

# Cornering CHRONIC WASTIA DISEASE

In case you missed the broadcast of the Deer Hunt 2011 TV special with Outdoor Wisconsin host Dan Small, you haven't missed your opportunity to view it. The complete broadcast can be viewed online at [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov). Search for Deer Hunt 2011.

# Wisconsin's CWD Response Plan aims for a healthy herd.

# WIC

Natasha Kassulke

**N**ASCAR driver Matt Kenseth has given the green light to a new campaign to stop the spread of chronic wasting disease in Wisconsin. "Hunt. Harvest. Help." Public service announcements featuring the famous #17 racer started airing in the state's CWD zone in mid-August, followed by billboards and a website: [KNOWCWD.COM](http://KNOWCWD.COM)

Why Kenseth to carry the message? Because this racing young gun also is pretty good with a hunting rifle. Kenseth, a Cambridge, Wis. native, is a deer hunter who knows a thing or two about teamwork.

"As a deer hunter I am concerned about CWD, but it's going to take more than one person to slow the spread," says Kenseth, the 2009 Daytona 500 winner, about the need for hunters and landowners to work together.

After a decade of CWD management in Wisconsin, it has become clear that controlling the disease in Wisconsin's free-ranging white-tailed deer will be extremely challenging and will require a human and financial resources commitment over an extended time, says Davin Lopez, DNR's former CWD coordinator.

"The Wisconsin DNR needs to start an aggressive CWD outreach plan to inform hunters, landowners and the general public, dispel old or false information about Wisconsin's efforts to manage CWD and compel stakeholders to take action," Lopez says.

As a result, the Department of Natu-

ral Resources has developed a response plan recognizing its public trust responsibility for managing wildlife and ensuring the health of wildlife populations in the state. The plan's overall goal is to minimize the area of Wisconsin where CWD occurs and the number of infected deer in the state.

The Department of Natural Resources would like hunters and landowners to become active partners by staying informed and continuing to "hunt, harvest and help."

**Hunt.** Continue enjoying the Wisconsin tradition of deer hunting.

**Harvest.** Harvest a deer for the quality meat and trophy that it provides.



MATTKENSETH.COM

**Help.** Donate a deer or extra venison to a local food pantry and help keep deer numbers at a level that promotes the health of the herd for years to come.

#### **A decade of discovery**

Chronic wasting disease was first detected in Wisconsin on February 28, 2002, in Mount Horeb. At that time, the Department of Natural Resources took an aggressive approach to drastically lower the deer herd in a radius around where the infected deer were harvested with the goal of eradicating the disease. But that approach failed, Lopez says, because the disease was later found to have already spread over a larger area.

Managing a disease in free-ranging wildlife populations is generally difficult, expensive and controversial, particularly when significant population reduction is a part of the plan. Controlling CWD in a

high density, free-ranging white-tailed deer population had not been previously attempted and there are no proven techniques for control of CWD in free-ranging populations. However, it is well established that lowering the densities of host species (in this case deer) can be effective in reducing the transmission and spread of communicable diseases.

Since 2002, we have learned much more about the disease including its distribution in Wisconsin and how it spreads. As a result, Wisconsin's management strategy has changed considerably and the Department of Natural Resources developed a new CWD response plan. The plan accepts an area of infection in the southern portion of the state and strives to limit CWD to that area, while simultaneously controlling its intensity and distribution. This goal indicates a shift from the state's original management approach.

CWD has the potential for significant, negative impacts on the future of deer and deer hunting wherever it exists. Therefore, decreasing the area of the state where the disease occurs is the responsible goal to pursue.

The agency also has learned much about people's views on CWD and management. Wildlife disease experts agree that without intervention CWD will spread further in Wisconsin. Therefore, managers need to find some balance between the social and biological issues of CWD to maximize the efficacy of their efforts.

The Department of Natural Resources spent about \$6 million annually on CWD management from 2002 through 2006. The funding came primarily from hunting license revenue along with some federal funding, mostly from the United States Department of Agriculture and the



Fawns of CWD-infected does are not born with the disease, but contract it from contact with infected deer or exposure to prions in the environment.

JERRY DAVIS

# Cornering CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE



Chronic wasting disease-affected deer show weight loss and changes in behavior.

DNR FILE



This 3-year-old doe shows signs of the disease before being shot by a DNR warden in Columbia County, August 2006.

DNR FILE



DNR wildlife staff work with hunters to collect samples for CWD testing from hunter-killed deer.

DNR FILE

Pittman-Robertson fund (supported by a federal tax on hunting equipment).

### Why everyone should care

CWD is a statewide issue, not just a southern Wisconsin issue, for the following reasons:

- Without appropriate management where CWD has been detected, the disease will spread to other areas of the state.
- Based on current knowledge of the dis-


ease, including information from western states where CWD likely has been for a longer period of time, CWD poses a significant threat to the Wisconsin deer herd's long-term health.

- Projections based on current Wisconsin CWD data suggest that CWD, if left unchecked, will ultimately reduce the number of deer available each year for hunter harvest.

- A healthy deer herd is important for hunting traditions. Wisconsin has nearly 700,000 deer hunters who have harvested an average of over 400,000 deer annually during the past decade.
- Deer hunting contributes more than 7 million days of recreation every year.
- A healthy deer herd is critical to the state's economy. Deer hunting annually generates more than \$500 million dollars in retail sales and over \$1 billion for the state's economy.

### Education and motivation

"Our aim is to educate hunters and landowners on the details of the DNR's CWD Response Plan, motivate hunters and landowners to support the plan, and move hunters and landowners to take an active role in helping the DNR with pre-

servicing a healthy whitetail herd and the rich hunting culture in Wisconsin," Lopez says. "We also intend to focus on informing lawmakers about the importance of an aggressive CWD management plan, and encourage them to provide more funding for the DNR's management efforts." 

*Natasha Kassulke is associate editor of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.*

## The KEY OBJECTIVES of this response plan are to:

- Prevent the spread of CWD to areas where the disease is not currently believed to be present
- Monitor for and respond to new areas of CWD infection
- Decrease CWD's geographic distribution and intensity
- Increase public understanding of CWD risks and participation in disease control efforts
- Address the needs of DNR's customers
- Improve the scientific information about CWD



To read the entire response plan, learn about deer donation stations in your area and find the latest news and research on CWD visit [KNOWCWD.COM](http://KNOWCWD.COM)

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal nervous system disease in white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose and elk. It belongs to the family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) or prion diseases. Though it shares features with other prion diseases, like mad cow disease in cattle and scrapie in sheep, it is a distinct disease known to only affect members of the deer family.

DONALD SAVOY