



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

January 31, 2020

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The Department of Livestock Reports Finding of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Eastern Montana Game Farm Elk

Helena, Mont.- On January 31, 2020, the Montana Department of Livestock reported that a single game farm elk in eastern Montana has been confirmed positive for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). The disease has not been identified in domestic cervids in Montana since 1999.

The CWD positive animal was found as a result of surveillance required by the United States Department of Agriculture CWD Herd Certification Program (HCP) which requires all deaths in captive animals greater than 12 months of age be tested. The affected animal appeared healthy and was slaughtered for meat. The infection was confirmed by the National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa through the identification of the prion in tissue samples collected from the animal.

The Department placed the herd under quarantine and is conducting an epidemiological investigation. Montana law requires CWD positive game farm herds undergo complete depopulation and post-mortem herd testing, or quarantine of the entire herd for a period of five years from the last CWD positive case.

“An epidemiologic investigation will be conducted, but at this time, the source of the disease is unknown,” stated State Veterinarian Dr. Marty Zaluski. “We will look at historical elk movements associated with this captive herd and proximity to infected wildlife to try to determine the source of exposure.”

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) has documented CWD in wild cervids across much of Montana through surveillance that began in 2017. In 2019, approximately 7,000 wild deer, elk, and moose were sampled statewide, with 140 testing positive for CWD.

CWD is a progressive, fatal disease that affects the nervous system of white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, and moose. Transmission can occur through direct contact between animals, urine, feces, saliva, blood and antler velvet. Infected carcasses may serve as a source of environmental

contamination and can infect other animals. Infected animals may carry the disease for years without showing signs of illness, but in later stages, signs may include progressive weight loss, lack of coordination and physical debilitation.

There is no known transmission of CWD to humans. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends hunters harvesting an animal in areas with a known CWD presence have their animal tested. If the animal tests positive, the CDC advises against eating the meat.

The mission of the Montana Department of Livestock is to control and eradicate animal diseases, prevent the transmission of animal diseases to humans, and to protect the livestock industry from theft and predatory animals. For more information on the Montana Department of Livestock, visit <http://liv.mt.gov/>.

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