



For Immediate Release

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Updated Map Shows Current Expansion of Chronic Wasting Disease Across Wyoming

Deadly disease in deer just 9 miles from Yellowstone National Park

Jackson Hole, Wy. - An updated map created by Wyoming Wildlife Advocates and Sierra Club Wyoming Chapter indicates that the fatal Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) that infects deer, elk and moose spread even closer to Yellowstone National Park in 2015.

Based on information from Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) and other sources, the updated map tracks the progression of the disease over the past 15 years. In 2015 and early 2016 alone, the area where CWD has been found in deer or elk expanded approximately 4 million acres. Before 2015, the endemic area expanded at an average of 1.8 million acres per year in Wyoming.

The map portrays the presence of CWD in WGFD designated hunt areas. Once an infected animal is detected in any of the state's deer hunt areas, that area becomes part of the endemic zone, which now overlaps portions of 21 of Wyoming's 23 counties.

The map also shows the proximity of the disease zone to Yellowstone National Park, the National Elk Refuge, and the state-run elk feedgrounds. In 2015 an infected deer was found in a hunt area 9.3 miles from the southeast corner of Yellowstone. An infected deer was also found in a hunt area 12.2 miles east of an elk feedground in 2015. As the disease moves north and westward

across Wyoming, infected areas approach critically important national parks and wildlife habitat upon which the \$3.4 billion dollar Wyoming tourism industry is based.

"This distance to the parks and feedgrounds is now just a day's walk for a deer or elk," says Lloyd Dorsey, Conservation Director for Sierra Club Wyoming Chapter.

CWD is a fatal, neurodegenerative disease affecting mule deer, white-tailed deer, moose and elk. The disease is infectious between and among deer, elk and moose.

Wild elk in Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park have CWD at 13-18% prevalence 1 , and they aren't clustered together for months as much as Wyoming's winter feedgrounds. That level of CWD will cause a decline in population. 2

Scientists fear that once the disease reaches any of Wyoming's 22 elk feedgrounds or the National Elk Refuge where elk are densely packed together for the winter months, it could spread rapidly with potentially devastating results. CWD on elk feedgrounds could reach many times the prevalence in wild elk.

"People from all over the world visit Wyoming to see wild, and healthy wildlife. If CWD runs unchecked through our famous wildlife herds and parks, our expanding tourism economy will take a big hit. CWD remains persistent in soil, plants and water, and will continue to infect wildlife for years, perhaps decades, into the future," said Kent Nelson, Executive Director of Wyoming Wildlife Advocates.

Retired US Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, Bruce Smith, PhD, has written, "Feedgrounds will become de facto biological 'Superfund' sites contaminated with infectious prions proven highly resistant to environmental and chemical degradation." ³

Wyoming Wildlife Advocates and Sierra Club urge prompt action to protect the wildlife resources of this region. Phasing out elk feedgrounds, allowing predators to attend all the game herds in Wyoming, and thinning out dense concentrations of elk and deer will help ensure healthy wildlife and our state's economy for the future.

"We hope the State of Wyoming and all agencies will adopt a comprehensive approach to mitigate the impacts of CWD on deer and elk herds," said Connie Wilbert, Director of Sierra Club Wyoming Chapter. "Instead of managing for maximum numbers of deer and elk, Wyoming needs to manage for *healthy* wildlife. The state should conserve robust predator populations to help keep our deer and elk herds healthy and spread out. And the state should not allow artificial feeding of deer or elk under any circumstances."

The new map and comprehensive comments by Wyoming Wildlife Advocates and Sierra Club on Wyoming's CWD Management Plan can be found at: http://wyomingwildlifeadvocates.org and http://sierraclub.org/Wyoming

¹ Wyckoff, A.C. et al. 2015. Prion Amplification and Hierarchical Bayesian Modeling Refine Detection of Prion Infection. *Scientific Reports* 5, 8358. DOI:10.1038/srep08358

² Monello, R.J. et al. 2014. Survival and Population Growth of a Free-Ranging Elk Population With a Long History of Exposure to Chronic Wasting Disease. The Journal of Wildlife Management. 78(2):214-223; DOI: 10.1002/jwmg.665.

³ Smith, B.L. 2012. Where Elk Roam: Conservation and Biopolitics of Our National Elk Herd. P. 114. Lyons Press. Guilford, CT.