

PRIORITIES FOR THE 2021 FEDERAL ELECTION

Chronic Wasting Disease

Opportunity

Prevent the spread and reduce the risk of chronic wasting disease (CWD) to Canada's cervids (deer, moose, elk, and caribou), the public, and the economy.

Responsibility

Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Network of Centres of Excellence (NCE), Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC)

Achievability

CWD is one of the greatest threats to wildlife in North America and has the potential for cultural, economic and human health impacts. Fortunately, the pathways through which this disease has and will continue to spread are well understood and can be effectively addressed through improved legislation and enforcement. Where gaps in our knowledge exist, Canada's world-leading scientific community has the expertise to obtain answers, if their research receives the appropriate financial support.

Background

- Chronic wasting disease is a highly infectious, incurable, and fatal disease that affects members of the cervid family. CWD has been detected in three Canadian provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Quebec), 26 American states, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and South Korea.
- While some of the spread of CWD can be attributed to natural animal movements, human activity has been responsible for the majority of the disease's spread. The transport of hunter-harvested carcasses from CWD-positive areas has the potential to spread CWD. The cervid farming industry has repeatedly moved infectious but asymptomatic animals, infecting new farms and subsequently spreading CWD to wildlife.
- CWD is bad for cervids: Research has conclusively demonstrated population-level impacts in mule deer, elk, and white-tailed deer. Even successful containment involves the depopulation (killing) of the local deer population. This has serious implications for biodiversity and species at risk such as caribou.
- CWD is bad for the economy: The detection of a single case of mad cow disease (which is related to CWD) in Alberta resulted in multiple countries banning the import of Canadian beef and cost our economy billions of dollars. While bans targeted at mad cow specifically limited the importation of beef, similar bans targeted at CWD could encompass a much wider range of agricultural products. In addition to products from cervid farms, trade restrictions could include plant-based products as CWD can contaminate plants.
- CWD is bad for people: CWD could lead to lower participation rates in activities such as hunting, tourism, and wildlife viewing due to declining health and abundance of cervids and the high degree of uncertainty and misinformation around the disease. Declining cervid populations threaten the cultural identity and food security of many Indigenous peoples and in this way, CWD would compromise Canada's ability to meet their fiduciary obligation. Finally, CWD has the potential to impact human health. While there is currently no direct scientific evidence that CWD can affect humans, new research has suggested the potential for non-human primates to contract CWD through the consumption of CWD-positive meat. Furthermore, there is no scientific

basis for human immunity to CWD and prion diseases have been shown to cross species barriers in the past with mad cow disease being the best-known example.

Proposed Solutions

- CFIA
 - Phase out cervid farms with compensation for producers and/or transition operations to acceptable alternatives.
 - Make enrolment in the Chronic Wasting Disease Herd Certification Program mandatory.
 - Add CWD to the CFIA Cervid Movement Permit in addition to bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis.
 - In collaboration with CBSA, create federal regulation on the importation of live captive cervids and hunter-harvested cervid carcasses specifically related to CWD.
 - Implement mandatory testing of all on-farm deaths and all farmed cervids sent to slaughter at no cost to the farmer.
 - Implement mandatory tagging, fencing, and biosecurity requirements for all cervid farms.
 - Ensure that all CWD-positive farms are depopulated and not permitted to restock with cervids.
 - End the practice of allowing cervids from CWD-infected farms to be “destroyed via slaughter” due to the risk this presents of allowing CWD to enter the human food chain.
 - Ban the use of attractants made from deer parts or products.
 - Ensure that trace-ins and trace-outs from CWD-positive farms include all products that may carry prions, including urine, gland secretions, semen, and velvet.
 - Prove the safety of current practices related to deer farming to allow public confidence that CWD is being kept out of our wildlife populations and food chain.
 - Communicate on CWD at a level necessary to engage and educate the public so they understand the importance of this issue and can avoid exposure to CWD.
- PHAC
 - Continue to fund the Canadian Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Surveillance System and ensure that the results of testing are communicated and used to support decision-making.
- NEC/CIHR/NSERC
 - Fund research on topics crucial to our understanding of CWD such as the development of rapid in-field diagnostic tests, the impact of CWD on wild cervids, CWD strains, the possible presentation of CWD in humans, and research on animal models to determine the risk of human exposure.
 - Explore opportunities for jointly-funded CWD-related research across different levels of government.

Benefits

As Canadians, we draw immeasurable benefits from healthy populations of deer, moose, elk, and caribou. They are important components of our cultural heritage and are a focal point of many social activities. Hunting and wildlife-related industries contribute billions of dollars annually to our economy. Finally, cervids are an important part of Canada’s biodiversity and fulfill key roles in many of Canada’s most iconic ecosystems.

Chronic wasting disease has the potential to put all of this in jeopardy, in addition to the spectre of economic impacts in the billions of dollars as countries put in place trade barriers to Canada’s agricultural exports.

This can be avoided by investing in research, increasing enforceability at our borders, and properly regulating a small and declining cervid industry.