florida has a strong and active captive cervid industry including game farms and hunting preserves. These facilities are located throughout the state, and they are an important economic presence in many rural areas that supports local communities through significant expenditures as well as promoting hunting.

In addition to monitoring and managing cervid populations, the FWC manages white-tailed deer hunting opportunities on more than 130 wildlife management areas throughout the state and works with private landowners to promote habitat management and white-tailed deer management practices to benefit both deer herds and people. The FWC also monitors cervids for diseases that could have a significant impact on this valuable wildlife resource. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is believed to be the greatest disease risk to cervids in Florida and throughout the United States because of its high fatality rate, persistence in the environment once an area is contaminated, and the current lack of knowledge about prion diseases in general.

In an effort to minimize the spread of CWD, the FWC developed regulations to prohibit importation of live cervids into the state and to only allow the importation of deboned meat, skins, clean skullcaps and antlers, and finished mounts from cervid carcasses from states with documented cases of CWD. Additionally, the FWC annually obtains samples from free-ranging cervids for CWD testing. Since 2002, over 9,000 samples tested resulted in no confirmed positives.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) is responsible for enforcing animal health regulations in Florida and protecting the state from animal pests and diseases to prevent major economic and public health consequences. Owners of captive cervid facilities are permitted by FWC to be in possession of cervids, and FDACS is responsible for preventing the spread of disease in captive cervids. Currently, it is not known whether CWD can infect humans or livestock, and there have been no documented cases of CWD affecting either.

Should CWD be found in Florida, a well-coordinated and timely response is vital to minimize the spread of the disease. FWC, FDACS and the captive cervid industry would have significant responsibilities in responding to this disease. This CWD Surveillance and Response Plan is intended to guide both agencies and ensure that, if CWD is detected, key stakeholders in the captive cervid industry and the hunting community are fully informed and prepared to engage constructively.

