

Meeting Minutes: Farmed Cervid Advisory Task Force

Date: March 19, 2019
Minutes prepared by: Mackenzie Reberg
Location: Buffalo Community Center, Buffalo, MN

Member Attendance

- Mary Donahue, USDA Veterinary Services
- Linda Glaser, Board of Animal Health
- Brenda Hartkopf, Minnesota Elk Breeders Association
- Jim Byrne, Minnesota Elk Breeders Association, Alternate
- Brooks Johnson, Farmed Cervid Producer At Large
- Scott Josephson, Cervid Veterinarian
- Daryl Simon, Non-Native Species Cervid Producer
- Don Myren, Board of Animal Health
- Mackenzie Reberg, Board of Animal Health
- Glen Zearth, Cervid Veterinarian
- Leo Windschitl, Minnesota Deer Farmers Association

Non-Member Attendance

- Elaine Hanson, Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Alliance
- Kevin Spiegel, University of Georgia Veterinary Student

Members not in Attendance

- Mark Luedtke, Minnesota Elk Breeders Association
- Denny Niess, Farmed Cervid hunting premises
- Gary Olson, Minnesota Deer Farmers Association

Review of Minutes from 12.4.18

Dr. Linda Glaser welcomed the group to the meeting and asked for introductions. Upon review of the previous meeting minutes, a member asked if the Board had received communication from DNR on their review of the exclusionary fencing guidelines as adopted by the task force. Dr. Glaser reported that she has not received any input on these guidelines.

A member asked if the Board had decided whether or not they would notify cervid producers if DNR requested information on cervid herds. Dr. Glaser responded that the Board would likely not be notifying producers that DNR has

requested herd information for an ongoing DNR investigation. A member expressed concern that DNR may be requesting cervid herd information without an active investigation in to the herd.

USDA Update - Dr. Mary Donahue

Dr. Mary Donahue gave a brief update indicating that the updated USDA Farmed Cervidae Program standards still have not been released, but expects they will be soon.

Later in the meeting, Dr. Donahue discussed using RAMALT (Rectal-Anal Mucosal Associated Lymphoid Tissue) testing in cervids following a question from a member on the topic of live animal testing. USDA program standards allow RAMALT testing only in CWD trace out white-tailed deer herds. The test can only be used in Codon 96 GG animals. The animals must test negative on RAMALT to two tests collected six months apart to be removed from quarantine in less than 5 years.

BAH Update – Dr. Linda Glaser

Dr. Glaser discussed that federal indemnity for the CWD monitored herd in Crow Wing county had been requested, and that the USDA was allocated federal indemnity funds. The indemnity requests to depopulate CWD positive herds are being evaluated and prioritized by national cervid staff. If selected for indemnity, the Crow Wing producer will receive an offer of indemnity directly from USDA.

Dr. Glaser reviewed current legislation moving through the Minnesota House and Senate. Dr. Thompson has been the primary testifier on introduced legislation. The Board has been preparing fiscal notes to demonstrate costs, staffing, and time impacts for the State of Minnesota regarding the introduced legislation. A member asked which of the several introductions have been heard, passed through committees, and what the deadlines are for advancement of bills. Dr. Glaser discussed that HF229 is the major bill regarding farmed cervids in the House and went through the key pieces of the bill in detail with attendees. A similar complement SF1995 is

Commercial vs Non-commercial Herd Definition

The task force discussed the introduced definitions of a commercial versus non-commercial herd. The task force discussed that some herds may be difficult to classify, and that classifications can change over time.

Fencing

High tensile or exclusionary (preventing physical contact) fencing may become required fencing. The task force expressed concern for changes to the fencing requirements and the ability for additional fencing to prevent herds from infection with CWD. Members pointed out that herds in Wisconsin that have been double fenced for 5 or more years have still become CWD positive herds. Members also cited that Peter Larson from the University of Minnesota has testified at the legislature that double fencing may not limit CWD exposure as there are many alternative routes where CWD may be introduced to a farm. Another member expressed concern for the cost of bringing existing fences into compliance with these new regulations and asked what the timeline for compliance would be.

Dr. Glaser discussed that new language in HF229 indicates that a herd's registration may be cancelled if two or more escape events happen within a period of time. A member asked if, when a herd's registration was cancelled, the animals could still move to slaughter. Dr. Glaser responded that the Board would approve moving the animals to slaughter when a herd's registration is cancelled.

Redundant Gating

Dr. Glaser discussed the new proposed language on adding redundant gating systems to existing entrances to farmed cervid pens. The general consensus of the task force was that the redundant gating is a good idea to limit escapes, but there is concern about how much these redundant gates will cost producers, how the language will be interpreted by the Board, and that some farms may not be able to fully implement the requirement due to pen or fencing designs.

Identification Requirements

Dr. Glaser discussed that the timeline for tagging newborn cervids may be shortened by the legislature, down to 72 hours from birth, or by September 15. There is also added language to allow DNR to destroy untagged cervids not in compliance with the new identification requirements. Currently all newborns must be tagged by December 31 in the year of their birth. The task force indicated that on some farms, calving and fawning can extend in to September, and that on some farms, newborns cannot be caught within 72 hours of birth. The task force also questioned how these regulations would be enforced. The task force agrees that all young animals need to be identified, but prefers to leave the tagging timeline as is.

Dr. Glaser discussed the new physical inventory requirement indicating that all tags must be physically read and recorded, scanned by RFID reader, or photographed within a period of 30 days for the physical inventory.

Inspection

Dr. Glaser discussed the addition of Departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources to inspections as needed. The task force expressed many concerns over these additions including limiting the number of people entering their farm, allowing individuals unfamiliar with their operation on to the farm, and concern that DNR doesn't have the authority to come on to property unless laws regarding wild cervids have been violated.

Fees

Dr. Glaser presented a variety of fee changes that have been introduced by the legislature. The task force expressed concern over the large increase in fees that some producers will incur and what the collected funds are used for. Dr. Glaser explained that a per head fee in HF229 was designated for an indemnity fund for CWD positive herd depopulations. The remaining proposed fees are designated to the cervid inspection account. Dr. Glaser discussed that Wisconsin has enacted legislation for the state to pay indemnity to CWD positive herds in the event that federal funding is not available. The Wisconsin program is not funded by cervid producers or cervid fees, has no cap or sideboards.

Mandatory Surveillance / Herd Depopulation

Dr. Glaser read proposed language to eliminate white-tailed deer movement to other locations, prohibit new white-tailed deer herd registrations, and mandatory depopulation of herds infected with CWD. Several members expressed concern that these legislative changes were directed only at white-tailed deer, not all cervids in general. Additional concern about limiting interstate commerce by preventing white-tailed deer movement were raised by the task force. Dr. Glaser discussed that because the primary wild cervid in the state is white-tailed deer, farmed white-tailed deer are a larger concern to the public. Additional questions were raised by the task force regarding the imposition of a 5 year premises fallow period following a herd depopulation and whether or not these timelines were based on research. The task force continued to discuss soil types and the potential variation in CWD prions remaining infectious in different soils. A member discussed ongoing research in treating soils with humic acid to reduce infectious CWD prions on a landscape. Task force members discussed concern over the language that would require that CWD infected premises register the status on the property deed. Members generally agreed that this requirement should apply to locations where wild CWD positive deer have been found as well.

Dr. Glaser discussed the indemnity funding language, indicating that federal appraisals for depopulations are based on genetic quality and the market value for white-tailed deer. There is currently no calculator for elk, but USDA has some experience calculating elk indemnity value. Dr. Glaser also discussed the voluntary white-tailed deer buyout proposed in HF229. This portion of the bill would provide white-tailed deer owners opportunity to depopulate some or all of their white-tailed deer in exchange for state funds.

Additional Legislative Concerns

A task force member discussed HF 2321 which proposes to prohibit a person from buying or selling farmed Cervidae hunts for enjoyment, sport, or amusement. The member is concerned that this bill could limit cervid producers in their ability to sell animals to out of state hunting ranches or limit business opportunities in the State of Minnesota. The member also expressed concern that there was no CWD risk mitigation involved in this introduction, it is purely intended to limit cervid producers' business activity.

The task force unanimously favors legislation providing additional funding allocations to the University of Minnesota, the Board and DNR for CWD management in Minnesota. Task force members are in support of developing live animal CWD testing and exploring genetic resistance or variable susceptibility. A member expressed interest in learning more about research coming out of Case Western University looking at skin testing for CWD. The task force is in favor of working with the University to help develop sample libraries and live animal testing. A member discussed that national organizations, such as the Elk Research Foundation, receives federal funding on genetic resistance research for elk.

A member raised concerns that with all the different legislative introductions and misinformation regarding farmed cervids and CWD, that it is likely difficult for legislators to receive pertinent and reliable information to make decisions. The task force discussed that they would like changes to the farmed cervid statutes be based on science and apply to both wild and farmed cervids in Minnesota. Producer groups and lobbyists should create messages for legislators and provide education on additional aspects of CWD management that may be overlooked (taxidermy, carcass importation, etc). Dr. Donahue discussed that although waste streams for domestic taxidermy is not regulated by the state, USDA oversees and inspects exotic taxidermy. There are stringent protocols, permits, and regulation of the waste stream for these taxidermists.

DNR Update – Dr. Linda Glaser

Dr. Glaser summarized the DNR CWD response efforts in SE Minnesota and in Crow Wing County. USDA sharpshooters plan to finish harvesting deer in SE Minnesota at the end of March. Don Myren indicated that USDA sharpshooting in Crow Wing County began a few days ago.

The task force had many questions regarding DNR's response in Crow Wing County. The group discussed active (intentionally harvested) versus passive surveillance (found dead/opportunistic) for CWD. The group asked questions about the specifics of the Crow Wing county CWD positive deer including necropsy diagnoses and gross findings. Dr. Donahue discussed the necropsy report and indicated that she would see if the report could be given to the task force.

Dr. Glaser discussed updates on the SE Minnesota Deer Movement Study, giving updates from the DNR website. A task force member indicated that they would like DNR staff to discuss the study results with the task force if possible. Dr. Glaser discussed increasing the Board's definition of a CWD endemic area to all locations within 15 miles of a CWD positive wild deer, from 10 miles, based on data from the Movement Study showing that wild deer travel farther than initially thought.

A member asked about the proposed introduction of free-ranging elk in NE Minnesota and the potential risk to wild and farmed Minnesota cervids. The member also asked about free-ranging elk information from Wisconsin and raised

concern that if free-ranging elk are released in NE Minnesota, that their home ranges may include CWD endemic areas in Wisconsin, further increasing the risk of CWD to Minnesota cervids.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Glaser recommends that the task force begin creating a report to present to the Board at the conclusion of the task force. The task force agrees that the goal of establishing exclusionary fencing guidelines has been met. The second goal of keeping the farmed cervid program viable for producers may depend on the legislative changes. The task force is hopeful that scientific advancements in live animal testing, genetics, and environmental management will help keep farmed cervid producers in business.

The task force agrees to schedule the next meeting following the completion of the current legislative session, in June 2019. Goals for this meeting include discussing the report the task force will deliver to the Board, suggestions for the farmed cervid program, especially legislative recommendations for the future.

Date: June 25, 2019

Time: 1-4pm

Location: Buffalo Community Center

Agenda items:

- Board update – legislative, fencing, other
- MN Elk Breeders – update
- MN Deer Farmers – update
- Redundant gating minimum standards