

July 3, 2020

Mr. Robert Taylor, Commission Chairman  
Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director  
Mississippi Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks  
1505 Eastover Drive  
Jackson, MS 39211

Dear Chairman Taylor and Dr. Polles,

We, the undersigned organizations representing millions of hunters, conservationists and wildlife professionals, urge the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) Commission to follow national best practices to manage the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Mississippi. Specifically, we request that the Commission maintain the current structure of the CWD Management Zones, including management actions therein, in Mississippi as recommended by MDWFP biologists.

CWD is an always-fatal brain disease affecting members of the deer family (cervids). Natural infections have been found in deer, elk, moose and reindeer herds of North America. The disease is caused by prions (misshapen proteins) that create holes in the brain and eventually lead to death. There is currently no vaccine or treatment. Spread of CWD in 26 states presents a fundamental, persistent, and growing threat to the health of wild cervid populations and the outdoor recreation and conservation interests that depend on them. It is unquestionably one of the largest threats to wildlife conservation that we've encountered over the last century.

CWD spreads most significantly through direct animal to animal contact and animal contact with prions in contaminated environments. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) released a [technical report on best management practices for CWD](#), which recommends a ban on supplemental feeding. This recommendation stems from scientific evidence documenting that baiting and feeding (including mineral licks) causes an unnatural concentration of cervids around bait sites that are additive to natural food sources and facilitate the spread infectious CWD prions through increased animal to animal contact, and contact with contaminated surfaces and soil. There is no doubt among the CWD research community that unnatural concentrations of wildlife can efficiently spread CWD in infected cervid populations. The MDWFP CWD Response Plan follows these best management practices by establishing strict CWD Management Zones.

In anticipation of CWD being transmitted to the Mississippi deer herd, biologists at MDWFP developed a state CWD Response Plan. After CWD was first found in Mississippi, staff scientists began to implement specific strategies from the plan to mitigate the spread of the disease, including a ban on supplemental feeding within CWD Management Zones. These strategies are in alignment with those of the AFWA "Best Management Practices for Prevention, Surveillance, and Management of Chronic Wasting Disease" which incorporate the experience and knowledge of state fish and wildlife agencies who have been battling CWD for over two decades.

At the June Commission meeting, the MDWFP Commission asked MDWFP Wildlife staff to shrink the current CWD management zones from 25-mile radii to 10-mile radii, and implement two 25-mile "surveillance" zones. The CWD Surveillance Zones would have carcass transportation restrictions in place but no ban on supplemental feeding. As stated on June 25, 2020, by MDWFP's Wildlife Bureau staff, it remains the staff's recommendation to not use supplemental feeders so as not to concentrate deer. Their recommendation includes this 'best management practice' in order to reduce the spread of CWD and other wildlife diseases.

As many states have learned, preventing the spread of CWD is a daunting task and early detection and rapid response once the disease is found is critical for long-term management. Adhering to strict best management practices, like those outlined by AFWA, and following the guidance of expert staff biologists is key to slowing the spread of CWD in Mississippi's wild deer herd. We strongly ask that you continue to follow the expert guidance of MDWFP staff and national best practices that are the result of scientific studies to maintain the current CWD Management Zones at the 25-mile radius and continue to prohibit supplemental feeding within those CWD Management Zones.

Sincerely,

Alabama Wildlife Federation  
Arkansas Wildlife Federation  
Boone and Crockett Club  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
CWD Alliance  
Mississippi Outfitters Association  
Mississippi Rural Property Rights Association  
Mississippi Wildlife Federation  
National Deer Alliance  
National Wildlife Federation  
Quality Deer Management Association  
Tennessee Wildlife Federation  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Wildlife Management Institute