

GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION

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• MEMBER TRIBES •

MICHIGAN

Bay Mills Community
Keweenaw Bay Community
Lac Vieux Desert Band

WISCONSIN

Bad River Band
Lac Courte Oreilles Band
Lac du Flambeau Band

MINNESOTA

Fond du Lac Band
Mille Lacs Band

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

of

TRAVIS BARTNICK

WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

of the

GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

Before the

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON

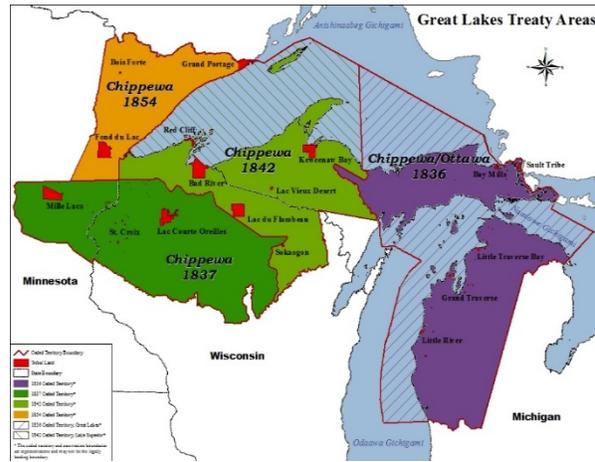
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES

At the Hearing Titled

OVERSIGHT HEARING: CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

October 17, 2019

The Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (“GLIFWC” or “Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony on chronic wasting disease (“CWD”) and its impact on the tribal communities that GLIFWC serves. The Commission is an intertribal natural resource agency exercising delegated authority from 11 federally recognized Ojibwe Tribes in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. GLIFWC member Tribes retain hunting, fishing, and gathering rights in territories ceded to the United States in various treaties. These rights have been reaffirmed by federal courts, including the US Supreme Court and have been recognized to include co-management authority over the health of the natural resources that are the subject of those rights. These Ceded Territories extend over portions of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan and include portions of Lakes Superior, Michigan and Huron (see map).



GLIFWC supports the exercise of tribal sovereignty and pursues intertribal co-management by protecting and enhancing treaty-guaranteed rights to hunt, fish and gather within the Ceded Territories. This includes protecting the health and sustainability of the natural resources upon which the exercise of these rights depend. The exercise of these rights supports tribal sovereignty in a variety of ways. Harvesting activities and the consumption of traditional foods promote health, connection to cultural lifeways, intergenerational teaching, and economic sustainability for individuals, businesses, and communities.

The value of hunting, fishing, and gathering wild-harvested foods cannot be overstated. Harvesting wild foods requires individuals and families to get out in the woods, experience fresh air, and provides opportunities to strengthen and the connection to traditional lands and culture. In turn, this supports physical and mental health. Wild harvested foods, including deer and elk meat, are required for various ceremonial activities (e.g., naming ceremonies, first kill ceremonies, and berry fast celebrations). These ceremonies acknowledge and reaffirm the Tribes’ and individuals’ continued dependence on and connection to the deer nation at important points in each individual’s life. These foods are also highly nutritious and important in tribal communities’ efforts to address high rates of diabetes and other chronic health conditions.

The health and long-term viability of wild white-tailed deer, moose, and elk herds within the Ceded Territories are threatened by the growing geographical spread of CWD. CWD is seen by many Tribes as an existential threat. Not only are Tribes concerned that CWD may lead to significant reductions in wild deer and elk populations over time, but that having CWD on the landscape may deter tribal hunters from pursuing this game because of a perception that this highly-nutritious traditional food is unsafe.

Investments in research on CWD and support for the implementation of effective measures to prevent its spread are needed. Particular areas of emphasis might include:

- Research on systems designed to employ the best methods for containing CWD prions from the point of kill to the disposal of the carcass, for infected cervids that have been harvested in the wild and for those killed in captive environments. Preliminary research has shown that certain carcass disposal methods work better than others (clay lined landfills and digestion in sodium hydroxide have shown promise) and that at least one method of sanitizing processing equipment may prove effective in containing infectious prions in a food processing environment.¹ However, Tribes and States need support to develop *practical, on-the-ground* guidance to facilitate cooperation on the part of hunters, meat processors and the captive cervid industry, as well as to facilitate the effective and responsible disposal of infectious material. This requires providing individuals and organizations with a range of effective options from which to choose, and working with specific communities to develop systems and plans that will work for their particular circumstances.
- Support for Tribes to develop the necessary infrastructure to effectively manage CWD, including funding for staff, the purchase of necessary equipment and/or waste management services, and, potentially, the construction of dedicated facilities.
- The development of a live test approved for individual animals . This would help the captive cervid industry limit the movement of live animals infected with CWD.
- The development of an easy, rapid field test for cervid carcasses to provide tribal and non-tribal hunters with information on the CWD status of an animal they have killed, prior to field-dressing or transporting that animal. Real-time CWD testing is critical for stemming the spread of infectious prions across the landscape.
- Requiring the depopulation of all CWD-infected captive herds, prioritizing those captive herds maintained within and near the Tribes' Ceded Territories.

Measures taken by State and federal agencies to control CWD have failed to contain this fatal disease. Within the last year, dozens of wild deer within or near the Tribes' Ceded Territories have tested positive for CWD.² These recent detections of CWD in wild herds represent a

¹ Williams K, et al, Inactivation of chronic wasting disease prions using sodium hypochlorite, PLOS ONE 14(10): e00223659. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0223659>

² Within the past year, in Minnesota, a wild deer tested positive for CWD in Crow Wing County (18 miles north of the 1837 Ceded Territory boundary); in Wisconsin, nine deer have tested positive for CWD in Lincoln, Oneida, Eau Claire, and Portage Counties (within and near the Ceded Territories of 1837 and 1842); in Michigan, one deer tested positive for CWD in Dickinson County (approximately 10 miles from the Ceded Territory boundary) and 61 wild deer have tested positive for CWD in Montcalm, Iona and Kent Counties within and near the 1836 Ceded Territory.

significant change in circumstances and have led the Tribes to institute new regulations restricting tribal members' ability to transport deer carcasses from certain areas. Meanwhile, several captive cervid facilities within the Ceded Territories continue to house CWD-infected herds. Many of these herds are contained within a single fence, providing abundant opportunity for captive cervids to interact with, and potentially infect, wild white-tailed deer. While herd reductions have been shown to be the only effective way to reduce the transmission of CWD, there is no indication that any of these CWD-positive captive herds are scheduled for depopulation. According to State agencies, a major impediment to depopulation is the lack of indemnity funds. Tribes have not been included decision-making regarding the depopulation of these facilities, and State and federal agencies have not been transparent about how these decisions are made; however, it does not appear as though tribal interests are considered in the prioritization process for indemnification funds.

On a related note, GLIFWC's Board of Commissioners and the Commission's Voigt Intertribal Task Force have expressed strong opposition to efforts by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove wolves from the List of Threatened and Endangered Species. While researchers and managers are currently incapable of detecting sub-clinical cases of CWD, research has shown that large predators likely have these capabilities. Removing federal protection before wolf populations have recovered in a significant portion of their historic range risks losing a strong ally in our nation's fight to maintain healthy deer, elk and moose herds.