

ISSUES – MARCH 9, 2006 – WILDLIFE COMMISSION MEETING

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ISSUES SUBMITTAL FORM

Date: 4 February 2006

ISSUE:	Should deer hunters in select DAUs be required to submit samples for CWD surveillance during 2006?
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DISCUSSION (FACTS AND FIGURES, EXPLANATION OF ISSUE):

Colorado Wildlife Commission policy on chronic wasting disease (CWD) directs the Division “to be diligent in its efforts to find CWD wherever it may exist in wild cervid populations in Colorado... using appropriate methods to monitor the occurrence and distribution of CWD based on a prioritized assessment of risk and available resources.” In 2002, Division staff committed to a 3-year effort to reliably determine CWD distribution statewide; as of February 2005, however, over half of the deer and elk DAUs in Colorado had not been adequately sampled. Despite a renewed commitment to adequately sample ten of the highest risk deer DAUs during the 2005-06 hunting season, sample goals were reached in only two of the 10 “high priority” DAUs; submissions in these two DAUs (D21, D22), along with a third (D25), were required during 2005-06. The recent discovery of the infectious agent for CWD in muscle tissue of late stage, CWD-infected deer may increase hunter interest in knowing with statistical reliability which DAUs do not have the disease.

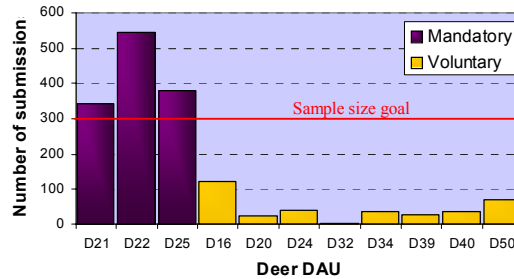


Figure 1. Mandatory vs. voluntary harvest submissions in “high priority” deer DAUs during 2005-06.

Based on 2005-06 data and the strong tendency in harvest submissions for CWD testing to come primarily from DAUs where the disease is already known to occur, it appears that mandatory sample submissions may be the most effective way to assure that sample goals are reached in high-risk DAUs. There appears to be no need to continue requiring submissions of harvested deer in D21, D22, or D25 in 2006. However, establishing mandatory submission regulations in other DAUs for 2006 likely would help advance the long-term goal of a complete and timely statewide survey for CWD. The highest risk (and consequently highest surveillance priority) DAUs would be D23, D24 and D32, and D34; a second tier would include D20, D39, and D40. Other inadequately sampled DAUs would be tertiary priorities.

WHO ARE THE INTERNAL/EXTERNAL PUBLICS IN THIS ISSUE? WHAT INPUT PROCESS HAS OCCURRED?

The internal publics are Division staff, particularly regional customer service representatives, law enforcement personnel, and seasonal employees who assist in CWD testing. External publics include those planning to hunt in DAUs that would be targeted for mandatory submissions. Previous discussions of statewide CWD surveillance goals and mandatory submissions have included Division staff, sportsmen and other publics, and the Colorado Wildlife Commission.

ALTERNATIVES: (POSSIBLE OUTCOMES or POSSIBLE REGULATIONS):

1. No change – based on past trends, likely outcome is continued inadequacy of CWD surveillance data in areas where CWD is not already known to occur.
2. Establish a regulation allowing the Director of the Division to implement mandatory hunter CWD sample submission requirements as necessary to comply with Commission surveillance policy, and defer further implementation of mandatory units until 2007. Implement and evaluate check stations, hunter contacts in the field, road-kill sampling or other voluntary means in the interim.

3. Develop other sampling approaches – based on available data, testing a quota of ~30-60 vehicle-killed and symptomatic deer in a DAU would provide essentially the same chance of detecting new CWD foci as testing ~300 harvested animals. Whether quotas could be reached in target DAUs is not known.	
Issue Raised by:	Wildlife Commission
Author of the issue paper (if different than person raising the issue):	M. Miller, Manager, Wildlife Health Program; modified 2/16/06 – Ackerman
CC:	
APPROVED FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION BY:	TOM REMINGTON
THIS REQUIRES NEW SPACE IN THE BROCHURE? Type YES or NO:	no
ISSUE PAPER HAS BEEN EMAILED TO REG REVIEW MGRS GROUP? TYPE YES OR NO:	Yes
REGULATION REVIEW OUTCOME:	

ISSUES SUBMITTAL FORM

Date: February 9, 2006

ISSUE:	Should the Commission regulate the collection, possession and/or trade of shed antlers?
DISCUSSION (FACTS AND FIGURES, EXPLANATION OF ISSUE):	
<p>Concern for wintering big game species across Colorado has increased in recent years, especially for mule deer on the western slope and to a lesser degree elk. The concerns have been expressed by sources both external and internal to the DOW. These concerns have ranged from biological to social and economic (in the form of game damage).</p> <p>The biological impacts of antler shed hunting while deer are still on winter ranges are of the greatest concern to many people. With deer and elk concentrated on winter or critical winter ranges the animals are already stressed due to competition from limited habitat (space and forage/browse availability), increased social interaction, and depending upon snow depths decreased mobility. As winter progresses and antler shed increases deer especially are fighting a biological battle of decreasing weight and body condition. While this is a normal response, additional stresses, such as antler collection during the time that animals are on winter range, can hasten the decline in body condition and lead to increased winter mortality.</p> <p>During the spring of 2005 Gunnison DOW officers heard from many local residents of increased late spring deer mortality. Many of the reported and observed dead deer were bucks which had shed antlers prior to dying.</p> <p>Generally speaking in western Colorado, deer and elk winter on south facing slopes at low to moderate elevations. This is because these areas offer reasonable forage/browse availability due to decreased snow depths caused by slope and aspect (radiant heat, windblown areas which don't hold snow quite as deep or as long). Many of these winter ranges are shared by a variety of other species including Gunnison and Greater sage grouse. These same areas are popular for shed antler hunting because the animals are concentrated in areas which are frequently readily visible to and accessible by humans. The antlers can be found in smaller geographic areas requiring less searching.</p> <p>With the increase in popularity of shed antler collection and the increasing economic value of shed antlers for collection, furniture, art, and other purposes the impacts to some areas of Colorado's deer and elk winter ranges has increased. Prices paid for brown, hard antlers has reached as high as \$18 per pound for average antlers. Trophy quality sheds are highly sought and their values can reach into the hundreds and thousands of dollars. Popularity has increased in the hunting media (websites, magazines) with sections dedicated to shed antlers. Due to these circumstances, the collection of shed antlers has developed into a significant economic issue.</p> <p>Interest in antler collection appears to have increased substantially in the last 3-4 years. This is likely a result of increased deer populations and buck/doe ratios in many parts of Colorado due to license limitations and a series of mild winters. The increased economic</p>	

value coupled with increased availability of shed antlers has led to the increased collection and consequently the increase in concern for wintering animals.

In the Gunnison Basin local DOW officers have seen a significant increase in the number of shed collectors and the timing has been altered, beginning much earlier in the year. In 2004 groups of non-resident antler collectors were observed arriving in early to mid-March. In 2005 some of the same groups were observed in Gunnison in mid-February. In 2006 one person was cited for harassing wildlife, while collecting antlers on Feb. 4, and two others issued written warnings on Feb. 8. The trend is showing that collectors begin earlier each year which places them on winter and critical winter range while deer are still trying to utilize these important habitats.

As the deer and elk shed their antlers from late December through early April people access the winter range areas in search of the cast antlers. In some circumstances people may follow or drive animals with trophy quality antlers in attempts to cause them to be dropped earlier. The Gunnison DOW office has received unconfirmed reports of deer being hazed by people on snowmobiles and OHVs on winter ranges in what appeared to be attempts to cause the antlers to drop. Reports and observations of OHV tracks in sagebrush areas known to harbor wintering big game have also been received.

Numerous local citizens of Gunnison have expressed their concern about allowing access to deer and elk winter ranges too early and the impacts this causes to animals. Another concern is the resulting movement of animals from public land wintering areas onto private lands, resulting in increased game damage claims. In some areas of the state the issue has resulted in increased incidents of criminal trespass onto private lands in pursuit of trophy quality antlers.

Other states have enacted regulations regarding antler shed collection with the intent of protecting wintering animals. Related laws currently in effect range from no regulation to partial bans on possession and trade to complete closure of some wintering grounds to all activity. In addition, some states have attempted implementation of shed hunting seasons.

As winter range pressures continue to increase on wildlife, and the market value of shed antlers continues to increase, Colorado can expect to see continued long-term pressure from collectors of antler sheds. This issue proposes that the Commission examine the practice and its impacts in order to determine the feasibility of decreasing pressure on wintering wildlife by regulating the collection of shed antlers.

WHO ARE THE INTERNAL/EXTERNAL PUBLICS IN THIS ISSUE? WHAT INPUT PROCESS HAS OCCURRED?

Wildlife Managers Antler shed collectors and brokers This document constitutes the formal initiation of the input-gathering process on this issue.	
ALTERNATIVES: (POSSIBLE OUTCOMES or POSSIBLE REGULATIONS):	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Status quo (no regulation regarding the collection and/or possession of shed antlers). 2. Implementation of an antler shed pick-up season on public lands (eg – April 1 through December 31). 3. A complete or partial ban on the possession and/or trade of shed antlers. 	
Issue Raised by:	Wildlife Commission
Author of the issue paper (if different than person raising the issue):	J. Wenum, Brandon Diamond, Brett Ackerman; modified 2/16/06 – Ackerman
CC:	
APPROVED FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION BY:	TOM SPEZZE AND RON VELARDE
THIS REQUIRES NEW SPACE IN THE BROCHURE? Type YES or NO:	yes
ISSUE PAPER HAS BEEN EMAILED TO REG REVIEW MGRS GROUP? TYPE YES OR NO:	yes
REGULATION REVIEW OUTCOME:	