



United States Department of the Interior



U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge
922 Bootlegger Trail
Great Falls, Montana 59404-6133

May 15, 2006

NWRS/BL/PU 5
Mail Stop 61510

Memorandum

To: Thomas Roffe, Chief Wildlife Health, R6, FWS, Bozeman, MT

From: Vanessa Fields, Wildlife Biologist, Benton Lake NWR

Subject: Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Accomplishment Report, FY-2006

The Benton Lake Complex encompasses 20,000 square miles along the western edge of the northern Great Plains in north central Montana. The Complex includes the Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge, located 12 miles north of Great Falls, and 22 Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) located throughout a 10 county Wetland Management District (WMD). The refuge is 12,383 total acres including 6700 acres of shortgrass prairie and 5600 acres of wetlands. The total deer population (mule and white-tailed deer) on the refuge, which is closed to big game hunting, is less than 100 animals. An occasional elk is seen on the refuge.

The Benton Lake complex has a relatively low to moderate risk of significant Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). This assessment is based on relatively low numbers of deer on the refuge and WPAs that are free to move on and off Service lands. There have been no relocations of elk or deer on or near Service lands in the last 5 years. The only confirmed case of CWD in Montana was found in a captive elk herd near Philipsburg (Montana Dept. of Livestock 2004), which is approximately 50 miles from the Powell County WPAs. The closest game farm to the refuge is 25 miles.

Our CWD planning and management goals and objectives for Benton Lake complex include:

Management Goal: In collaboration with Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, prevent the establishment of CWD in wild cervids that use the Refuge or WPAs

Surveillance Goal: Early detection of CWD to increase the probability of eliminating or controlling the spread of the disease.

Surveillance Objectives: To determine the status of CWD in deer and elk on the Refuge and in the WMD and estimate the likelihood that CWD is absent.

Methods

For fiscal year 2006, regular surveillance is being conducted for CWD on the refuge. Refuge staff drive an established monitoring route 1-2 times per week to look for any deer or elk that exhibit symptoms of CWD (emaciation, drooling, staggering) or carcasses that could be submitted for sampling. The date, start time, and weather conditions are recorded before each route. The number and species of all ungulates observed during the route are recorded, as well as their general condition.

Due to the remote location of many Service lands within the Wetland Management District, staff conducted opportunistic surveillance for sick or dead ungulates in conjunction with other job related visits to these units.

If deer or elk are observed exhibiting clinical signs consistent with CWD (emaciation, drooling, staggering, indifferent to surroundings) these animals will be collected and the heads removed and submitted to the MTFWP lab in Bozeman or the diagnostic lab at Colorado State University (CSU). If freshly dead animals are located, the heads from these animals are collected and submitted to the Bozeman or CSU lab as well. Collection methods and safety measures were described in the CWD Plan for Benton Lake Complex (USFWS 2004).

FY 2006 Surveillance Results to Date

During monitoring thus far in FY2006, there were 591 white-tail deer observations on the refuge (Figure 1). All of the animals appeared to be healthy and did not exhibit any symptoms of CWD. In addition, no deer or elk have been seen exhibiting symptoms of CWD through opportunistic observations by refuge staff. WMD staff have not observed any deer or elk with clinical signs consistent with CWD during routine work on the district this year.

Thus far in FY2006, one white-tailed deer from Benton Lake refuge and one elk from the Blackfoot Valley have been submitted for CWD testing to Colorado State University. The results are not yet available. Materials for additional sampling kits have been purchased to increase the number of staff that can collect heads opportunistically.

Discussion

A database was created to record all of the surveillance observations and specimens collected. GIS layers have been created from these datasets. Copies of the database have been submitted with this report and will be submitted to the state of Montana at the end of the fiscal year.

During 2005, the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP) developed a draft management plan for CWD in free ranging wildlife in Montana (MTFWP 2005). The plan identified a wide variety of alternatives ranging from minimal action to aggressive control if CWD is found in Montana. The plan is not yet final. The Project Leader has been coordinating with MTFWP staff during development of this plan and will continue to do so for future implementation of the final plan. Benton Lake Complex staff has also met with MTFWP staff throughout this past year to discuss concerns or updates on CWD in Montana. If MTFWP's final plan necessitates any modifications to Benton Lake Complex's existing CWD surveillance and monitoring plan, those will be addressed in the upcoming year.

Refuge and WMD staff that interact with hunters are prepared to provide information about Refuge surveillance goals, the status of CWD in Montana, facts concerning CWD transmission, and the potential risk involved.

Project Funding Summary

Costs	Spent through May 2006	Estimated for remainder of FY06	Total
Staff time (salaries)	\$3,000	\$1,500	\$4,500
Fuel	\$200	\$180	\$380
CWD sample kits (re-stock & creating additional)	\$780	\$100	\$880
CWD testing (shipping and analysis)	\$100	\$200	\$300
Total	\$4,080	\$1,430	\$6,060

References

Montana Department of Livestock. 2004. CWD information from Montana Department of Livestock. [URL:http://www.liv.state.mt.us](http://www.liv.state.mt.us).

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. 2005. Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan for Free-ranging Wildlife in Montana. Helena, MT. 89p

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2004. Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance and Monitoring Plan for Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex. 16

cc: David Gillund
Robert Johnson

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Figure 1. Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance:
white-tailed deer observations October - May 2006

