



## SCIENCE SNAPSHOT

January 31, 2025

### Chronic Wasting Disease Updates

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#### Georgia Confirms First CWD Case

This week, the state of Georgia confirmed its first case of chronic wasting disease, marking a significant development in the disease's spread across the southeastern U.S. The infected deer was detected through routine surveillance, underscoring the importance of ongoing monitoring efforts. State agencies are expected to implement response measures, including increased testing and possible movement restrictions to prevent further spread.

#### Funding and State Agency Budgets

The NDA 2025 Deer Report provides a breakdown of state budgets dedicated to CWD management, with Idaho's 2023 budget at \$300K. However, this figure likely falls short of the actual costs required for effective surveillance and management. Many states allocate funds based on available resources rather than actual needs, and competitive USDA funding remains in high demand. This suggests that state agencies are operating with far less funding than necessary to fully address CWD.

#### Culling as a Management Strategy

The Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) Report highlights culling as a potential method to assess the extent of CWD spillover. However, large-scale culling of infected cervid populations is not a viable management strategy. Historical examples, such as efforts in Norway with reindeer and past mule deer culling in California, demonstrate that such approaches are prohibitively expensive and often ineffective. Resistance from landowners further complicates implementation, as seen in Minnesota, where a costly culling program (~\$800K/year) was discontinued due to lack of landowner cooperation. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2025/01/08/minnesota-dnr-halts-targeted-deer-culling-as-chronic-wasting-disease-spreads> (January 8, 2025)

#### Addressing Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories

Misinformation about CWD continues to circulate, particularly in North Dakota, where individuals like Dusty Backer, a hunting rights activist and beekeeper, challenge the legitimacy of state and federal CWD policies. Backer has influenced legislation such as:

- SB2137 (The Baiting Bill): Passed in the Senate this week, this bill restricts the state's ability to regulate baiting, which is a known risk factor for CWD transmission.

- HB1236 & HB1325: These bills aim to prevent ND Game and Fish from allocating funds to CWD management and redefine diagnostic requirements in ways that contradict established prion science.

Backer promotes the idea that CWD is extremely rare and akin to Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), disregarding well-established research on CWD's contagious prion-based nature. His claims align with previous misinformation efforts, such as those by Dr. Frank Bastian in 2019, who misleadingly proposed that CWD was caused by a bacterial infection rather than prions.

*Key misinformation themes include:*

- Denial of prion existence – Claims that prions have never been observed under a microscope.
- Misinterpretation of disease mechanisms – Equating CWD with non-contagious neurodegenerative conditions.
- Skepticism of inoculation studies – Dismissing peer-reviewed research demonstrating CWD's transmissibility.

### **Takeaways**

Given the persistence of misinformation, scientists, wildlife managers, and conservation organizations must continue collaborative efforts around:

- Communicating clear, evidence-based explanations of CWD's prion pathology.
- Countering false claims through outreach and engagement with hunters and policymakers.
- Advocating for adequate funding and science-based management strategies.

For further insights into misinformation trends, refer to Backer's statements on the Plain Talk podcast (or YouTube video) and his January 29, 2025, testimony before the ND House:

- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/572-prions-dont-exist/id1449473116?i=1000686824319> (Plain Talk podcast)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phflmav5pRs> (Plain Talk YouTube video)
- <https://video.ndlegis.gov/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20250129/-1/32430?startposition=20250124105600> (North Dakota House)

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*The Science Snapshot is intended to provide an overview of convenings addressing science-based topics that are relevant to the mission of the TRCP. If you have additional questions, please get in touch with Jamelle Ellis at [jellis@trcp.org](mailto:jellis@trcp.org).*