

TESTIMONY OF

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Concerning:

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Before the

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND WATER

April 6, 2004

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. My name is Gary Wolfe and I represent the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance...a coalition of fifteen organizations and businesses who are deeply concerned about Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to share our concerns regarding CWD, an issue of considerable importance to sportsmen across the country. Thank you for giving this serious wildlife disease issue your attention.

CWD Alliance

I would like to take a moment to share with you a brief history of the CWD Alliance, as it illustrates the significant concern CWD has generated among America's sportsmen, conservationists and the outdoor industry.

In January 2002, the Boone and Crockett Club, Mule Deer Foundation and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (three of the nation's leading sportsmen's-based, nonprofit wildlife conservation organizations) were becoming increasingly concerned about the impact CWD was having, and may continue to have, on North America's wild deer and elk populations. They were also concerned about the impact this disease may have upon millions of hunters' desire and opportunity to hunt deer and elk each fall, and upon their confidence to put healthful wild venison on their families' tables. In response to these concerns, these three organizations initiated a collaborative project...the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance.

During the ensuing two years, other organizations and businesses joined the Alliance's effort. The CWD Alliance currently consists of 15 partners and sponsors:

Boone and Crockett Club	Izaak Walton League of America
Mule Deer Foundation	Camp Fire Conservation Fund
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	Dallas Safari Club
National Shooting Sports Foundation	Whitetails Unlimited
Pope and Young Club	Cabela's (sponsor)
Quality Deer Management Association	Bio-Rad Laboratories (sponsor)
Wildlife Management Institute	IDEXX Laboratories (sponsor)
Bowhunting Preservation Alliance	

The mission of the CWD Alliance is to *promote responsible and accurate communications regarding CWD, and to support strategies that effectively control CWD to minimize its impact on wild, free-ranging deer and elk populations.*

Alliance partners pool resources, share information and cooperate on projects and activities to positively impact the CWD issue. The Alliance recognizes that appropriate public information and education are vital to the resolution of the CWD dilemma. In an effort to promote responsible, timely and accurate communications the Alliance has:

- Developed and maintained a comprehensive, informative CWD website to facilitate the public's access to basic CWD information, breaking CWD news, scientific literature, recommendations from professional wildlife management agencies, and links to other CWD information sources. The website (www.cwd-info.org) was launched in July 2002, and has received more than 257,000 visits.
- Co-sponsored and/or participated in CWD conferences and seminars in numerous locals throughout North America.
- Served as a resource for media sources seeking credible information about CWD.
- Published responsible and accurate CWD articles in their respective organization's member magazines.
- Collaborated on the development of a CWD information and training video for hunters.
- Participated on several interdisciplinary, multi-agency CWD task forces and committees.
- Participated as a partner with state and federal agencies to assist with implementing the "Communications" section of the *Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies and Tribes in Managing Chronic Wasting Disease in Wild and Captive Cervids*.

Alliance partners and sponsors collectively contributed more than \$102,000 during 2002-2003 to support the CWD Alliance project, and have pledged an additional \$83,000 for the Alliance's 2004 activities.

National CWD Strategy

The CWD Alliance has actively monitored the responses of the various state and federal agencies to CWD, and has participated in numerous planning activities and task force meetings. We believe there has been an exceptional level of interagency coordination and cooperation in responding to this wildlife disease crisis.

In June 2002, a task force of federal agencies and state wildlife management agencies completed the *Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies and Tribes in Managing Chronic Wasting Disease in Wild and Captive Cervids (National CWD Plan)* and presented it to Congress. The *National CWD Plan* lays out an aggressive, coordinated interagency strategy for managing CWD, and was followed-up by an *Implementation Document* that identified specific actions for addressing CWD. State wildlife agencies, universities, and federal agencies have utilized the *Implementation Document* to guide their response to CWD and have directed funds to the ongoing battle against this disease.

The *Implementation Document* identified budget needs to address CWD, excluding funding for environmental compliance activities, of \$108,360,000 over a three-year period. The majority of this funding was identified to come from Congressional appropriations, while the remainder would be redirected funds from various federal, state, and tribal agencies.

We appreciate the funding Congress has authorized for CWD, and the support APHIS and the USGS have provided to the state wildlife management agencies. Considerable progress has been made, especially in terms of surveillance and management of CWD in free-ranging cervids, research, dissemination of information, and publication by APHIS of the proposed rules on *Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Herd Certification Program and Interstate Movement of Captive Deer and Elk*. However, there has not been adequate federal funding for **full implementation** of the *National CWD Plan*.

How Congress Can Help

Significant progress has been made addressing the challenges of managing CWD, but much more work is needed. **State wildlife management agencies are on the front line of CWD management, surveillance, and research; and are the agencies in greatest need of financial support for CWD activities.**

State wildlife agencies have redirected critical wildlife management funds from other programs to address CWD issues. The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) reports that state wildlife agencies collectively expended approximately \$15.2M on CWD in FY 2003 (Progress Report on the Implementation Document for the Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies and Tribes in Managing Chronic Wasting Disease in Wild Cervids, October 2002-September 2003). The CWD Alliance is especially concerned that this redirection of limited state wildlife agency funds is not adequate to address the CWD issue, and will have negative impacts on other important wildlife management and conservation programs.

We would like to offer the following general recommendations regarding how Congress can support state wildlife management agencies, state agricultural agencies, tribal governments and federal agencies in the control of CWD:

- **Expanded funding for the *National CWD Plan* is a top priority.** The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) recently identified \$34.15M of CWD funding needs for the FY 2005 federal budget (Appendix A). We encourage Congress to seriously consider IAFWA's recommendations when determining appropriations for the *National CWD Plan* in the FY 2005 federal budget, especially the suggested \$19.2M of grants to assist states and tribes.

- **Additional legislation granting agencies authority to address CWD or creating additional bureaucracy is not needed.** Successful control and eradication of CWD will depend upon a cooperative approach and a well-coordinated effort between federal and state agencies. The respective federal and state agencies have the necessary authority and mechanisms to address this issue. They have been doing an exemplary job of coordinating and collaborating with each other; an excellent strategy has been identified via the *National CWD Plan*; and specific action plans have been identified in the *Implementation Document*. Congress can best assist through the appropriations process.
- **Any CWD legislation should recognize and reinforce the principle that state wildlife agencies have the primary responsibility for managing wild cervid populations.** We encourage Congress to rely heavily on the recommendations of the state wildlife agencies when considering CWD legislation.

We would like to thank Senators Allard, Feingold and Crapo for introducing S1366, the **Chronic Wasting Disease Financial Assistance Act of 2003**. It addresses many of the concerns we have regarding adequate funding for the *National CWD Plan*, and is consistent with our general recommendations regarding how Congress can help state and tribal wildlife management agencies deal with CWD. Specifically we:

- Are pleased that S1366 recognizes that “The States retain undisputed primacy and policy-making authority with regard to wildlife management...” (section 2 (b)(1)).
- Support “grants to assist States in developing and implementing long term management strategies to address chronic wasting disease in wild cervids” (section 3(a)), and “in responding to chronic wasting disease outbreaks in wild cervids” (section 4(a)).
- Support “grants to tribal wildlife management agencies to assist Indian tribes in developing and implementing long term management strategies to address chronic wasting disease in wild cervids” (section 5(a)).
- Believe the \$20.5M of grants to states and tribes authorized by S1366 is urgently needed by the states, and is necessary to adequately implement the *National CWD Plan*.
- Request that any CWD funding that is administered through the Federal Assistance Program of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (section 6) not be a redirection of existing Pitman-Robertson Federal Aid funds to CWD, but newly appropriated money.

In conclusion, America's wild deer and elk populations are priceless treasures. They are a source of beauty, inspiration and recreation for millions of Americans, and they infuse billions of dollars annually into our national economy. Their health and vitality must be protected!

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and recommendations on this very important wildlife disease issue.

Respectfully Submitted,

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APPENDIX A

ASSISTANCE TO STATES, FEDERAL AGENCIES, AND TRIBES IN MANAGING CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE IN WILD AND CAPTIVE CERVIDS

Recommendations from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (March 3, 2004)

States, Federal agencies, and Tribes are addressing chronic wasting disease (CWD) according to the 2002 *Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies and Tribes in Managing Chronic Wasting Disease in Wild and Captive Cervids* (National CWD Plan) and the *Implementation Document* for the National CWD Plan. Considerable progress has been made, especially in terms of surveillance and management of CWD in free-ranging cervids, research, dissemination of information, and publication by APHIS of the proposed rules on *Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Herd Certification Program and Interstate Movement of Captive Deer and Elk*. To date, there has been no consistent or unified Federal funding for full implementation of the National Plan. However, USDA/APHIS/Veterinary Services has provided funding toward control of CWD in the farmed cervid industry and to the 50 state wildlife management agencies for public education, as well as surveillance and management of CWD in wild deer and elk. USDI agencies have redirected limited resources toward their own CWD research and monitoring programs, and USGS has provided a small amount of funds to several States for CWD monitoring. Because of inadequate funding to all State and Federal agencies, important CWD-related activities are being implemented incrementally and with limited coordination. State wildlife management agencies are on the front line of CWD management, surveillance, and research and are the agencies in greatest need of financial support for CWD activities. To date, APHIS grants for CWD work have been the most significant and helpful sources of Federal assistance to State Wildlife Management Agencies.

DISEASE MANAGEMENT---Goals are prevention, elimination, maintenance or reduction of established prevalence, and/or containment of CWD, depending on site-specific CWD status. Needs are \$9M (through USDA-APHIS) for States, \$2M for USDA, and \$3.5M for USDI, including enhanced funding through USGS-BRD for the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS).

SURVEILLANCE---Goals are development of sampling plans, early detection, determination of distribution and prevalence of CWD in free-ranging cervids and epidemiologic investigations in the case of CWD in farmed cervids. Funding needs are \$7M (through USDA-APHIS) for States, \$1M for USDA, and \$2.25M for USDI, including enhanced funding through USGS-BRD for SCWDS.

RESEARCH---Goals are rapid diagnostic tests, better understanding of epidemiology and pathogenesis of CWD, management tools, and understanding human dimensions related to CWD. Needs are \$3.2M (through USDA) for States, \$1.5M for USDA, and \$3.5M for USDI.

DIAGNOSTICS---Objectives are to establish sufficient laboratory capacity for testing, continue use of the immunohistochemistry technique as the gold standard, assure diagnostic sample quality, and assist with validation and application of high throughput screening tests. Funding needs are \$625K for USDA to assist State laboratories and validate new tests and \$50K to USDI for training assistance.

COMMUNICATIONS---Objectives are to increase awareness and educate target audiences, provide timely scientific information on current knowledge and advances in CWD management, and provide scientific and technical training to agency personnel regarding CWD. State and Federal (USDI) needs are approximately \$105K and \$400K, respectively.

FY2005 NEEDS TOTALS

States (through appropriations to USDA) for free ranging cervids: \$19.2M
USDA: \$5.1M
USDI: \$9.85M

APPENDIX B
Biographical Sketch
Gary J. Wolfe

Gary Wolfe is a lifelong outdoorsman and conservationist. He attended college at the University of New Mexico, majoring in biology and chemistry, then earned masters and doctorate degrees in wildlife biology from Colorado State University. His Ph.D. dissertation was entitled “Population Dynamics and Management of the Vermejo Park Elk Herd”.

His first professional natural resources job was as a seasonal ranger at Mount Rainier National Park in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. He spent four summers as a backcountry and climbing ranger at Mount Rainier, followed by a season at Big Bend National Park in Texas.

Gary spent 12 years at Vermejo Park Ranch, a working cattle ranch and world-class hunting and fishing resort in Northern New Mexico. Starting as the ranch’s fishery and wildlife biologist, he completed his tenure there as Vice President and General Manager.

Gary joined the staff of the fledgling Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in 1986 as the organization’s second field director. He spent 15 years with the Elk Foundation in various positions, including Director of Field Operations, Executive Vice President & COO, and from 1998-2001 as President & CEO.

Following his retirement from the Elk Foundation, Gary founded Conservation Resources Group, a private natural resources consulting company. One of his major focus areas has been chronic wasting disease, and he has served as the CWD Alliance’s project leader since January 2002. He represents the Alliance on the multi-state CWD Task Force, and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ Wildlife Health Committee. He developed a comprehensive CWD website, has presented testimony at congressional CWD hearings, has given numerous media interviews, and has spoken at CWD conferences and symposia in both the United States and Canada.

Gary and his wife, Rita, live in Missoula, Montana.