



NEWS RELEASE

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The Challenge of Chronic Wasting Disease: “Insidious, Dire, and URGENT”

WINNIPEG, MB: The cervine (deer) version of ‘mad cow disease’ is threatening Western Canada’s deer, elk, moose, and caribou populations. Like ‘mad cow disease’, chronic wasting disease (CWD) is an infectious protein or ‘prion’ disease. It is always fatal.

“Prions are virtually indestructible and can persist in the environment,” said Darrel Rowledge, Director of the Alliance for Public Wildlife. “Prion diseases have repeatedly jumped species barriers – most alarmingly in the United Kingdom, when BSE-infected beef killed 229 people.”

The largest prion epidemics have been in domestic or captive animals: Scrapie in domestic sheep; Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), or so-called ‘mad cow’ disease in cattle; Transmissible Mink Encephalopathy (TME) on mink farms; and CWD in captive deer and elk.

Vince Crichton, internationally-recognized wildlife expert, former Co-Chair of Canada’s National Wildlife Disease Strategy and retired wildlife biologist with the Province of Manitoba, says “CWD is vastly more challenging than ‘mad cow’ because it is highly contagious. Spread widely in game farm animals and products, it is repeatedly infecting wildlife. CWD is now the world’s largest, fastest growing, and most infectious biomass of prions in history.”

In 2001, the United States officially declared CWD in a ‘State of Emergency’ and every factor related to the disease continues to worsen. It has now been identified in 24 U.S. states, three Canadian provinces, South Korea, and recently in Norway. Field studies confirm potentially severe impacts on wildlife populations.

So far no transmission to humans has been documented, but the risk is not zero. Test tube conversions, experimental transfer to squirrel monkeys, and most recently to macaques (the closest non-human primates allowed in research) just from eating infected deer meat have scientists concerned.

“The possibility that thousands of CWD-infected animals are being consumed unknowingly by hunter families every year is cause for great concern,” said Dr. Brian Kotak, Managing Director of the Manitoba Wildlife Federation (MWF). This has been described as one of the most outrageous human susceptibility experiments in history.

The combination of threats is sobering. CWD has been shown to persist and remain infectious in the environment indefinitely. Decomposing carcasses create contaminated ‘super-sites’ and clay-based soils can dramatically increase infectivity.

The threats of CWD extend far beyond wildlife populations and human health – extending to agriculture and international trade. Plants contaminated through saliva, urine, or feces from infected animals can transmit disease and there is evidence of uptake via the root systems of agricultural crops growing in contaminated soils. The economic impact of trade barriers due to contaminate crops would be staggering.

There is good news, and hope, but we must act immediately. Please join us for an MWF-sponsored public presentation on CWD and its implications featuring guest speaker Darrel Rowledge, Room 223, Wallace Building, University of Manitoba, November 2, 2017 at 7:00 PM.

For more information on CWD and the public presentation, please visit: www.mwf.mb.ca and Alliance for Public Wildlife www.apwildlife.org or contact the MWF office at (204) 633-5967.

