



**Assembly of First Nations
National Climate Gathering**

March 3-4, 2020

**Rassemblement national sur le climat
de l'Assemblée des Premières Nations**

Les 3 et 4 mars 2020

Chronic Wasting Disease

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Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

- CWD is a degenerative neurological prion disease that is invariably fatal to all cervids including Deer, Moose, Elk, and Caribou.
- It is highly contagious and spreads through contact with infected bodily fluids/tissues as well as contaminated soil/surfaces.
- Research has demonstrated that there is a possibility for CWD to spread to Humans.



Chronic Wasting Disease

- CWD is prion disease similar to “Mad Cow” disease but is much harder to manage.
- CWD is extremely resilient and is known to persist in soil and on surfaces at infectious levels for 10+ years.
- The prions have been observed to uptake through the roots of plants growing in contaminated soil.
- They are resistant to disinfectants, radiation, freezing, and incineration, which makes decontamination incredibly difficult if not impossible.



CWD Symptoms

- Animals that are infected with CWD may live and spread the disease for several years without displaying any clinical symptoms.
- Clinical symptoms include: excessive salivation, weight loss, excessive thirst, excessive urination, teeth grinding, drooping ears, lowered head, loss of appetite, decreased interaction with other animals, and repetitive walking in set patterns
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67v1hkt-T3E>
- (1:32-2:15)

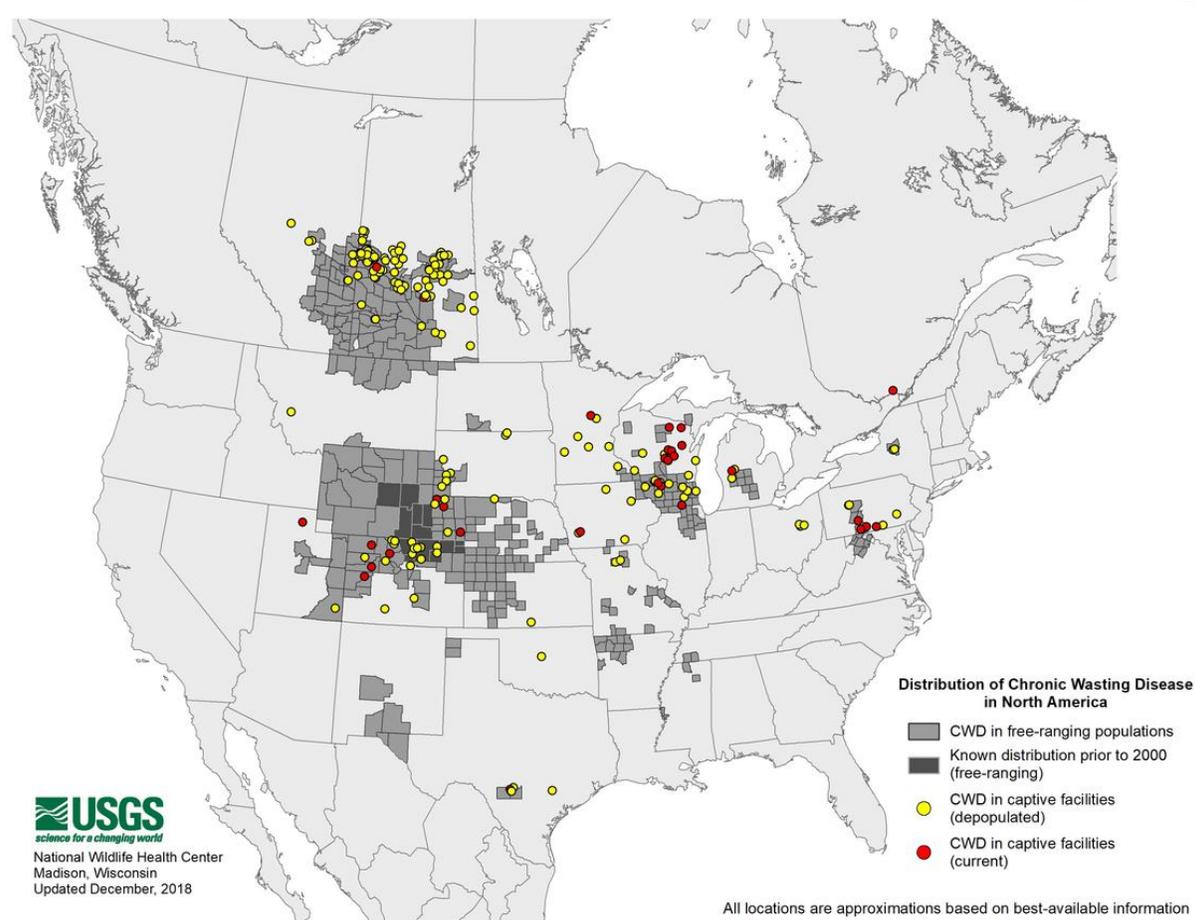


CWD Testing

- Many of the symptoms for CWD are similar to other diseases or conditions so cannot be relied on for diagnosis.
- The only way to confirm CWD is to test the brain, lymph node, and or tonsils of an animal post mortem.
- Testing is predominantly done by the provincial or territorial government after heads have been submitted, but results may take as long as a month to be confirmed.



CWD Infected Regions



All locations are approximations based on best-available information

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CWD Spread and Game Farms

- Domestication of wild animals has resulted in the creation of many modern diseases including Mad Cow and now CWD.
- Current regulations for game farms have enabled infected animals to be transported to new facilities where they spread the disease.
- Interactions at fences with wild herds has spread it into the broader environment.



CWD Spread in the Environment

CWD can be introduced and spread throughout the environment in a number of ways:

- Hunters using urine as bait may introduce the disease
- Location of infected carcasses can become concentrated sources of CWD prions
- Predators can carry the prions to new locations after hunting an infected animal
- Contaminated soil and surfaces can spread CWD to animals in the future



CWD Spread and Climate Change

- As climate change continues to affect natural habitat, many species are moving further north.
- This includes deer, moose, and elk populations that are potentially infected with CWD.
- As they move north, there is an increased risk that they will come in contact with caribou, or infect caribou habitat and subsequently caribou herds.



Combatting CWD Spread - Humic Acids

- A recent study from the University of Alberta has demonstrated the ability of natural acids – such as humic acids - found in some soil types to naturally degrade the CWD prion, however this alone has not stopped the spread of the disease.
- Boreal forest and Tundra soils have some of the lowest humic acid levels and therefore may be at a higher risk of contamination.



CWD Infection in Humans

- To date there have been no confirmed cases of CWD in humans.
- Regardless, studies involving closely related non-human primates have resulted in disease transfer through the consumption of infected meats.
- The World Health Organization, Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, First Nations Inuit Health Branch, and Environment and Climate Change Canada all recommend that any CWD infected animals not be consumed or used for any purpose.



Environmental/Wildlife Impacts

- To date, testing remains largely voluntary, which is problematic due to the resulting lack of information on true infection rates.
- CWD's effects on Caribou are especially devastating due to their social nature (Norway).
- Herd populations for numerous species are at risk of being decimated.



Health Impacts

- The prolonged testing of carcasses for CWD (up to one month for results), can lead to the inadvertent consumption of infected meats which poses a significant threat.
- Access to testing for First Nations and remote communities can be extremely difficult for a variety of reasons.
- The total number of infected animals consumed by humans annually is estimated to be between 7,000-15,000.



Economic Impacts

- After the BSE (Mad Cow) outbreak in the UK, the international response to ban imports of potentially contaminated cattle, and other associated products resulted in significant economic impacts.
- In the case of CWD, similar responses could have serious impacts on the Agricultural and the Wildlife Industry
- Norway has already put a trade ban on wheat and hay coming from provinces confirmed to have CWD.



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Impacts on First Nations

- Species/Habitat
- Food Security/Sovereignty
- Human Health and Wellness
- Socio-Cultural
- Economic
- Inherent/Treaty Rights

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Government Response

- Jurisdictional challenges exist around game farms, wildlife health, and reportable diseases
- Federal departments have begun to work more collaboratively (CFIA, PHAC, FNIHB, ECCC)
- Provincial and Territorial governments have had varied responses
- On-going collaborative efforts are required



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Government Response

- ECCC is leading a push to create a Pan-Canadian Approach to Wildlife Health
<http://www.cwhc-rccsf.ca/>
- The goal of such an approach is to address jurisdictional gaps, and build capacity to address wildlife health.
- This proposed approach remains in its early stages and will ultimately require adequate resourcing and Ministerial approval.

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AFN Mandate(s)

- Chiefs-in-Assembly have passed a number of recent resolutions providing a mandate for the AFN's cross sectoral involvement in work on CWD, calling for collaborative work with First Nations', federal, provincial and territorial governments as well as NGO's to mitigate, and to the extent possible, prevent the potential impacts of the disease.
- #58/2018 - First Nations Response to Chronic Wasting Disease
- #13/2017 – Chronic Wasting Disease
- #70/2010 – First Nation Controlled Awareness, Training & Surveillance Program for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)



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Questions?

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Discussion

- How can we increase awareness about CWD?
- Who needs to be involved in the dialogue?
- What should an action plan to confront CWD include?

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