

AGRICULTURE LIAISON ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT
OCTOBER 23, 2023

PRESENT: Kerry Coleman, Chair Larry Campbell Dave Ferguson Rick Moore Paul Mussell

ABSENT: Mike Bohm Tony Jackson Larry Miehls John Williamson Joe Wilson

STAFF: Matt Robbins, Liaison Mark Ryckman

GUESTS: Mike Evers Stu Paterson Paul Prowse

Kerry Coleman began the meeting at 7:00 pm by Zoom.

1. Introductions

2. CWD Update – Matt provided an update on CWD, primarily on MNRF monitoring

Matt provided a summary of the 2022 monitoring:

- Testing occurred in three areas in Ontario:
 - Ten wildlife management units (WMUs) between Sarnia, Woodstock, and London (WMUs 90B, 91A, 91B, 92A, 92B, 92C, 92D, 93A, 93B, and 93C),
 - Eleven WMUs around the Peterborough, Toronto, Barrie area (WMUs 72A, 72B, 73, 77A, 77B, 77C, 78A, 78B, 78C, 78D, and 78E)
 - Four WMUs around the eastern boundaries of Algonquin Park (WMUs 48, 55B, 58 and 59)
- A total of 646 white-tailed deer samples were collected and tested.
 - Additional 14 cervids (moose and deer) with abnormal behaviour or appearance were tested from across the province.
 - CWD was not detected in any samples.
- Since the CWD surveillance program began in 2002, over 14,843 samples have been tested.
- Based on the ministry's CWD risk model, Ontario's 2023 CWD surveillance will occur in:
 - Northwestern Ontario in WMUs 9B, 10 and 11A
 - Central Ontario in WMUs 50, 51, 54, 55A and 57
 - Southwestern Ontario in WMUs 90B, 91A, 91B, 92A, 92B, 92C, 92D, 93A, 93B and 93C
- Committee members would like information for submitting deer heads for sampling. Matthew will follow up.

There is ongoing concern in the USA where CWD has been found in more than 26 states.

An ad hoc committee of experts appointed by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine is conducting a review of CWD and will draw conclusions about the state of knowledge regarding:

- The infectious dose of CWD and different modes of disease transmission among cervids;
- The means of geographic spread through cervid dispersal, scavenger activity, and human actions;
- The effectiveness of interventions to reduce transmission and/or geographic spread of the disease; and
- The population-level and economic impacts of CWD and the effectiveness of different interventions to reduce those impacts.

3. Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group Update – Matt

- Much of the discussion was on HPAI (avian influenza) and the problem of feral cats/free roaming cats.
- The primary issue associated with cats is their impact on wildlife numbers.
- Contentious issue.

4. Agriculture Wildlife Conflict – Larry

- Tony Jackson attended this meeting. The main discussion focused on drafting a new terms of reference for this group.

5. HPAI – Matt

- Significant drop this year in sick/dead birds.
- CWS did testing on wild birds throughout the year.
- High antibody rates in mallards and geese in southern Ontario, with low active shedding.
- Have been able to sample eggs of infected birds and found that antibodies are being passed on, which is good news.
- Will be supplying blood strips to hunters in the future for more efficient testing.
- There has been evidence of mammals contracting the disease and transferring it back to scavenging birds when they die.

6. Wild Boar Farming – Matt

- In 2021, the MNRF released “Ontario’s Strategy to Address the Threat of Wild Pigs” and made amendments to the Invading Species Act, 2015, to designate pigs (*Sus scrofa*) as a restricted species and to prohibit the hunting of wild pigs.
- Made it illegal to import, possess, transport, propagate, lease, trade, buy, and sell Eurasian wild boar and their hybrids in the province as of January 1, 2022; however, wild boar owners were eligible for an exemption for up to two years.
- Although the MNRF has not released an update on the subject, the two-year period initially outlined will come to an end this coming January 1, 2024.
- MNRF has been very responsive to wild pig reports. To date, there are no known established wild pig populations in Ontario.

A note by Kerry: In the USA, wild hogs are also known as feral hogs, wild or feral pigs, razorbacks, or wild boars. Wild hogs may number 9 million in the US and have been spotted in 40 states. The problem is especially bad in Texas where they have caused millions of dollars of losses to agriculture crops, as well as environmental challenges. Intensive hunting, even from helicopters with machine guns (imagine this in Canada) hasn’t been effective. A researcher in Texas has been researching the use of baits laced with warfarin to kill wild hogs. “If the landowner follows a very specific application protocol, actually teaches the pigs how to feed out of a hog-specific feeder and integrates a nontoxic bait over several weeks before they ever introduce a hot bait, the product does kill the pigs effectively,” said Mike Bodenchuk, the director of Texas Wildlife Services. Apparently, warfarin breaks down quickly in the carcasses of dead animals and was not considered lethal to scavengers. There was concern about bears accessing the specialized feeders.

7. Roundtable Update

Larry – seeing far fewer crows and blue jays in his area. Not sure why. Possibly West Nile, HPAI or increased development in surrounding area.

David – concerned about high deer numbers on his property and financial losses. There are lots of hunters, but everyone appears to be targeting bucks. He would like to see changes that will encourage more does to be harvested. It is difficult to change the primary draw system for antlerless validation tags, but additional deer tags can be antlerless specific. This concern will be taken to the Big Game Advisory Committee.

Kerry – asked members to think about possible future guest speakers.

Respectfully submitted,

Kerry Coleman
Chair