



Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage

2023 Senate Bill 30

Restrictions on Baiting Deer in Counties Based on Chronic Wasting Disease or Bovine Tuberculosis

December 6, 2023

Good morning, Chair Stafsholt, and members of the Committee. My name is Jasmine Batten, and I am the Wildlife Health Section Supervisor for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 30, related to restrictions on baiting deer in counties based on chronic wasting disease or bovine tuberculosis.

Senate Bill 30 would remove the requirement that DNR promulgate rules prohibiting the baiting and recreational feeding of deer in counties within 10 miles of a confirmed positive chronic wasting disease (CWD) or bovine tuberculosis (TB) test result from an animal at a captive facility.

Baiting and feeding is a known risk factor for establishment and spread of CWD and bovine TB, as it facilitates increased transmission of these diseases, both directly by deer-to-deer contact and indirectly by contaminated environment-to-deer contact. Although deer naturally come into contact and congregate due to a range of behavioral, seasonal and resource factors, research has shown that human-associated concentrations, such as those created through baiting and feeding practices, can significantly increase both direct and indirect disease transmission. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) identifies the unnatural concentration of cervids as one of four priority risks to address for the prevention of, introduction, and establishment of CWD, and one of the key best management practices they identify is to prohibit baiting and feeding of wild cervids. Many states adhere to these recommendations, and baiting and feeding restrictions are a common component of state wildlife agencies' CWD response protocols. Most commonly, these regulations do not consider a CWD-positive within a captive facility differently than a CWD confirmation in a wild deer. At least 22 states have feeding and baiting restrictions, including the Midwest states of Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, and Missouri.

Based on what we know about CWD, evidence suggests that CWD behind a fence is a risk to wild deer outside the fence. We can assume that the reverse is also true, that CWD in a free-ranging deer herd in close proximity may pose a risk to deer within a captive facility. Annually, escapes are routinely reported, even when adequate precautions are taken. Fences are damaged after weather events, gates are left open, and deer can clear 8-foot fences. Additionally, prions which cause CWD are known to persist in the environment and remain infectious for many years. Since 2001, DATCP has reported 44 deer farms with a CWD positive test in Wisconsin, and 22 of those have been depopulated. Positive farms may become environmental "hot spots," as transmission dynamics may perform differently in a confined setting. The highest rate of CWD prevalence ever reported, over 80 percent, has come from a deer farm. Finally, research has shown that transmission may occur at facilities with a single fence through nose-to-nose contact between farm-raised and wild deer. The only requirement for double-fencing currently in Wisconsin is for farms that are enrolled in the CWD Herd Status program and are also located within 5-

miles of at least two CWD detections in wild deer. DATCP reports that 98 of 243 premises are currently enrolled in the CWD Herd Status program, resulting in CWD-positive premises with single fences on the landscape today.

Also of concern is the increased risk for the establishment of bovine TB in wildlife. Senate Bill 30 removes the requirement to institute a baiting and feeding ban in response to a finding of bovine TB within a captive facility. All mammals are susceptible to infection with the bacterium that causes TB, and white-tailed deer have demonstrated the ability to act as a reservoir for the disease. Fortunately, to date, bovine TB has not been detected in wild deer in our state. The impacts on wildlife and the cattle and cervid industries would be extremely serious should bovine TB become established in the state. Bovine TB spreads through oral and nasal secretions and removing the artificial congregation of animals at baiting and feeding sites, where opportunities for transmission are increased, is one small but important measure available to states in attempts to prevent the establishment and spread of this disease to free-ranging wildlife. Once established in wildlife populations, this disease is extremely difficult and expensive to control and has significant regulatory impacts on the agricultural industry. In addition, as a zoonotic disease, the establishment of bovine tuberculosis would require additional biosecurity measures be established for the handling and testing of white-tailed deer for CWD and other diseases.

While to date bovine TB has not been found in wild deer, CWD has spread significantly since its initial detection in 2001, although there are still significant portions of our deer herd that are not yet impacted. This bill would increase the likelihood of expansion of CWD into new areas of the state as well as increase the risks that bovine TB becomes endemic in wild deer in the future.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.