



CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE TASK FORCE
Cabela's Conference Room
Buda, TX
May 03, 2012

The meeting convened at 9:00 am. Membership and others in attendance included:

Committee members:

Mitch Lockwood, *TPWD*
Dr. Don Davis, *TAMU-CVM*
Dr. Bob Dittmar, *Private Veterinarian*
Commissioner Dick Winters, *TAHC*
Warren Bluntzer, *Private Consultant*
Dr. Dan McBride, *Private Veterinarian*
Todd Franks, *Elk / Red Deer Producer*
Dr. Dan Baca, *USDA, APHIS*

Dr. Andy Schwartz, *TAHC*
Charley Seale, *Exotic Wildlife Association **
Juan Lino Garza, *Deer Breeder*
Dr. Scott Bugai, *Private Veterinarian, Deer Breeder*
Dr. Bill Eikenhorst, *Private Veterinarian*
Dr. Ken Waldrup, *DSHS **
Dr. Terry Hensley, *TAHC*

**Not in attendance*

Other Participants:

Clayton Wolf, *TPWD*
Ryan Schoeneberg, *TPWD*
Alan Cain, *TPWD*
Todd George, *TPWD*

Dr. Dee Ellis, *TAHC*
Shawn Gray, *TPWD*
Billy Tarrant, *TPWD*
Robert Macdonald, *TPWD*

➤ **Welcome and Opening Comments**

- Mitch Lockwood welcomed everyone and Task Force members introduced themselves. Lockwood thanked members for their willingness to assist the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) through the process of developing a response plan for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) detected in mule deer harvested in New Mexico within 1-2 miles of the Texas border, and the process of developing a new version of the CWD Management Plan for Texas. Lockwood and Dr. Schwartz will serve as co-chairs of this committee.
- Lockwood explained that Big Game Program staff have been rewriting the CWD Management Plan as much has been learned since the original plan was written in 2003. Additionally, staff recognized that the 2003 plan is not practical for the current situation in the Trans Pecos region. Lockwood proposed the following goals for the revised CWD Management Plan:
 - Minimize CWD risks to the wild and captive white-tailed deer and mule deer resources in Texas.
 - Establish and maintain support for prudent CWD management with hunters, landowners, and other stakeholders.
 - Minimize direct and indirect impacts of CWD to hunting, hunting related economies, and conservation in Texas.

Dr. Ellis stressed that the first goal should include all susceptible species rather than focusing only on white-tailed deer and mule deer. There was a consensus among members for making this revision. Commissioner Winters followed with a recommendation that this task force develops a template for all disease response; not

just CWD. A skeleton or template developed by this task force for CWD response should be applicable, at least to some degree, to other disease discoveries in the wild (e.g., bovine tuberculosis), preventing the need to develop a new plan for each and every circumstance.

Lockwood said that he expects discussions from this meeting to help fill the gaps that currently exist in the plan, and then TPWD will request TAHC's review of the plan before submitting the plan to the task force for review.

- Some relatively recent findings regarding CWD research include:
 - Prions are found ubiquitously throughout the body of an infected animal.
 - There are multiple strains of CWD, which increases the probability of the disease jumping the species barrier. There is still no evidence that humans or domestic livestock can be infected with CWD.
 - Additional susceptible species include red deer and sika deer.
 - High disease prevalence can be a population limiting factor. Deer populations in which CWD prevalence exceeds 40% have experienced significant (>45%) population declines. Lockwood recognized that the correlation may not be causation, but stated that habitat quality is good and hunting is nonexistent for at least some of those declining populations.
 - As prevalence rates and geographic distribution increase, hunters are more likely to alter hunting behaviors including avoidance of areas with high CWD prevalence. This can affect local communities dependent on hunting revenue as well as state agency efforts to manage cervid populations through hunter harvest.
 - CWD has been detected in 19 states or provinces (Figure 1).

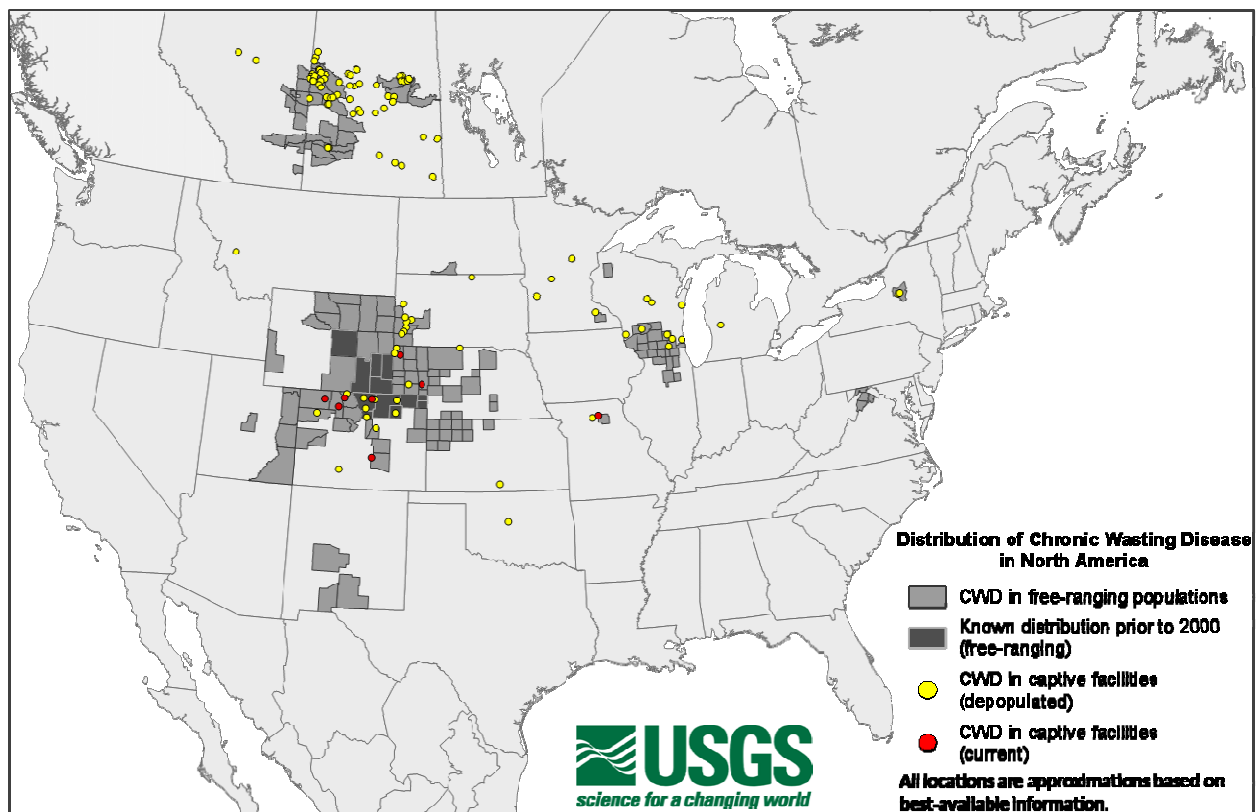


Figure 1. Distribution of CWD in North America, May 2012.

- A strong outreach component to the management plan will be important to minimize undue alarm and ramifications, build public trust, and provide timely, factual, accurate information. Stakeholder trust tends to be relatively low with respect to CWD management, which is largely a result of the scientific uncertainties associated with the disease. Additionally, trying to provide assurance that CWD cannot affect people while also advising hunters to take precautions while processing deer sends a mixed message, reducing trust. Effective communication of this plan with various stakeholders will be critical – to ensure there is no unnecessary fear factor.

➤ Recent CWD Detections in New Mexico

- New Mexico Game and Fish (NMGF) notified TPWD in February 2012 that CWD was detected in 4 of 7 hunter-harvested mule deer in Game Management Unit (GMU) 28, including 3 of 4 mule deer in the Hueco Mountains within 1-2 miles of the Texas border. NMGF subsequently shared the following data with TPWD (Figure 2 and Table 1).

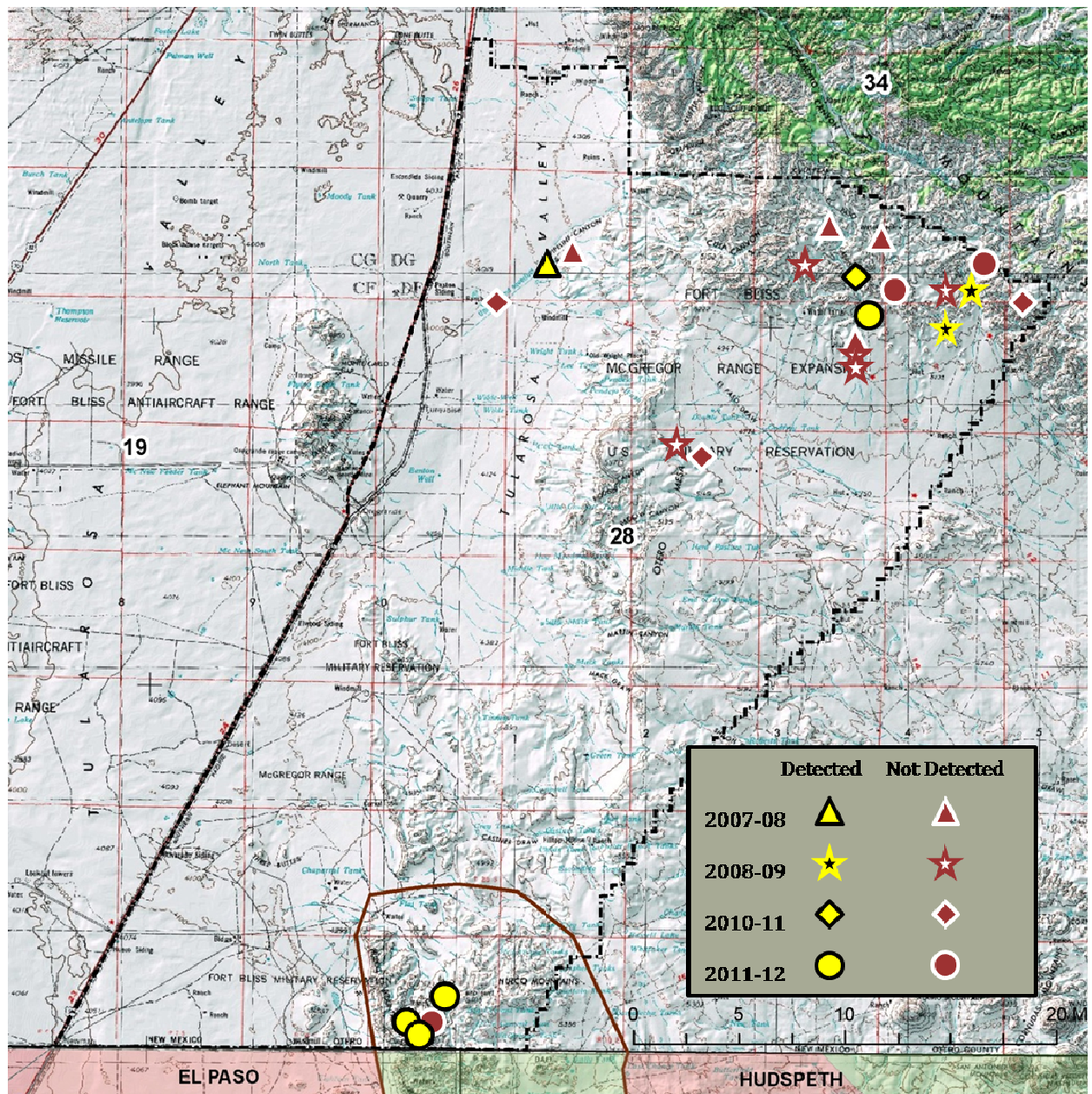


Figure 2. Locations of CWD samples collected in GMU 28, 2007-08 through 2011-12.

HUNTING SEASON	SAMPLE SIZE	NOT DETECTED	DETECTED	% DETECTED
2007-08	5	4	1	20
2008-09	7	5	2	29
2009-10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2010-11	4	3	1	25
2011-12	7	3	4	57

Table 1. CWD test results for hunter harvested mule deer in GMU 28.

- CWD has also been detected in mule deer and/or elk in GMU 19 and GMU 34 (Figure 3). While sample sizes are very small, it seems that little effort is required to detect CWD in random samples from GMUs 28 and 34, and that CWD prevalence may be quite high in the southern Sacramento Mountains and northern Hueco Mountains. TPWD has not yet received all CWD data from NMGF, but TPWD staff are under the impression (based on phone conversations with NMGF staff) that very little CWD surveillance has occurred in GMUs 29, 30, and 31. GMUs 29 and 30 are of significant concern, considering basic deer and elk biology and the relationship of the Cornudas and Guadalupe mountains to the Sacramento Mountains.

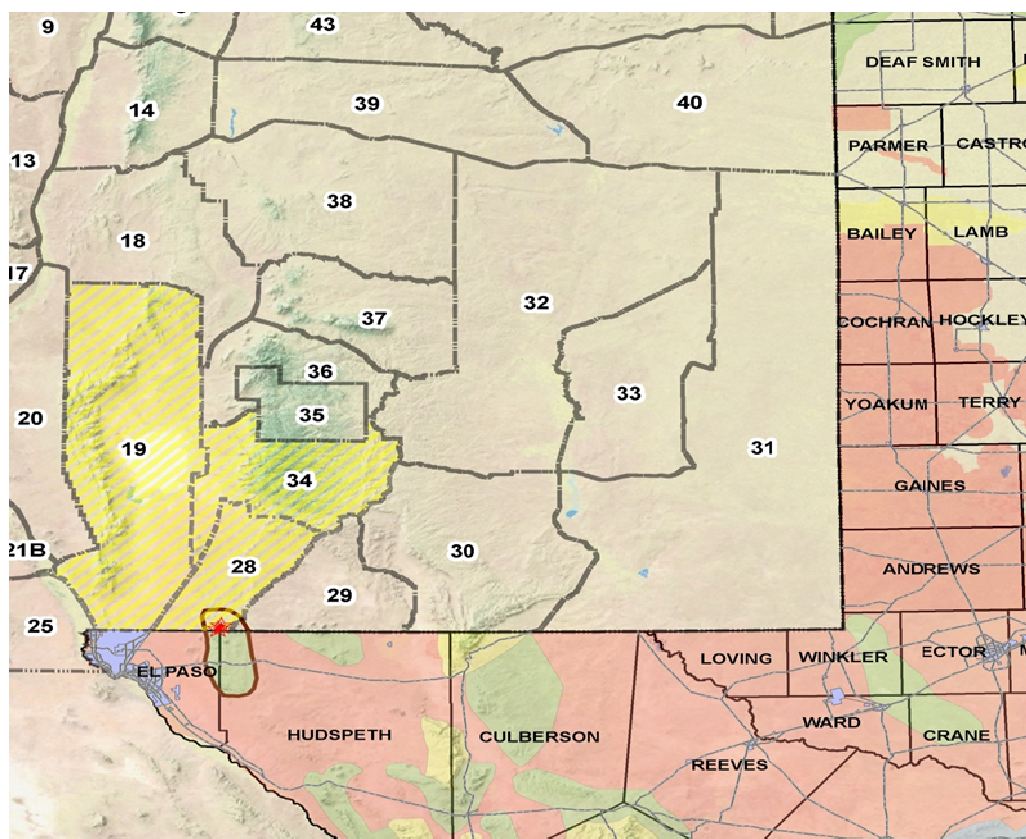


Figure 3. New Mexico GMUs (19, 28, and 34) in which CWD has been detected.

➤ **CWD Surveillance in Texas**

- TPWD has received “Not Detected” CWD test results for 26,556 wild white-tailed deer and mule deer since 2002-03. Additionally, 7,422 tested breeder deer returned “Not Detected” results. Table 2 shows the distribution of those CWD samples throughout Texas.

Ecoregion	Wild Deer	Breeder Deer
Blackland Prairies	749	311
Cross Timbers and Prairies	3,105	1,017
Edwards Plateau	4,845	1,246
Gulf Prairies and Marshes	1,904	143
High Plains	175	88
Pineywoods	4,353	945
Post Oak Savannah	3,949	1,275
Rolling Plains	1,202	202
South Texas Plains	5,650	2,139
Trans Pecos, Mountains and Basins	624	56
Grand Total	26,556	7,422

Table 2. CWD test results of "Not Detected" by ecoregion since 2002-03.

- The task force discussed the need for a more proactive surveillance program to begin this summer. Dr. Dan McBride offered to assist with an operation in the Hueco Mountains, by initiating landowner contact and scheduling a meeting between TPWD and at least one Hueco Mountain landowner. Dr. Eikenhorst followed with a similar offer. The group also discussed the depredation problems of mule deer on alfalfa fields near Dell City, and the opportunities for active surveillance in that area. Lockwood emphasized that TPWD would not harvest deer without landowner cooperation (including neighboring landowners). While the task force agreed that it would be responsible and prudent to conduct surveillance this summer, they all agreed that the response plan and communications plan should be in place before test results are received from TVMDL.

➤ **Containment Zone and High Risk Zone**

- Lockwood suggested that the detection of CWD in a free-ranging deer population in northern Hudspeth County should not necessarily affect management decisions in the Pineywoods of east Texas. Likewise, he opined that management decisions associated with the detection of CWD in the northern Hueco Mountains should not be delayed until the disease is detected within the state of Texas. There was some discussion on some political realities of disease management, and the location of an infected animal relative to political boundaries has a bearing in some decision-making processes (such as allocation of federal funds). However, there was a consensus among task force members that delaying CWD-management decisions would be irresponsible, if not negligent. Dr. Ellis and others advised that we must also assume that CWD is in the Cornudas and Guadalupe Mountains to the east, and he expressed concern for the apparent lack of CWD surveillance among elk in those mountains. Drs. McBride and Eikenhorst both emphasized that we cannot ignore elk in our CWD surveillance program, and advised a cooperative effort with New Mexico.
- Management decisions may vary depending on relative distance from locations where CWD has been detected, geography, deer and elk biology, etc. For example, the closer a deer-management operation may be to known CWD cases, the fewer management tools (e.g., Trap, Transport, and Transplant Permit, Deer Management Permit, Deer Breeder Permits, etc.) may be afforded that operation.

- The task force unanimously recommended that movement of live susceptible species should not be allowed from the Hueco Mountains of northern Hudspeth County, and most of the meeting involved discussions regarding the delineation of the containment zone. Commissioner Winters suggested that the group should begin using a broad brush until we have more information to refine that zone.
- Considering the seemingly high CWD prevalence rate in the Sacramento and Hueco Mountains, Lockwood predicted that CWD may be well established in the population and in the environment at this time. Dr. Ellis agreed and questioned if there should be any effort devoted to tracking deer movements out of the area of much concern. He said we must determine what level of risk we are willing to take.
- The current area of much concern was delineated as all land west of the Pecos River and IH 20, and north of IH 10 to Ft. Hancock, and all land west and north of Ft. Hancock (Figure 4) and the Containment Zone (CZ) was delineated as all land west of HWY 62-180 and HWY 54, and north of IH 10 to Ft. Hancock, and all land west and north of Ft. Hancock. The remaining area of the defined area of concern that lies to the east of the CZ was casually referred to as a buffer zone, but then Dr. Dittmar advised the group that an area of such risk should be given a term that better implies the risk associated with that zone. Therefore, that area will be referred to as the High Risk Zone (HRZ) and not a buffer zone. Data regarding mule deer population parameters and mule deer movements, knowledge of elk movements, and the geography and habitat types of the area were considered in the delineation of these zones.

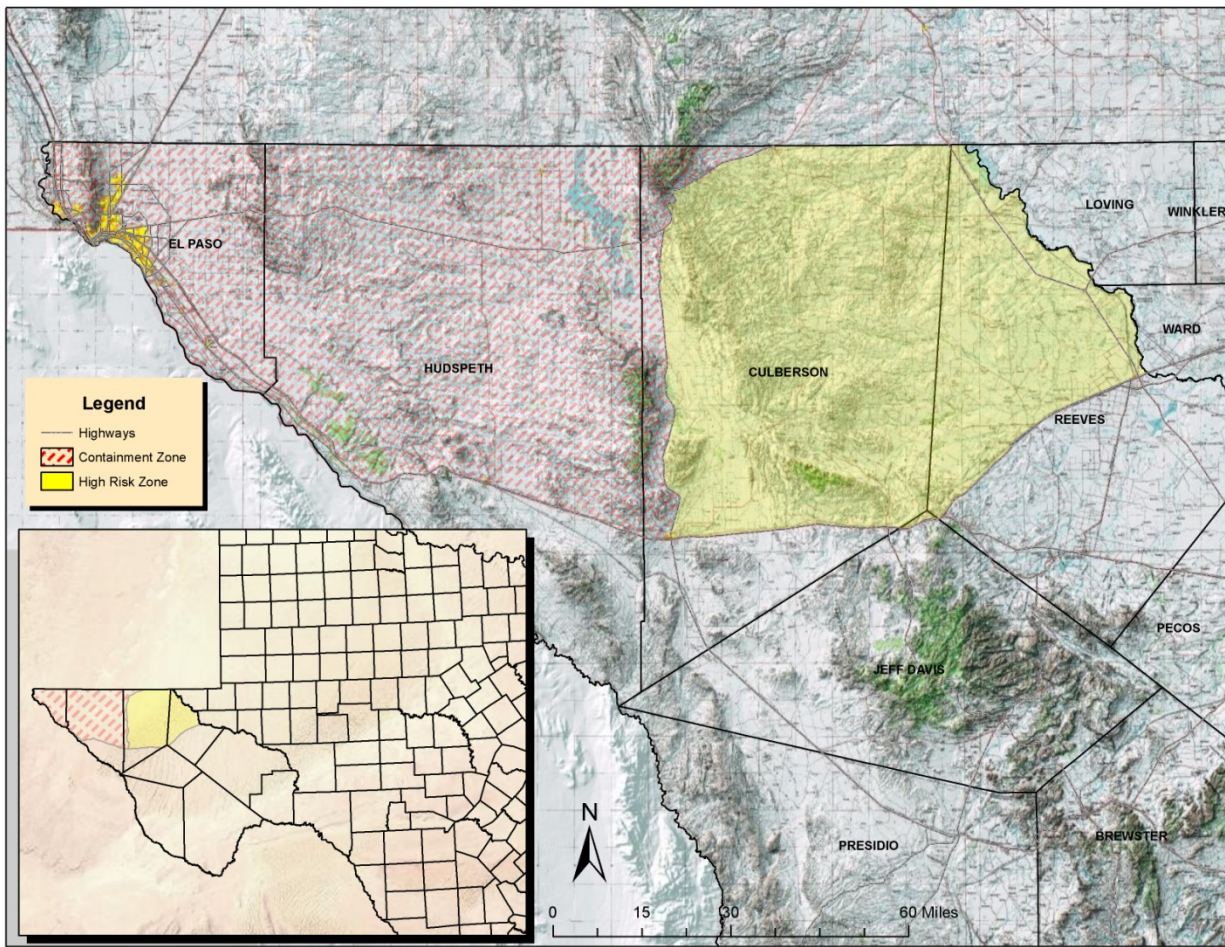


Figure 4. The recommended CWD Containment Zone (CZ) and High Risk Zone (HRZ), May 2012.

- Currently there are zero (0) permitted deer breeders in the proposed CZ, and one (1) permitted deer breeder in the HRZ. There have been zero (0) TTT trap sites or DMP facilities within either zone.
- Within the CZ, the task force unanimously recommended:
 - Any deer breeder permit issued should permit zero (0) deer to be held within the approved facility. *Current statutes require TPWD to issue a deer breeder permit to an individual meeting qualifications, but TPWD can limit the number of deer to be held in the permitted facility.*
 - No Trap, Transport, and Transplant (TTT) permit should be issued for white-tailed deer or mule deer. *This may require regulation changes by TPWD.*
 - Unnatural movement of all susceptible species should be prohibited. *This may require regulation changes by TAHC. After discussion about the fact that elk (for example) can currently enter Texas from a CWD state from a facility with 5-year status, it was decided that TAHC may consider changing the rules for obtaining 5-year status rather than prohibiting all movement. For example, a new facility in Hudspeth County should not be able to inherit the status of the facility from which they acquire elk or red deer; rather, the 5-year status program should begin on the site for which the participating facility resides.*
 - Deer Management Permits (DMPs) shall not be issued.
 - Mandatory CWD testing (sample submission at TPWD check stations) for all mule deer harvested, provided TPWD has resources for such intensive sampling. *This may require regulation changes by TPWD.*
 - There was much discussion on whether carcass export from the CZ should be prohibited (for susceptible species). Task force members recognized that such a prohibition would be futile while allowing deer and elk carcass imports from Colorado and other CWD-infected states. Todd Franks said he believes Texas' border should indeed be closed to importation of carcasses of susceptible species. Warren Bluntzer agreed and said the former CWD Task Force discussed this issue at length several years ago, and decided that it would be too difficult to enforce. After some discussion on the enforceability of such a rule, this Task Force recommended to not take such action at this time, and to put much effort into providing good education materials discouraging hunters from importing carcasses, with guidelines for carcass disposal. Members agreed that live animal movement poses a much greater risk, and there is still much unknown about how long prions may persist in the environment.
 - TPWD should use space in the Outdoor Annual to illustrate the CZ and HRZ, and to advise hunters of recommended carcass disposal procedures and mandatory CWD-testing requirements (if adopted by the TPW Commission).
 - TPWD should reinforce with TXDOT, DPS, County highway departments, etc. of the importance to notify TPWD any time deer or elk are found dead on roadsides.
- Within the HRZ, there was a consensus that:
 - Transport of white-tailed deer or mule deer from a deer breeder facility should be allowed for any deer breeder who has "5-year status" (i.e., TAHC Status of "Level C, Year 5" or higher). Warren Bluntzer recommended that any current deer breeder in the HRZ participate in the TAHC monitored herd program, but voiced his concern with this restriction without CWD being detected within the HRZ, but other members contended that any zone in which CWD is detected would be a CZ (i.e., no cervid movement allowed) as opposed to a HRZ (i.e., cervid movement allowed after adequate surveillance). All other task force members in attendance agreed that the risk associated with disease transmission is too great

when transporting captive or wild deer from (or within) the HRZ. *This may require regulation changes by TPWD.*

- Within the HRZ, the task force unanimously recommended:
 - Trap, Transport, and Transplant (TTT) permits shall not be issued for white-tailed deer or mule deer until at least 300 “Not Detected” CWD test results for white-tailed deer or mule deer (depending on the species to be detained under the permit) 16+ months of age have been submitted to TPWD. All test results must be for deer taken on the prospective trap site of contiguous land under one ownership. This sample size is the number of samples required to have 95% confidence that CWD would be detected in an infinite population where CWD prevalence is at least 1%. *This may require regulation changes by TPWD.*
 - Unnatural movement of “exotic” susceptible species should be allowed for animals from a herd that has achieved and maintained a status of “Level C, Year 5” or higher, as defined by TAHC. *TAHC may consider changing the rules for obtaining 5-year status. For example, a new facility in Hudspeth County should not be able to inherit the status of the facility from which they acquire elk or red deer; rather, the 5-year status program should begin on the site for which the participating facility resides.*
 - Deer Management Permits (DMPs) shall not be issued until at least 300 “Not Detected” CWD test results for white-tailed deer or mule deer (depending on the species to be detained under the permit) 16+ months of age have been submitted to TPWD. All test results must be for deer taken on the prospective DMP site of contiguous land under one ownership. This sample size is the number of samples required to have 95% confidence that CWD would be detected in an infinite population where CWD prevalence is at least 1%. *This may require regulation changes by TPWD if the HRZ expands into an area where DMP permits may be issued.*
 - Voluntary CWD testing (sample submission at TPWD check stations) for all mule deer harvested, provided TPWD has resources for such intensive sampling.
 - TPWD should use space in the Outdoor Annual to illustrate the CZ and HRZ, and to advise hunters of recommended carcass disposal procedures and voluntary CWD-testing opportunities.
 - TPWD should reinforce with TXDOT, DPS, County highway departments, etc. of the importance to notify TPWD any time deer or elk are found dead on roadsides.
- There was also discussion about prohibiting the importation and release of susceptible species into low fenced pastures of either zone, or into high fenced pastures or other enclosures without participating in a TAHC monitored herd program, with Level “C” status of five years or higher.

The meeting adjourned 3:30 pm.