

December 1, 2009

Deer Hunters Can Help Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance Program

Deer hunters can help the Ministry of Natural Resources monitor for the presence of a fatal brain disease that affects deer as well as elk, moose and potentially woodland caribou.

During the current firearm hunting season, which closes December 15, the ministry is monitoring harvested deer in northwestern Ontario for the presence of Chronic Wasting Disease.

Ministry wildlife research technician crews have been canvassing hunters in the field to collect tissue samples from harvested deer in Wildlife Management Units 11B, 12A, 12B, 13 and 14. Technicians remove a small amount of tissue from the head of the deer and then return the deer to the hunter.

“The ministry is working to gather as many samples as possible,” says Thunder Bay District management biologist Michael Deschamps. “Hunters who were not contacted in the field are asked to take the heads of yearling or older deer to one of the ministry freezer depots in Thunder Bay, Atikokan or Ignace as soon as possible – preferably within a few days of being harvested.”

The disease has never been found in wild deer or moose in Ontario and there is no evidence that it can be transmitted to humans or domestic livestock. It has been detected in deer in Alberta, Saskatchewan and several U.S. states and in wild moose in Colorado and Wyoming.

Surveillance for Chronic Wasting Disease in Ontario deer began in 2003. All dead elk recovered from the wild are also tested.

Testing takes place at the Animal Health Laboratory at the University of Guelph, where brain and lymph node tissue from recently deceased animals are examined. The disease is similar to bovine spongiform encephalopathy in cattle, also known as BSE or mad cow disease, and appears to be caused by an abnormal protein called a prion, not a virus or bacteria. Prions are concentrated in the animal’s brain, spinal cord, lymph glands, tonsils, eyes and spleen.

As a precaution, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and World Health Organization advise people not to consume animals known to be infected or that appear sick. For hunters who wish to wait for the test result before eating their venison, the results will begin to be posted on the ministry’s website in December.

Government efforts are guided by the Ontario Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance and Response Plan, developed by the Ministries of Natural Resources, Agriculture,

Food and Rural Affairs, and Health and Long-Term Care, together with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

The plan identifies the risks to wild and captive members of the deer family associated with Chronic Wasting Disease and provides for multi-agency coordination in prevention, surveillance, control and eradication, recovery and communications. The plan is available at ontario.ca/cwd, by contacting the MNR Wildlife Section, 300 Water Street, Peterborough, Ontario, K9J 8M5 or by calling 705-755-1573.

MNR freezer depots are located at:

Town - City	Location/Address	Hours
Thunder Bay★	MNR- NWR Natural Resources Centre 173, 25th Side Road	8:15 a.m.– 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday Closed on holidays
Thunder Bay★	Bait and Bow Archery 213 London Drive	Flexible hours seven days a week. Please call ahead 807-344-9181 or 1-866-447-9181
Ignace★	MNR Area Office Corner of Hwy 599 and Hwy 17	8:30 a.m.– 5:00 p.m. Monday–Friday Closed on holidays.
Atikokan★	MNR Area Office 108 Saturn Avenue	8:30 a.m.– 5:00 p.m. Monday-Friday Closed on holidays.