

MDC Leads Efforts to Protect Deer

The Conservation Commission voted to approve proposed amendments to regulations regarding the operation of hunting preserves and wildlife breeding facilities that hold white-tailed deer, mule deer, their hybrids, and other members of the deer family, known as cervids. The changes would become part of the agency's strategy to minimize fatal disease risks to the state's deer herd.

Actions recommended by the Commission include:

- Banning the importation of live white-tailed deer, mule deer, and their hybrids from other states.
- Improving fencing requirements for captive-cervid facilities.
- Requiring all deer 6 months or older that die in a Conservation Department-licensed facility to be tested for CWD.
- Establishing better record-keeping requirements for Conservation Department-licensed captive-cervid operations.
- Prohibiting any new captive-cervid facilities within 25 miles of where CWD has been confirmed.

The proposed amendments are designed to ensure the health of Missouri's entire deer herd, which includes free-ranging and captive-cervids. These proposed amendments work to reduce the risk of this fatal disease (CWD) from spreading beyond the limited area where it has been found, while minimizing the economic impact on the captive-cervid industry and the communities and businesses that benefit from deer hunting and deer-related activities.

CWD is a fatal disease that affects members of the deer family, collectively called cervids. It is different and unrelated to the recent outbreak of hemorrhagic diseases. Those diseases – blue tongue and epizootic hemorrhagic disease – are caused by viruses and are often not fatal. Their effects are short-term and localized. However, hemorrhagic diseases have been in Missouri for years, and white-tailed deer are adapted to cope with them.

Over 500,000 citizens enjoy deer hunting, sharing their hunting heritage and passing that heritage on to future generations. Missourians consume millions of pounds of venison and share with neighbors in need through the Share the Harvest Program. The spread of CWD could negatively impact deer-dependent businesses that support more than 12,000 Missouri jobs and generate over \$1 billion in economic activity annually.

Proposed changes to the Wildlife Code of Missouri would give white-tailed deer an extra measure of protection against this fatal disease. The Missouri Department of Conservation stresses that success depends on an informed, involved public.

Now that the Conservation Commission has approved proposed amendments to the regulations, they will be published in the Missouri Register. There will be a 30-day public comment period beginning July 16, and any comments on the proposed rule changes will be forwarded to the Conservation Commission for its consideration. Those comments will be reviewed prior to deciding whether the rules will be adopted, amended, or withdrawn. To comment go to www.mdc.mo.gov/deerhealth.