



# Chronic Wasting Disease in Georgia

**Surveillance and Management Plan**  
**Department of Natural Resources**  
**January 27, 2025**

# Hunting in Georgia

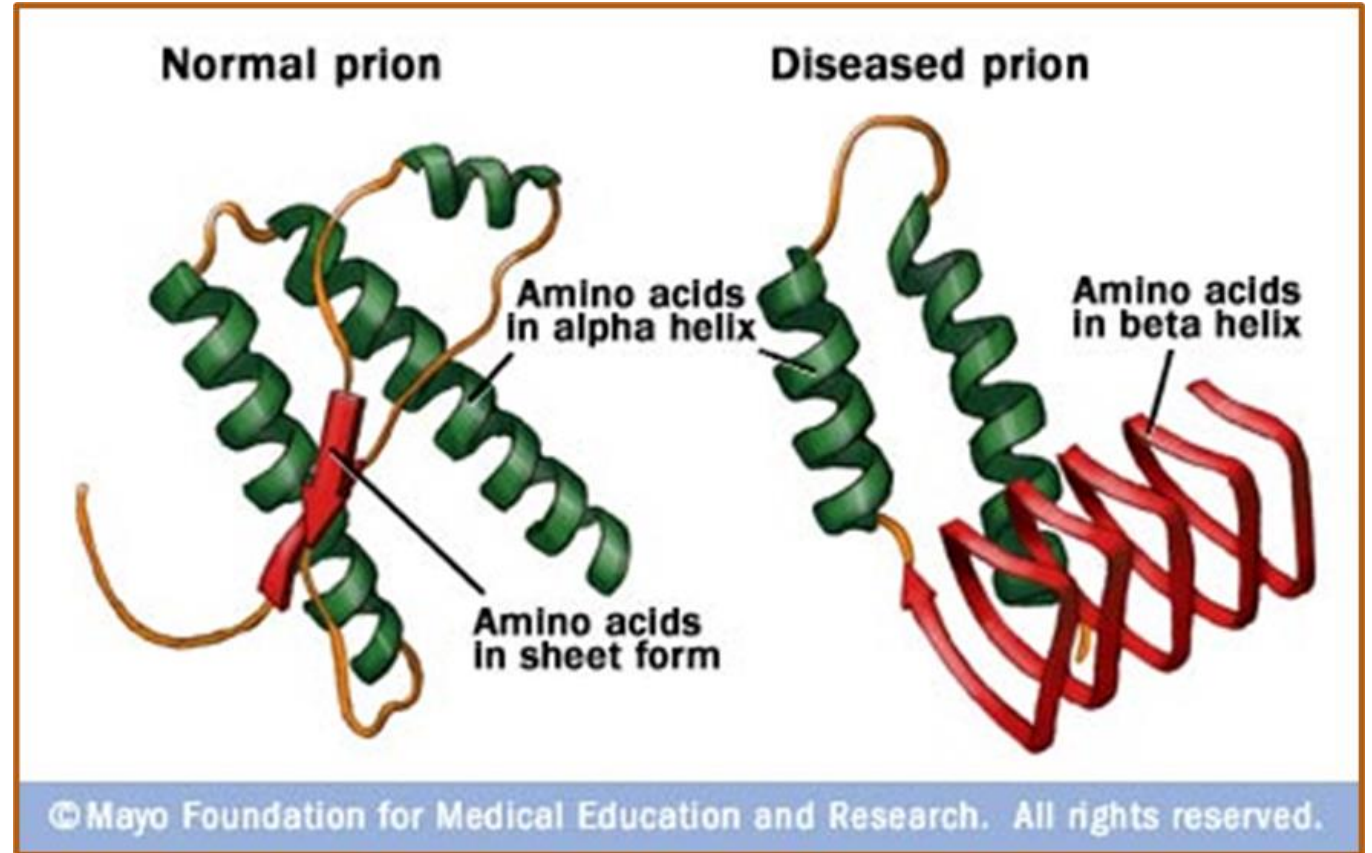
- State mammal of Georgia
  - White-tailed deer
- \$1.6 billion economic impact in Georgia
- 150,000+ jobs
- 600,000 hunters
- Generates \$23 million in Pittman-Robertson funds
- 280,000 deer harvested annually



# What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

- Neurological disease affecting deer, elk, & moose.
- Caused by infectious, misshapen prion protein.
- 18-30 months incubation period.

**100% of infected deer die.**



# Visible Signs and Symptoms

- The incubation period is so long that most deer with CWD die of other causes or are killed by hunters before becoming symptomatic.
- **Infected deer look normal** until the final few months of the disease.
- Infected deer shed prions, contaminating the environment and exposing other deer they contact before symptoms appear.



# An Invisible Disease?

- Few sick deer are seen until prevalence is high
  - Symptoms
    - Dramatic weight loss
    - Droopy head and ears
    - Drooling
    - Abnormal behavior
- Appear months/years after infection  
– final stages of CWD

**This is why routine surveillance  
is needed to catch it when  
prevalence is low.**



# How Is It Spread?

Moving live deer is the #1 way CWD has (and continues to) spread long distances.

## Direct:

- Deer-to-deer contact
  - Saliva, urine, and feces

## Indirect:

- Infectious carcass parts
  - Brain and spinal column
- Contaminated environments

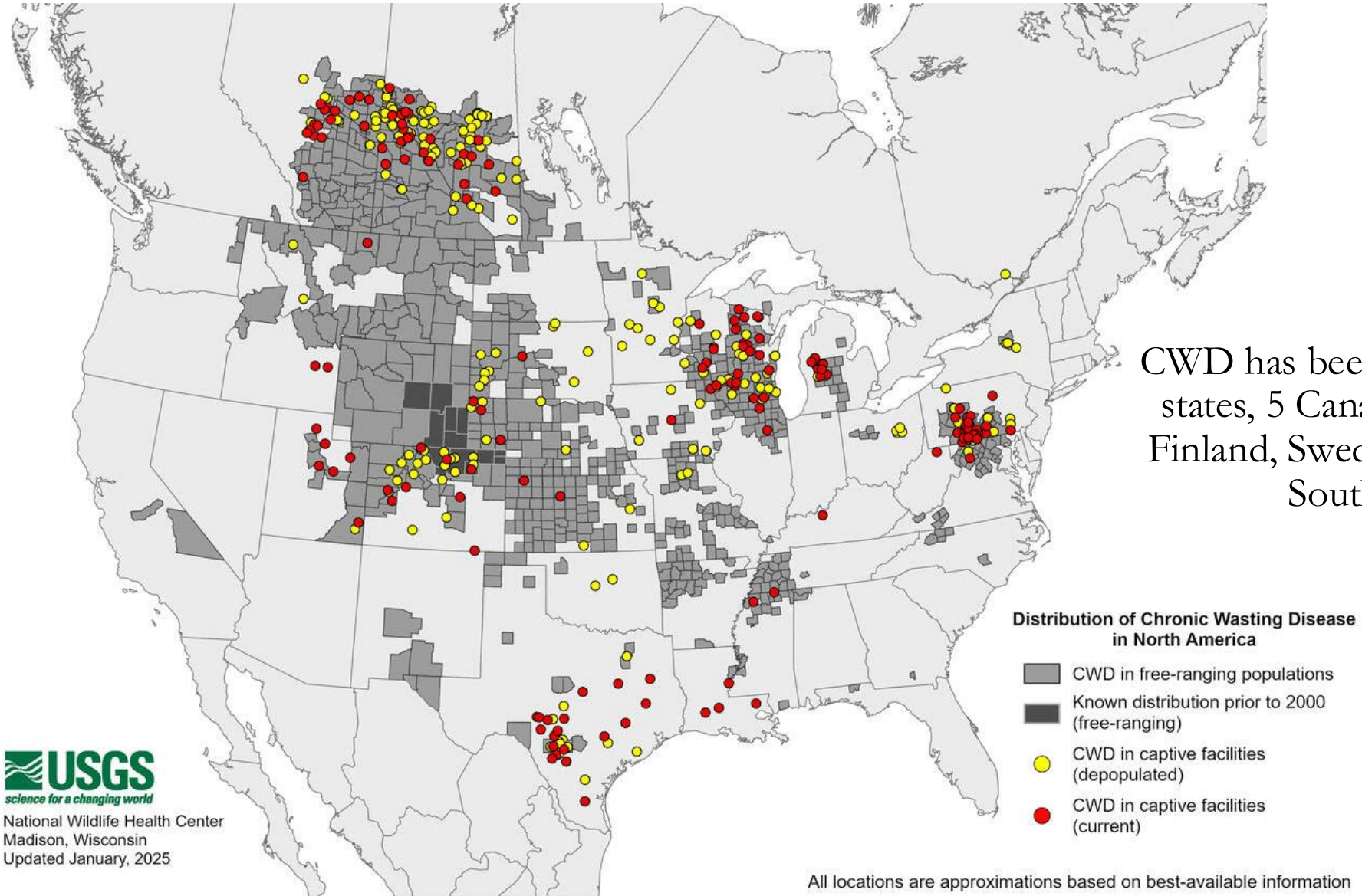


# What If We Do Nothing?

- Unlike other diseases that come and go as survivors develop immunity, CWD steadily spreads if left unmanaged.
- Eradication in a wild population isn't feasible.
- Larger geographic area becomes contaminated as prevalence increases over time.



# 2025 Distribution of CWD

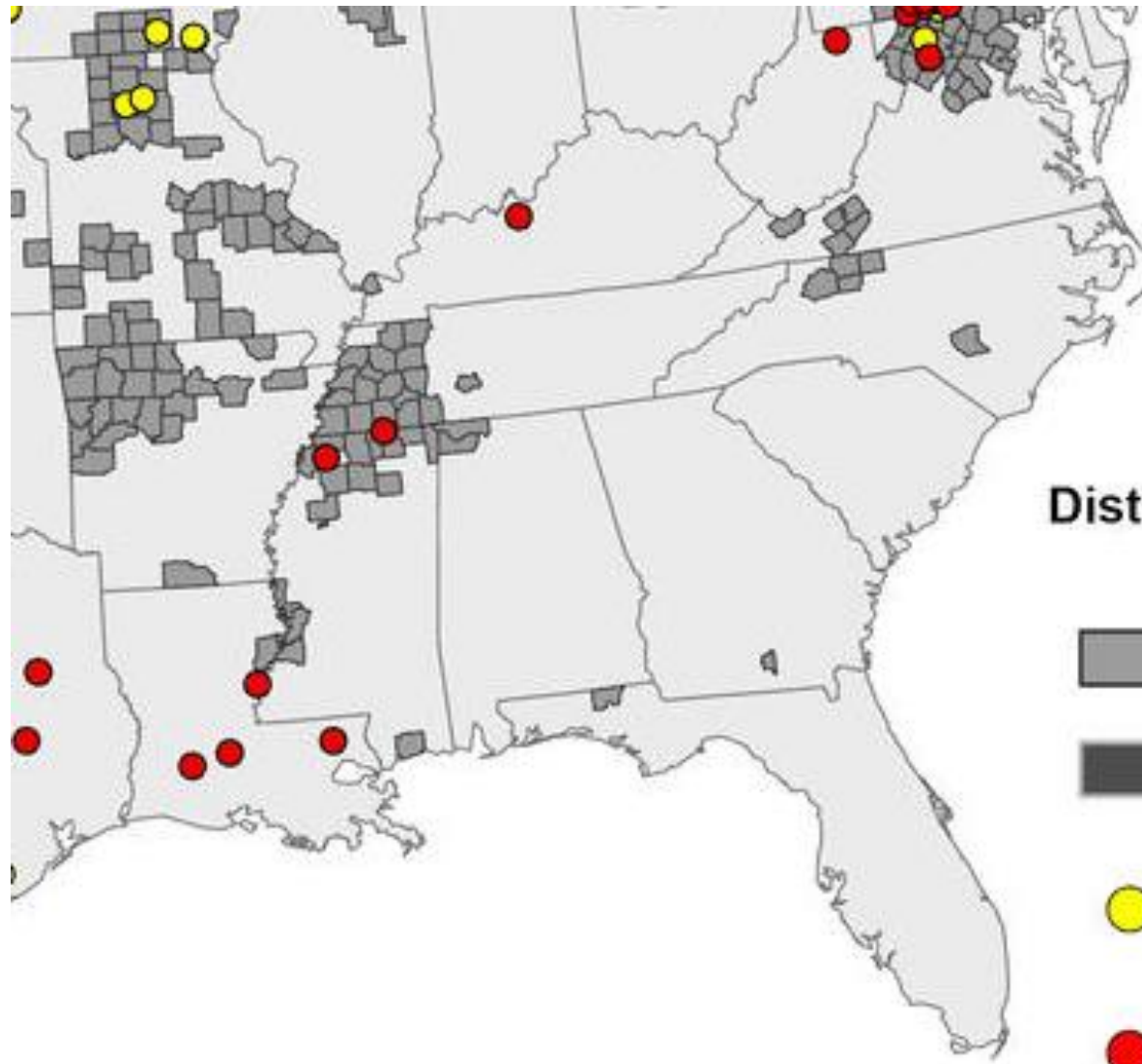


CWD has been found in 36 US states, 5 Canadian Provinces, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and South Korea

All locations are approximations based on best-available information



# CWD in the Southeast



## Distribution of Chronic Wasting Disease in North America

- CWD in free-ranging populations
- Known distribution prior to 2000 (free-ranging)
- CWD in captive facilities (depopulated)
- CWD in captive facilities (current)

# Human Health Concerns?

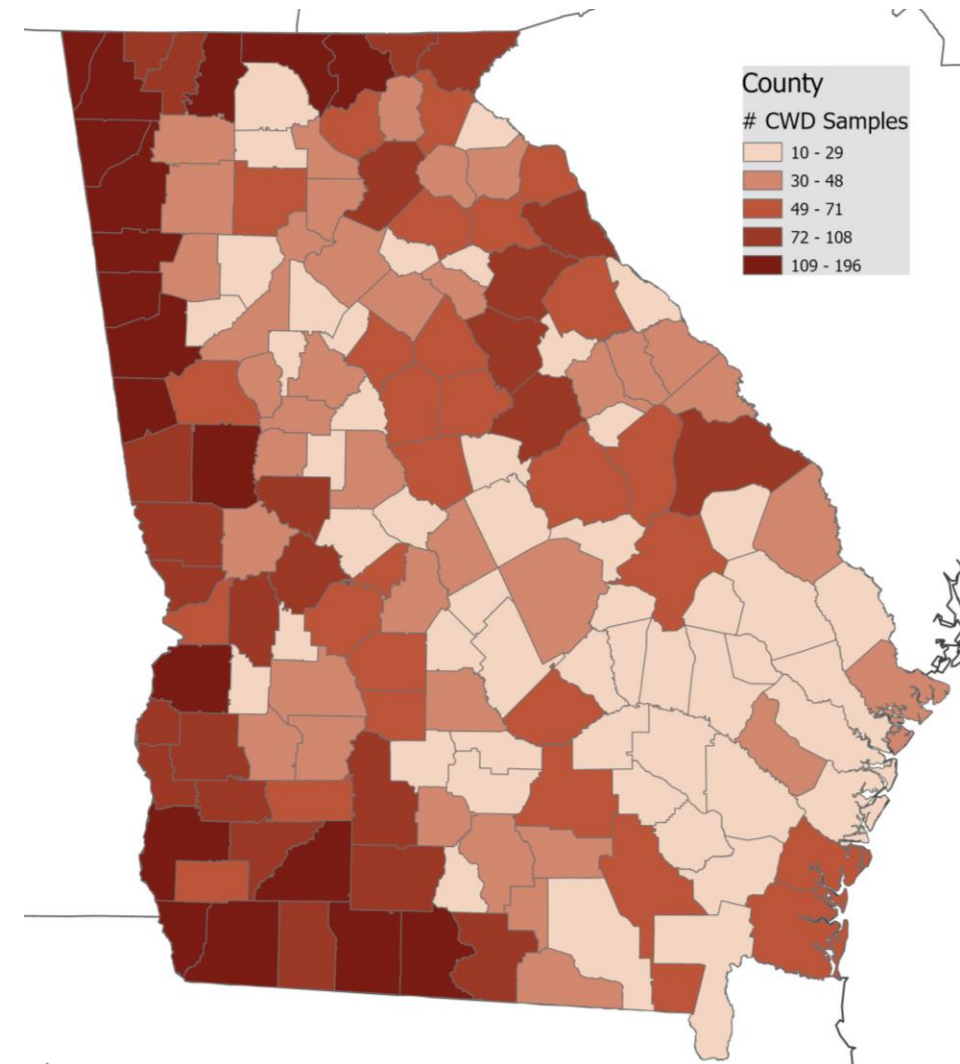


- “CWD hasn't been shown to infect people.”
- No cases of CWD have ever been documented in people
- Consider having deer from CWD management areas tested before you eat the meat.

# CWD Surveillance and Prevention

- Statewide surveillance since 2002.
- Worked with legislature to prohibit importation of live deer and carcasses from CWD states in 2005, further amended in 2022.
- Investigated unlawful importations of live deer and tested them all for CWD.
- Increased CWD surveillance around captive deer facilities and other risk factors.

CWD Samples Collected by County Since 2019



# Where was CWD Detected in Georgia?

- Routine testing of a hunter-killed 2.5-year-old male deer
- Harvested on the Lanier/Berrien county line
- Counties that touch a 5-mile radius are included in the CWD Management Area (CMA)
- CMA may expand if more positives are discovered



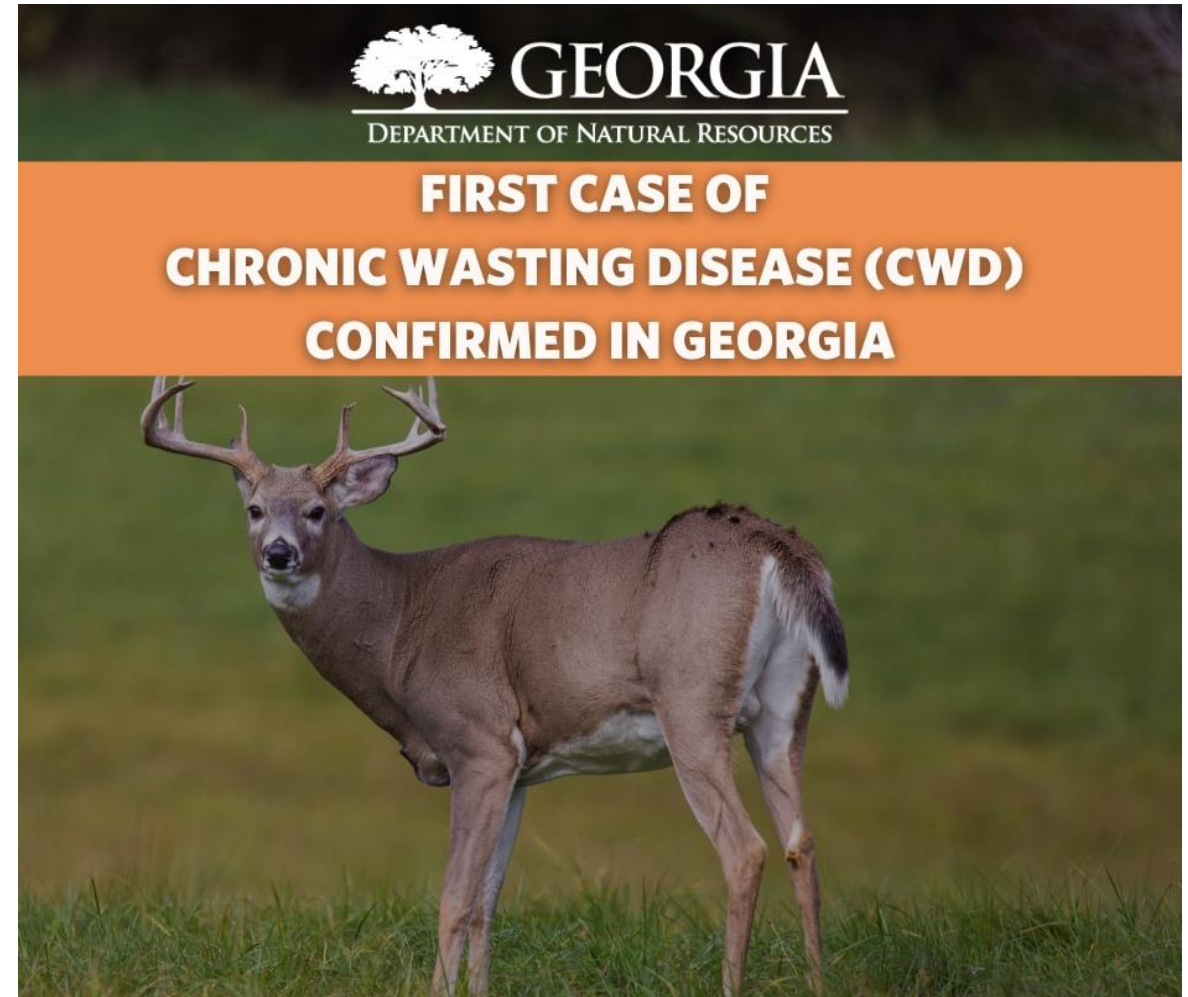
# Initial Response from DNR

- DNR's CWD response plan activated immediately.
- Hunter & landowner notified.
- Location where deer was harvested identified.
- Contacted landowners within 1-mile radius.
- Contacted area processors and taxidermists.



# Initial Response – Public Outreach

- Press Release (Jan. 23)
- Updated website
- Press Conference (Jan.24)
- Social Media Management
  - Providing answers to questions via comment section and direct message
  - Continued source of information
- Planning public meetings
  - In-person in surrounding area
  - Virtual meeting
- Continue to update Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) with answers



# Initial Response – Sampling Efforts

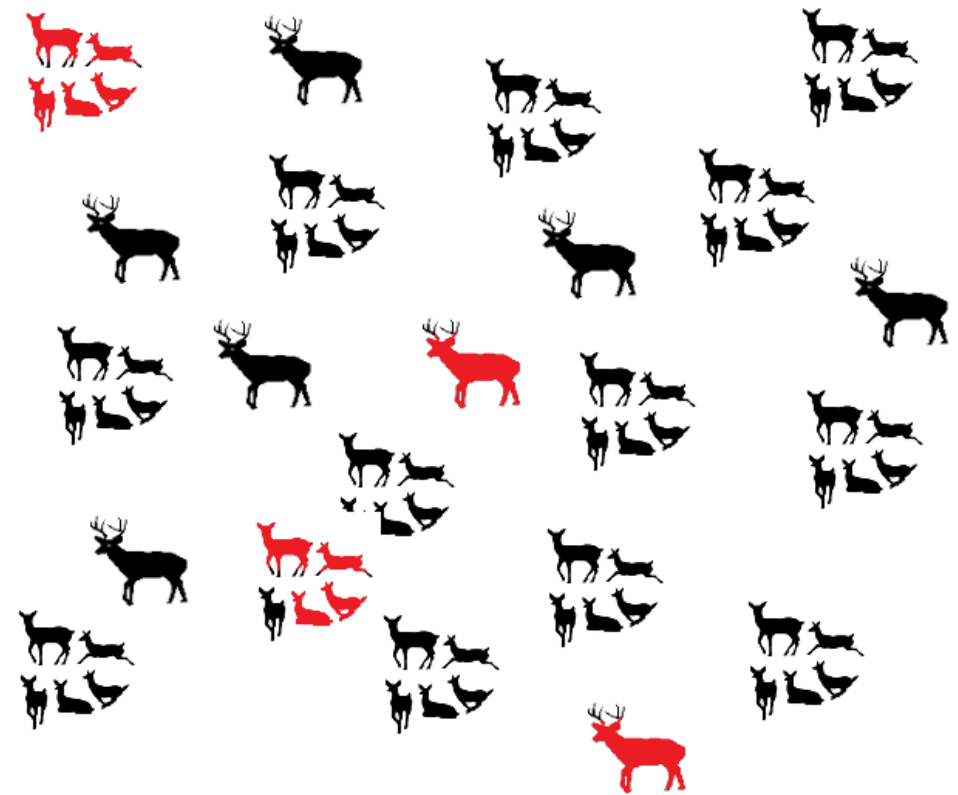
- Currently working with landowners to collect additional samples (20-30 within the 1-mile radius).
- Collect samples from crop damage permit deer and road-killed deer until hunting season begins in September 2025.

## Why?

- Determine the prevalence and geographic extent.
  - Prevalence - percent of deer herd that tests positive.
  - Geographic extent - how far it has spread.

# CWD Management – Cluster Sampling

- Work with landowners to follow-up on each positive deer
- Focus in the immediate vicinity where each positive deer was located.
- Selectively targets deer most likely to have had contact with the positive deer



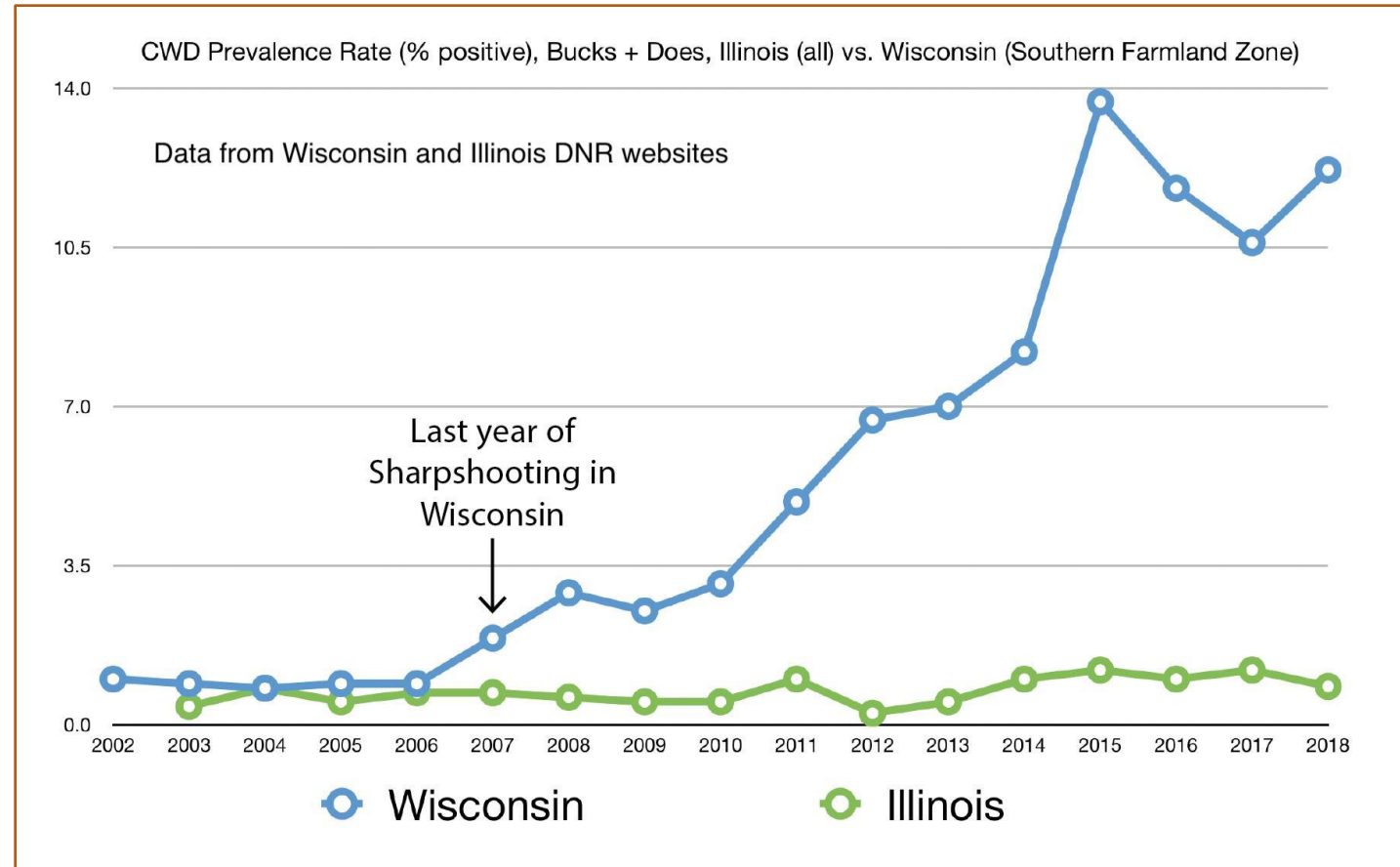


# CWD Management – Now Until Deer Season

- Cluster sampling removes individual deer most likely to have CWD.
- Cluster sampling is not used to reduce local deer densities; it occurs at the property level.
- All sampling being conducted by landowners and managers in cooperation with DNR.
- Significant herd reductions are not a tool we are using to manage CWD.
- Surveillance and monitoring will continue to be primarily from hunter-harvested deer as well as road kills and deer taken under crop permits.

# Long-term Management

- Keep prevalence low through cluster sampling, ideally below 5%.
- Continue increased surveillance to monitor geographic extent.
- Continue providing access to testing for hunters.
- Maintain Georgia's rich deer hunting heritage for future generations.



Credit: Lindsay Thomas, Jr. National Deer Association

# Key Takeaways

- DNR has been planning and preparing for this since 2002
  - Our response plan has evolved over 22 years of monitoring the 35 states who found it before us.
- CWD management will be conducted locally, in cooperation with landowners and hunters.
- CWD is likely here to stay and will require continual surveillance and adaptive management long term.

