

Dr. Mike Miller, perhaps the world expert on chronic wasting disease, was in Michigan Monday, September 29, to participate in the “The Science of Deer Management” symposium co-sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources and Michigan United Conservation Clubs.

Miller works for the Department of Wildlife in Colorado, where CWD was first identified. Miller said CWD was mysterious in as much as it sometimes shows up where it’s least expected and its appearance in Michigan was “not the result of any failing by state officials.”

Miller said it is incumbent upon wildlife managers to do all they can to prevent the spread of the disease.

“Prevention is a critical aspect,” he said. “The long-term consequences are not entirely clear (but) it is going to be far easier to deal with early on than it will later.”

After his presentation, Miller answered specific questions about CWD in Michigan.

Q. Has Michigan overreacted to the threat of CWD with its baiting-ban and amplified-testing response?

A. I don’t think so. You’re in a preventative or early intervention mode, trying to take stock of what’s going on. That you found it unexpectedly as you did suggests kicking it up a notch.

Q. Should Michigan be doing anything else?

A. What they’re doing is basically going by the book. They’re not just making it up as they go.

Q. How bad could CWD be for Michigan’s deer herd?

A. The population ramifications of these things unfold over decades. In most places we haven’t been following this long enough to know what’s going to happen.

Q. Wouldn’t it make more sense to ban urine-based scents than bait?

A. Urine will most likely be a source of prions, but bait piles are bringing a whole bunch of deer to the same spot every day where they’re salivating and defecating. Baiting would be expected to exacerbate a situation like that. Potential sources of exposure are nose to nose, nose to feces, nose to soil.