

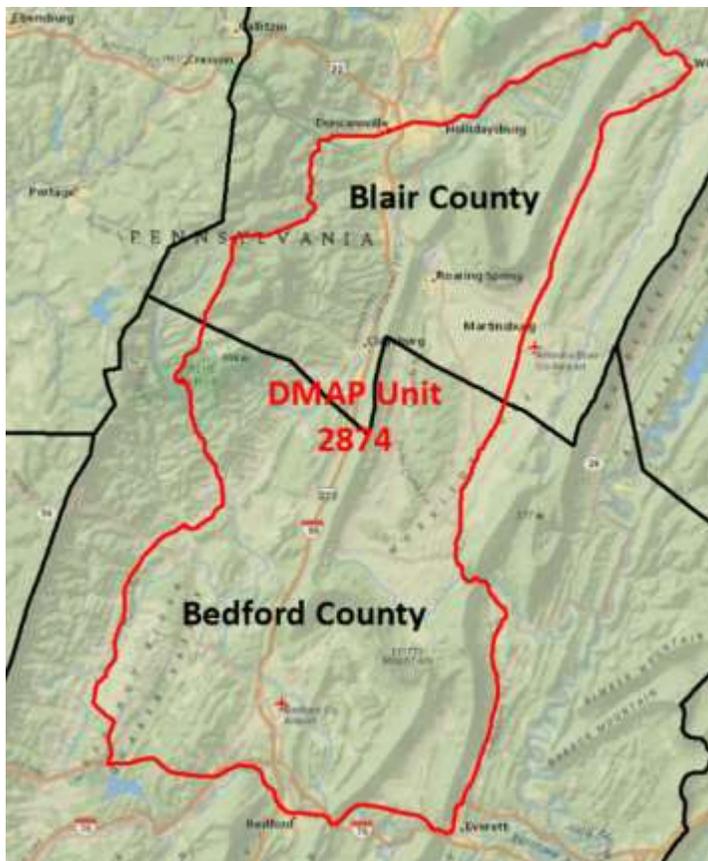


# Can We Control Chronic Wasting Disease?

***The Game Commission and the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Penn State are conducting a study in Bedford and Blair counties to determine best management practices to help control Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Pennsylvania.***

## **Where will this study take place?**

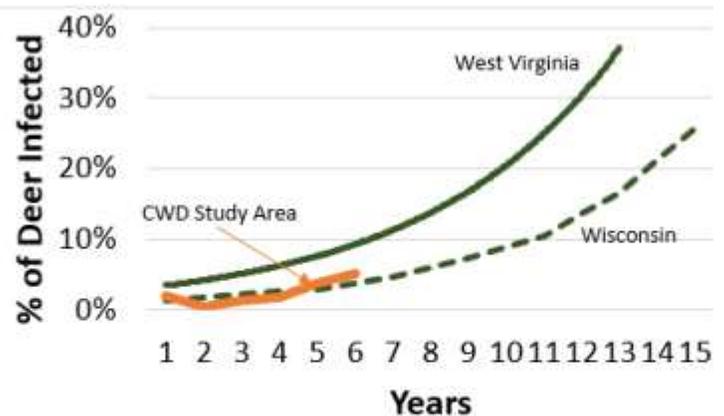
This research will take place in DMAP Unit 2874 located in southern Blair and northern Bedford counties. This area is where the majority of deer infected with CWD have been found.



## **Why do this study now?**

Since 2012, when CWD—an always fatal disease of white-tailed deer and elk—was detected in Bedford and Blair counties, the Game Commission has relied on hunters and increased hunting opportunities to reduce the number of deer with CWD.

Unfortunately, each year more deer have tested positive with CWD. The first 6 years of the CWD infection is tracking infections in other states. If nothing new is done and this trend continues, 25% of the deer could be infected in the next decade.



As the number of deer with CWD increases, deer populations and deer hunting will suffer. Deer populations with high prevalence of CWD have lower survival rates and are not sustainable unless deer hunting opportunities are reduced.

Although future effects of CWD on people are unknown, past history of these types of diseases (for example, Mad Cow Disease) demonstrate a need for action to minimize exposure to CWD.

Doing nothing to prevent the spread of CWD will allow the disease to worsen. To protect deer populations, the Game Commission is taking steps to work with hunters and landowners to slow the spread of the disease. These efforts are consistent with our mission to manage Pennsylvania's wildlife for current and future generations.

## What can be done to stop the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease?

There is no vaccine or treatment for CWD, and there is no approved live-animal test for CWD.

To date, wildlife agencies around the country have attempted various methods to contain CWD with some success.

Where success has occurred, management actions reduced deer populations using increased hunter harvests and targeted removal of deer.

## How will this study improve efforts to control Chronic Wasting Disease ?

This study will seek to answer the following questions:

- What are the survival rates and the causes of deer mortality in this area?
- What actions can stabilize or reduce CWD?
- What management actions will the public support?

This research will investigate if increasing hunter harvest and targeted removal of additional deer after the hunting seasons has an effect on the spread or prevalence of CWD.

The Game Commission will continue current CWD management actions such as:

- Collecting and testing thousands of deer statewide for CWD;
- Providing increased hunting opportunities so hunters have the first opportunity to remove deer and provide samples for CWD testing; and
- Providing bins for hunters to drop harvested

deer heads for free CWD testing

This study will incorporate new actions such as:

- Capturing and marking deer in the study area to gain information on deer movements and survival
- Estimating the size of local deer populations
- Increasing hunting opportunities
- Targeted removal of deer after 2018-19 hunting seasons, as needed
- Surveys of local landowner and hunter opinions

## How can the public help?

The Game Commission intends to implement an evaluation of local deer population reduction for both the short-term and long-term benefits of deer, deer hunting, and public satisfaction.

The state considers both hunters and landowners to be important partners in ongoing efforts to slow the spread of this always-fatal disease. Hunters can take advantage of hunting opportunities to harvest deer and submit harvested deer heads using head-drop bins for free CWD testing. Landowners can provide access to land to capture and mark deer. Landowner permission will be obtained before engaging in the

***Landowner permission to capture deer does NOT mean you are giving permission to remove deer from your property.***

targeted removal of any deer on private land.

## What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

CWD is a contagious, always-fatal disease that infects deer and elk. CWD was first detected in captive and wild deer in Pennsylvania in 2012. CWD destroys brain tissue and eventually causes the death of the animal. The disease progresses slowly and it may take months or years for the animal to show signs of the disease including emaciation, weakness, and abnormal behavior.

Other diseases similar to CWD include Mad Cow Disease in cattle; Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans;

and scrapie in sheep and goats. CWD was first recognized in deer and elk in Colorado in 1967. The cause of CWD is an abnormally-shaped protein, called a prion. Prions are concentrated in the brain, nervous system, and lymphoid tissues of infected animals but can be found throughout the animal. Prions are shed in bodily fluids (urine, feces, saliva).

CWD is spread through deer-to-deer contact and prion-contaminated environments.

Prions are nearly impossible to destroy and can remain infectious in the environment for years.

Animals may be infected and excrete prions for months to a year before showing signs of disease. This means, deer living in areas with a high deer population are more likely to become exposed, infected, and spread the disease.

## Is Chronic Wasting Disease dangerous to Humans?

Currently, no evidence exists that CWD is transmissible to humans or traditional livestock.

However, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that *“Specific studies have begun that focus on identifying human prion disease in a population that is at increased risk for exposure to potentially CWD-infected deer or elk meat. Because of the long time between exposure to CWD and the development of disease, many years of continued follow-up are required to be able to say what the risk, if any, of CWD is to humans.”*

Therefore, the CDC – along with the Game Commission – recommend that meat from CWD-positive animals not be consumed.

**Does this deer have Chronic Wasting Disease? It is impossible to know by looking at a deer. Deer infected with CWD will look healthy for months while spreading the disease.**

## Looking Forward

Managing CWD in deer is a complicated and evolving process.

Since CWD is very difficult to control, and is now in our deer population, the Game Commission believes that a close partnership with hunters, landowners, and the public is the best strategy for managing this disease.

The Game Commission also recognizes that efforts to control CWD will likely reduce some local deer populations in the short-term. It is our hope that working together with the public will help minimize immediate costs, and ensure that deer populations are protected for current and future generations.

## For More Information or Questions about this Study:

Contact a deer biologist via email

[ra-pgcdeerquestions@pa.gov](mailto:ra-pgcdeerquestions@pa.gov)

Visit the Game Commission’s Website

[www.pgc.pa.gov](http://www.pgc.pa.gov), click on Chronic Wasting Disease under “Quick Clicks” or go to: <http://bit.ly/PGC-CWD>.

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**For local information about non-study topics, reach out to the region office that serves the county in question:**

**Northwest Region**

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Phone: 814-432-3187, 814-432-3188

**Southwest Region**

Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington, Westmoreland counties  
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**Southcentral Region**

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**Northeast Region**

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**Southeast Region**

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