

NWRS/Biology  
WM 2.6  
Mail Stop 60130

June 21, 2006

To: Director  
Assistant Director, National Wildlife Refuge System

From: Acting Deputy Regional Director, Region 6 /s/ Sharon R. Rose

Subject: Chronic Wasting Disease Accountability Report

This memorandum is to meet the Director's reporting requirements regarding Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) FY06 funding allocations. This report has an earlier due date (June 2006) than previous years to enable the report to be used in decisions for FY07 allocations.

Overview:

During FY06 CWD continued to be discovered in new parts of the country. While FY05 saw discovery of CWD in two new states and a Canadian province, most of the expansion of known CWD affected sites during FY06 occurred in Mountain-Prairie Region states with existing CWD. Colorado surveillance extended the endemic area south and southeast in the state. A new finding was extension into northwest Kansas from known adjacent affected areas, with that state reporting its first ever CWD case in January 2006. All Mountain-Prairie Region states with endemic CWD reported new cases, with some states like South Dakota finding most of their cases in the last 2 years. In addition to CWD from known endemic areas, Utah reported new cases in the central part of the state where historically only one CWD-affected deer in 2004 had been found. In Wyoming, the disease expanded north-northwest, and new discoveries near Thermopolis show over 3 percent prevalence. The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), through the Wyoming Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Office (FWMAO), worked in collaboration with the Wind River Reservation to find first ever CWD on the Reservation as part of the newly discovered Thermopolis focus. Outside the Mountain-Prairie Region, West Virginia rediscovered CWD in March and April 2006. Alberta found its first ever case in free-ranging deer September 2005 and through the winter 2006 has now reported eight cases. New research published this winter demonstrated prion agent in the muscle of mule deer fueling increased public speculation and concern over the risk posed to human health from a disease so far not known to have any human health implications. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) finalized regulations for managing CWD in captive cervids. The disease continues to be a high priority item for state wildlife conservation agencies, particularly in the Mountain-Prairie Region.

FY05 efforts completed refuge and fish hatchery-specific CWD surveillance and response plans (see CWD accomplishment report, October 2005). All refuges now have a site-specific CWD contingency plan or are covered by a regional plan. In FY06, the Mountain-Prairie Region was allocated \$206,800 in CWD funding. We also added \$2,200 from regional funds (1261) toward CWD efforts to cover rescission since allocations had to be made earlier in the year. We were directed to use the funds to 1) develop and implement Regional CWD surveillance and response plans, 2) support logistical needs associated with surveillance and management, and 3) implement Service responsibilities of the joint States/DOI/USDA CWD implementation plan including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). An additional FY05 requirement of all Regions was to develop some form of CWD response plan.

Our eight-state Region now has six states with endemic CWD in wild cervids with the addition of Kansas, and an additional state (Montana) that has had CWD-affected captive cervids. Only North Dakota has not had any evidence of CWD in either wild or captive cervids. With such a wide distribution of the disease and its continued expansion in our Region, we again funded only high priority needs by soliciting proposals from refuges, national fish hatcheries and FWMAOs for funding CWD-specific projects as partial implementation of CWD contingency plans. Part of the evaluation criteria was that the proposal was endorsed by the state thus ensuring coordination and collaboration between the Service and state activities on CWD. Virtually all projects summarized below are on-going as this reporting date falls in the middle of a fiscal year. Funding was again provided for technical assistance at the same rate as last year (\$10,000). The remainder (\$199,000) was used for implementation of management, research, and surveillance projects at refuges, hatcheries, and FWMAOs.

**Technical Assistance** (\$10,000): In FY05 the new discoveries of CWD in the northeast United States resulted in considerable effort to support Region 5 in the development of their CWD planning effort. Support continued in FY06. Assistance included review of regional and refuge-specific CWD contingency plans and development of an agenda for their CWD training workshop. New site-specific CWD plans are underway, and we will continue to assist other regions as requested and as resources permit.

Our technical assistance provided guidance to our field stations in development and review of CWD implementation projects. We also maintain a Regional CWD database.

We continue to provide field managers and biologists, Regional managers, and Washington staff up-to-date information on the status and progress of CWD through regular "Disease Update Alerts."

**Planning** (\$0): Because the Region has completed CWD contingency planning, no funding was allocated. However, as previously discussed (see FY05 CWD report, October 2005), knowledge, distribution, and epidemiology of CWD are constantly changing, and we consider these plans to be living documents that will require revision as local circumstances and knowledge change. Regular updates, including changes in the distribution of CWD, were provided to Service managers to allow adjustment as appropriate.

**Implementation** (\$199,000): Remaining funding was allocated for management implementation, including surveillance, preparedness, CWD responses, and applied research projects at stations with

completed CWD plans. We solicited project proposals in October 2005 from all stations with finalized plans with two caveats: proposals had to address key elements in the station's CWD plan, and proposals had to be complementary to or cooperative with state CWD activities, and supported by the state. We received 23 proposals for this funding. Most were projects on-going from FY05, generally cooperative with the states. A few refuge-only projects were strongly supported by the state. We funded 18 of these projects, but were able to combine a few together so that most of the 23 received some funding. Budgets were critically examined and adjusted so that highest priority needs could be met within the funding allocated to the Region. A list of some of the accomplishments from these projects includes:

1. CWD surveillance continued on several refuges in cooperation with their respective states and through FWMAO on reservations. CWD was found for the first time on the Wind River Reservation. Some FY06 surveillance will be completed during the upcoming early fall hunting seasons. Our field stations are integrated within each state's surveillance efforts so that data are consistent across broad landscapes. In most cases GIS layers were created with geographically explicit surveillance data and shared with the state. We continued to fund intensive surveillance for high confidence of detection of low prevalence of CWD at locations such as the National Elk Refuge, with nationally significant cervid resources.
2. Aerial and ground census of cervid population numbers and densities augmented data collected in FY05 on several refuges. These projects collected data in cooperation with the state using methodology consistent with state census efforts.
3. Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) has a long-term cooperative project with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission on a research project using radiotelemetry on deer from the Refuge and nearby known CWD endemic areas to assess movement of CWD on the landscape and risk to Refuge cervid populations. Crescent Lake also completed an aerial census, deployed global position satellite collars on deer, and provided ground assistance to the state on animal relocation.
4. Ft. Niobrara NWR is a range-restricted fenced Refuge with bison, elk, and deer populations. Last year the Refuge conducted a risk assessment of their boundary to determine where risk of CWD incursion is highest and how those risks might be mitigated or prevented. This year a monitoring effort will be started to assess movement of deer across Refuge boundaries. CWD is known in areas within 10 miles of the Refuge.
5. Ft. Niobrara NWR conducted an active surveillance program by collecting deer and elk on the Refuge to survey for CWD. To make greatest use of Refuge and Regional efforts, herd health monitoring for other diseases was included. The state participated in these activities on the Refuge, and Refuge staff worked with the state on hunter surveys conducted off Refuge.
6. Sully's Hill National Game Preserve (NGP) is also fenced and has bison, elk, and deer populations. Using motion camera technology, the Preserve conducted a boundary risk assessment for CWD incursion in FY05 and entered its second year of monitoring in FY06. Monitoring has revealed some areas where deer inside and outside the Preserve are making fence line contact.
7. Sully's Hill NGP also partnered with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department to eliminate areas of transboundary risk. Three new cattle guards were installed along the Preserve big game perimeter to prevent transboundary movement of large ungulates. The Preserve partnered with the North Dakota Board of Animal Health to modify the entrance

gate to the Preserve last year, and is in the process of contracting for a new gate on the south side of the big game perimeter.

8. Sully's Hill NGP conducted active surveillance by removing 18 white-tailed deer and 4 elk for CWD and herd health surveillance. A cervid management plan, with specific attention to health issues, is being developed.
9. Jones Hole National Fish Hatchery (NFH) continued with their CWD educational campaign with their nearly 10,000 visitors. The Hatchery also provided ancillary support to the Utah Department of Wildlife Resources for CWD surveillance on and near the Hatchery by conducting visual observations for clinically affected cervids.
10. The Lander FWMAO cooperated with the Shoshone and Arapaho Tribal Fish and Game offices and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department in surveillance for CWD on the Wind River Reservation. CWD was found on the Wind River Reservation, and ongoing surveillance will attempt to define the extent of CWD affected areas.
11. The Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR installed a cervid-proof gate at the south entrance to the Refuge. The Refuge is located in an endemic area for CWD in Colorado, but ongoing surveillance has not found CWD in Refuge resources. Late FY06, the Refuge, in conjunction with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, will use antemortem sampling (tonsillar biopsy) to assess status of Refuge resources and movement of deer.
12. Bowdoin NWR conducted a winter aerial survey of cervids on waterfowl production areas under Refuge management, along with the Refuge itself.
13. The Montana FWMAO purchased CWD surveillance sampling kits for work in conjunction with the seven Montana Native American Reservations.
14. The Charles M. Russell NWR provided funding to the State of Montana for Refuge CWD sample processing and worked collaboratively with the state for an aerial survey of Refuge cervid resources. The CWD management response environmental assessment started in FY05 was completed. A final version will be released when the state has completed their environmental assessment.

#### Current Status:

We have CWD surveillance and response plans covering all refuges in Region 6, along with plans for two fish hatcheries and several tribes through cooperation with two state FWMAOs.

Implementation of research, surveillance, and management projects started in FY05 is the focus of most funding expenditure in FY06. Funding requests continue to exceed funding availability.

Cooperation and coordination with the states has been exceptional throughout the entire Region. As in the past, our field stations implemented a number of projects to effectively assist states and tribes in addressing CWD while protecting wildlife resources of the National Wildlife Refuge System. We plan to use FY07 funding to complete implemented projects and to address action items identified in station CWD surveillance and response plans. CWD is more widespread than in previous years, and we also plan to continue our national leadership role and provide assistance to other Service regions in their effort to deal with CWD.

#### Attachments (1 Table)

cc: w/atts.

Casey Stemler, Special Assistant to Director

Table 1. CWD Implementation Projects Funded in FY06

<b>Location</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Sully's Hill NGP	Risk assessment of transboundary cervid movements and development of risk mitigation measures	\$6,200
Rocky Mountain Arsenal	Risk mitigation: prevention of cervid movement across the southern Refuge boundary.	\$23,500
Ft. Niobrara NWR	Risk assessment of transboundary movements of cervids at Ft. Niobrara through use of radiotelemetry	\$42,000
Ouray NWR	Hunter sample surveillance for CWD on and around Ouray NWR	\$8,000
National Elk Refuge	Increased sampling sensitivity in surveillance for CWD on the National Elk Refuge	\$8,900
Crescent Lake NWR	Aerial surveys to determine movements, distribution and intermixing of nearby CWD-affected and Refuge mule deer populations at Crescent Lake NWR using radiotelemetry	\$24,100
Lander FWMAO	Increase the CWD surveillance on the Wind River Reservation	\$10,000
Charles M. Russell NWR	State-federal cooperative CWD surveillance program on the CMR NWR	\$17,100
Montana FWMAO	Training, supplies and equipment for CWD surveillance on 7 Native American Reservations	\$8,100
Benton Lake NWR	Passive CWD surveillance on Benton Lake NWR	\$6,000
Jones Hole NFH	State-federal cooperative CWD surveillance on and near Jones Hole NFH	\$2,100
Crescent Lake NWR	Addition of Global Position Satellite collars to cervid movement and risk study	\$14,500
Ft. Niobrara NWR	Herd health assessment and CWD surveillance for cervids on Ft. Niobrara NWR	\$3,500
Bowdoin NWR	Aerial census of cervid populations and passive surveillance for CWD on Bowdoin NWR and Wetland Management District	\$2,500
Charles M. Russell NWR	Aerial census of cervid populations on the CMR NWR.	\$12,800
Sully's Hill NGP	Cervid management, population assessment and CWD surveillance on Sully's Hill NGP	\$3,300
Ft. Niobrara NWR	State-federal cooperative CWD surveillance near Ft. Niobrara NWR	\$3,000
Sully's Hill NGP	Risk mitigation: installation of a boundary gate to prevent cervid transboundary movements	\$3,400