



Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Statement on Chronic Wasting Disease Etiology

Transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) are a family of diseases that have been documented in numerous mammalian species, including cattle, sheep, humans, and members of the deer family (Cervidae or cervids), among others. Decades of scientific research have been dedicated to understanding the cause and treatment of TSEs, including chronic wasting disease (CWD) of cervids. The consensus that has emerged from this research indicates that prions (misfolded proteins) are the causative agents of TSEs, including CWD.

However, alternate theories regarding the cause of CWD have been postulated and continue to be examined by some in the scientific community. These theories, which explore possible etiologies including viruses, bacteria, trace mineral imbalances, and others, have been advanced for many years and often are supported by peer-reviewed, scientific publications. While our understanding of CWD epidemiology can benefit from diverse research perspectives and investigations, the preponderance of scientific information currently available strongly supports prions as the causative agent of all TSEs, and this is accepted by the vast majority of scientists working in this field.

There currently are no vaccines, no treatments, no cures, and no practical live animal, ‘carcass-side,’ nor food safety tests for CWD, despite extensive efforts and research to develop them. Consequently, CWD must be managed with available science-based tools that include, but are not limited to, regulation of live cervid and carcass movements, prohibition of activities that congregate susceptible species, targeted removal, hunting, surveillance and monitoring, and public education.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) supports the scientific consensus regarding prions as the causative agent of CWD and endorses use of the above and other available management strategies by state, federal, provincial, and territorial wildlife agencies as well as research that further elucidates the epidemiology of CWD and identifies effective management practices. Additional information on CWD management can be found in the *AFWA Best Management Practices for Prevention, Surveillance, and Management of Chronic Wasting Disease* that are available online at:

https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/5215/3729/1805/AFWA_CWD_BMPS_12_September_2018_FINAL.pdf.

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