



CWD Myth Busting

Myth 1: Chronic Wasting Disease wipes out deer herds

While it is highly unlikely for CWD to wipe out a deer herd, there is potential for the disease to significantly decrease deer populations over time.

This has already been seen in [Wyoming's](#) South Converse Unit, where CWD has a 50% prevalence rate. This is the highest known rate of free-ranging deer infected with CWD in the world. Wyoming's South Converse deer herd has been cut in half over the past decade. A recent study has shown CWD is contributing to a 19% decrease in the deer population each year.

CWD positive animals are also more susceptible to alternative sources of mortality like increased predation and road kill, as their awareness of such threats is likely compromised due to the disease. Though other diseases, such as [EHD](#), impact deer herds more quickly, the long-term impacts of CWD are unknown. In certain areas, once the disease reaches high prevalence levels, long-term and sustained population declines are a concern.

BUSTED





CWD Myth Busting

Myth 2: CWD is the biggest threat to white-tailed deer populations

We don't necessarily know what the impacts of CWD are long-term on the deer herd, but there are serious concerns about the long-term stability of deer populations in areas where CWD has spread to up to half of the herd. Other disease threats, such as [EHD](#), are very rapid, and can kill deer very quickly. However, these impacts are not long-term; EHD doesn't kill every deer that it infects! Some deer can recover from EHD and those that do have immunity that can be passed on to offspring.

Even though some portions of the Midwest and West experience dramatic EHD outbreaks every couple of years, the Southeast is relatively immune to the disease. This is because immunity to the disease is high in these herds because they are exposed to the virus more frequently. There is no such immunity in deer for CWD. If they live long enough, all deer infected with CWD will die from the disease or health complications related to the disease.

In herds that are affected with EHD, populations tend to recover in 2-4 years to pre-outbreak levels.

BUSTED





CWD Myth Busting

Myth 3: Sharpshooters are killing all of the deer because of CWD

Sharpshooting is a controversial but necessary tool in combating CWD. The Michigan approach was modeled after the effective approach of [Illinois](#) that slowed the the spread of CWD. With that in mind, Illinois reported in 2014-2015 that 7,902 animals were tested for CWD, with only 1,393 coming from sharpshooting efforts (this is approximately 18%).

However, sharpshooting accounted for 35% of the total positives. This is even more drastic when taking into account sharpshooting done specifically for CWD control. A total of 861 deer were shot (11% of the total sample) with 34% of the positives occurring from this effort.

Likewise, Michigan has experienced similar success. Through June, 2016, deer tested through sharpshooting efforts contributed to ~17% of the total sample (769 out of 4,558) in the CWD Management Zone, but have contributed to 66% of the total positives since the initial discovery thus far.

Additionally, sharpshooters are not shooting deer in the entire CWD Management Zone. They are only shooting on properties within 2 miles of a known CWD positive deer, and where they have a signed approval from landowners. Sharpshooters are only taking the number of deer specified by each landowner's desires.





CWD Myth Busting

Myth 4: CWD is brought in from farmed cervids

Though farmed cervids are just as susceptible as free-ranging deer, the transport of any deer, live or dead, increases risk and can spread the disease faster than the natural movement of deer. For this reason, there are [restrictions and regulations](#) in place that prohibit the transport of carcasses into Michigan, just as there are restrictions on the movement of live cervids. Both hunters and the captive cervid industry must take responsibility for the potential spread of the disease, as this disease can be impactful to both the captive industry and wild deer. All privately owned cervid facilities within a 15 mile radius to the positive cases in free ranging deer in mid-Michigan have been inspected to ensure all restrictions and regulations have been followed. Currently, there is no evidence that suggests CWD in Michigan came from a private facility.

BUSTED





CWD Myth Busting

Myth 5: We've had CWD for years; we are only finding it now because we are looking for it

Though we don't know how long [CWD](#) has been in Michigan, we do know that prior to the discovery of CWD in free ranging deer, the Michigan DNR had tested over 34,000 deer, 1,600 elk, and 70 moose without a single detection. We do believe the disease was brought into our state recently, likely through human assisted means, and our aggressive approach is based on reducing the impact of the disease. Given the low prevalence in the Management Zone to date, it is unlikely the disease has been here for many years.

BUSTED





CWD Myth Busting

Myth 6: State agencies can't eradicate CWD

Though it's true that complete eradication of the prion in the environment is impossible, there is hope that states can eliminate the future accumulation of these prions in the environment by removing the actively diseased animals from the landscape. Since prions are resistant to destruction and can persist in the environment for years, perhaps decades, the potential for a reoccurrence of the disease is possible. However, if the environmental accumulation remains low, the potential for future outbreaks is greatly diminished. With an aggressive approach early on, both [New York](#) and [Minnesota](#) have seemingly removed all living animals with CWD, thus preventing any further accumulation in the environment. Both states were fortunate to detect the disease early and seemingly have eliminated any active carriers on the landscape without any additional positives after their initial detections.

*Prions are the infectious agents that cause the neurological disease of CWD.





CWD Myth Busting

Myth 7: The DNR wants to eliminate all the deer in an area where CWD exists

Though drastic herd reduction is going to reduce the potential for spread of the disease, we understand the value of deer as a resource on the landscape. Eradicating deer from a county or even township is impossible, and given that CWD can persist in the soil for years, future deer that return into the area would still be susceptible to contracting the disease. The DNR's approach is to go into areas where there is known CWD transmission occurring and target adult males and female social groups. This will improve the odds of removing CWD positive animals off the landscape, and will reduce the potential for prion accumulation in the environment.



BUSTED



CWD Myth Busting

Myth 8: Deer will adapt over time and CWD will go away, leaving deer stronger because of it

To date, there is no known immunity in white-tailed deer. Any deer can contract the disease, and once the disease is contracted, there is no recovery. There does appear to be resistance in some types of deer, but this simply means they are able to live with the disease longer before succumbing to the disease. This may not be the best thing, as they are able to spread the prions longer than deer that succumb more quickly from the disease.

If there is immunity in the deer herd, and it is true that some deer simply can't contract the disease, having this disease go away will still be highly unlikely. First, the few deer that would be immune would be very poorly represented on the landscape. The disease would have to selectively kill the majority of the deer that are susceptible. This would lead to catastrophic losses in the deer herd. Additionally, evolution has specifically selected against these type of deer for some other reason, making them under-represented on the landscape. We don't know what the impact of increasing these deer would mean to deer herd dynamics. Finally, such a change would likely occur over hundreds to thousands of years. Though CWD is a slowly progressing disease, it is much faster than evolution.

The herd would be impacted greatly before it would be able to adjust.

BUSTED





CWD Myth Busting

Myth 9: CWD is not fatal

Though it's true many things can kill a deer before CWD shows its symptoms, deer do die from CWD. In fact, the second leading cause of mortality in the study just being completed in [Wyoming](#) is CWD. The index animal in Michigan was severely malnourished, underweight, and exhibiting neurological symptoms. That doe was put down by a local police officer, but would have likely perished from the disease within days to weeks had her condition not been alerted to authorities. CWD has also been associated with additional forms of mortality, such as road kills and predators. This implies that deer that are afflicted with CWD may lack awareness of external threats, and thus are more susceptible to them because they have contracted CWD. In this manner, even though CWD is not directly causing mortality, it may be enhanced through other, more traditional forms of mortality.

BUSTED





CWD Myth Busting

Myth 10: CWD isn't widespread and only impacts a few animals

Though the disease was first discovered in [Colorado](#), it has now [spread](#) to 24 states and 2 provinces in both captive and free ranging cervids. In many of these cases, only small parts of each state are affected, but the scale of infection has changed drastically over time. Prior to 2000, the disease was only suspected to be in Wyoming and Colorado. The scale now is drastically different, with states spanning the West, Midwest, Northeast, and Mid-Atlantic all impacted from CWD. Though the disease is slow moving, the spread and prevalence can increase dramatically over time. Because the prion can persist in the environment, more and more animals are likely to be impacted over time, and what seems like only a minor occurrence today can grow to impact over half of the deer or elk population locally in several decades. The concern remains not for the present condition or impact of our deer resource, but the long term impacts associated with the accumulation of the disease on the landscape.

BUSTED

