



QUALITY DEER MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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September 22, 2008

Mr. Keith Charters, Chairman
Michigan Natural Resources Commission
Mason Building, Sixth Floor
P.O. Box 30028
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Chairman Charters and NRC Members:

On behalf of the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA), we are writing to express our support for the Michigan Department of Natural Resource's (DNR) chronic wasting disease (CWD) surveillance and response plan. This plan was developed and critically evaluated by wildlife and disease professionals following the discovery of CWD in Wisconsin in 2002. Herein, we also propose the inclusion of additional action items we believe would strengthen the existing plan.

The recent discovery of CWD in a captive white-tailed deer in Kent County, Michigan has generated serious concern among the state's deer hunters, landowners, resource managers and agricultural producers. This also gives Michigan the unenviable distinction of being the only state in which both CWD and Bovine TB have been detected in white-tailed deer. These disease concerns are justified given that Michigan's estimated 1.5 million deer and nearly 800,000 hunters generate approximately \$1 billion for the state's economy annually and support many thousands of jobs. If CWD becomes established in Michigan's free-ranging deer herd, it would result in significant negative impacts to many sectors of Michigan's already struggling economy.

A key component of the DNR's surveillance and response plan is a ban on the baiting and feeding of deer in the entire Lower Peninsula, which QDMA supports. While the exact modes of CWD transmission in wild deer are not fully understood, direct contact with infected deer via saliva is one known mode of transmission. Thus, spread of the disease likely would be accelerated where deer are concentrated at bait or feed sites. While the localized baiting ban proposed by the Michigan House of Representatives may have been worthy of consideration if the DNR had time to test all captive facilities linked to the Kent County case and the wild herds around these facilities, this simply was not possible. The time constraint was further complicated given that the early antlerless deer season is already underway in Michigan. We recognize the hardship this ban will have on some Michigan farmers and understand the importance of this practice to many Michigan hunters. However, we believe the DNR took the only biologically and socially responsible action to minimize the threat of CWD to Michigan's wild deer herd and the future of deer hunting in Michigan.

The state of Michigan, led by the DNR, now faces a difficult but vital task – to do everything possible to determine the extent of CWD in both wild and captive deer and to implement all necessary and reasonable measures to protect its wild deer resource. Michigan now joins a growing list of states in which CWD has been discovered. However, among these, Michigan has the largest deer population, highest number of hunters and greatest impact on the U.S. hunting economy. As such, Michigan must assume a leadership role at the national level in the battle against CWD.

To accomplish such a task, the Michigan legislature should immediately make available necessary appropriations enabling the DNR to implement an effective education, research, surveillance and management program. Key aspects of this program should include:

- Spearheading a national CWD research effort to better understand the impact of CWD on wild deer herds and the future of hunting. The impact of this disease on the U.S. hunting economy could be catastrophic given that 70% of the \$67 billion hunting industry is generated from white-tailed deer.
- Evaluating all captive deer facilities in Michigan and ranking them according to disease risk to wild deer, and to implement testing, record keeping and movement regulations as necessary.
- Testing all captive facilities with known linkages to the Kent County facility and to aggressively sample the wild deer herds around each facility.
- Evaluating the potential risk associated with taxidermy operations and captive deer facilities which manufacture products containing deer urine and/or feces.
- Collaborating with conservation organizations such as QDMA and individuals with wildlife habitat expertise to educate hunters and landowners on the benefits of food plots and native habitat improvement as alternatives to baiting and feeding.

In closing, we recognize that this is a trying time for Michigan's hunters, landowners, wildlife managers and farmers. We applaud the DNR's courage in making this difficult decision and hope the Kent County deer was an isolated case. In closing, we urge you to join with us in supporting the existing plan while expanding it to include the critical action items listed above. Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Michigan's natural resources.

Respectfully,

Brian Murphy
Chief Executive Officer

Kip Adams, Director
Education & Outreach, Northern Region

Leon Hank
Michigan State Chapter President

cc: Rebecca Humphries, DNR Director

Michigan Branch Presidents and Members

About QDMA

The QDMA is an international nonprofit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to ethical hunting, sound deer management and preservation of the deer-hunting heritage. Currently, QDMA has more than 50,000 members, including over 3,000 of the nation's leading natural resource professionals. Michigan ranks second nationally in membership with nearly 4,000 members. Given its commitment to research, education and stewardship, QDMA is widely regarded as the most respected whitetail conservation organization in North America.