

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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Boone and Crockett Club

Two Major Conferences Held That Will Impact Wildlife and Hunting

Two major conferences were held this past summer that will impact wildlife and hunting in the western states: an Energy Development Stakeholders'

Summit and a Chronic Wasting Disease Symposium.

Energy Summit

Participants in the Energy Summit, which took place on June 14-15 in Cody, Wyoming, included leaders of the oil and gas industry, livestock industry, government agencies, wildlife organizations, and four members of the Boone and Crockett Club. The principal topic was coal bed methane gas removal.

The Summit was convened by the Sportsmen and Ranchers for Land Stewardship after the Powder River Basin Companies notified the U.S. Department of Interior and other federal agencies of its intent to "drill, operate and reclaim 39,400 new natural gas wells," and "construct, operate and reclaim various ancillary facilities needed to support the new wells, including roads, pipelines for gathering gas

The Energy Summit was called to seek "common understanding of issues and reasonable solutions to potential conflict between fish and wildlife, ranching, and energy development."

and production water, electrical utilities, and compressors." The project would cover eight million acres of prime wildlife habitat, mainly in Wyoming.

Coal bed methane is a form of natural gas contained in coal seams. The methane trapped in the immense coalfields of Wyoming's Powder River Basin could supply almost 10% of this country's natural gas

production, but this will come at a cost. Each well can only produce small amounts of methane so thousands of wells are required—about one well on every 40 acres. Each of these wells will pump out thousands of gallons of water as a by-product of extracting the gas. Pumping thousands of gallons of potable water during the recovery process would be a blessing for wildlife, but pumping toxic water would be a major threat. Each well would require roads, power, well drilling, and compressing. The impact on wildlife, streams, and vegetation could be dramatic.

The Summit was called to seek "common understanding of issues and reasonable solutions to potential conflict between fish and wildlife, ranching, and energy development." The specter of so many wells in prime habitat and hunting country cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, our need to develop energy for current and future demands cannot be ignored. Wildlife representatives recommended:

- Cluster drilling, e.g., slant drilling to reduce the number of wellheads, roads, power lines, etc.
- Return toxic water deep into the earth to prevent substantial wildlife deaths from ingesting tainted water. Industry representatives, however, said it was politically unacceptable to put water where it would never be found again.
- Abstain from drilling in critical wildlife habitat areas, such as sage grouse areas and big-game migration corridors.
- Restoration of drilling sites.

Industry representatives requested a "one-stop shopping" facility for oil companies to secure the necessary permits for drilling, etc. Currently, 25% of the cost of drilling a well is in the state and federal permit area, including environmental impact statements. Money saved in this area could be utilized in wildlife research and mitigation.

As for the water issue, industry representatives pointed out that ranchers and farmers were currently utilizing non-toxic water removed from well sites for irrigation purposes. The well-site water could also be used to develop wetlands and watering areas for birds and big game. Those representing wildlife responded by sharing their concern about what happens when the pumping stops, and these new refuges dry up. Is it possible we had better think long-term?

As you can readily see, there were no easy answers for the participants at the Summit. It is important that the group continue to work together to help bring about President Bush's energy program with the least possible impact to fishing, wildlife, and habitat in the West.

CWD Symposium

The Boone and Crockett Club was a co-sponsor of the Chronic Wasting Disease Symposium held on August 6-7 in Denver, Colorado. Over 450 veterinarians, biologists, research scientists, government officials, livestock and wildlife representatives attended the two-day conference. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a form of transmissible spongiform encephalitis. In Europe, it is known as bovine spongiform encephalitis, or "Mad Cow disease." In sheep, it exists as scrapie, in cats as feline spongiform encephalitis, and in humans, it appears as Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease (CJD). All of these forms are prion protein diseases, indicating a mutated form of protein that attacks the brain, spinal column, and lymph glands.

The conference focused on CWD history, identification, testing, transmission, specie barriers, hunter perspectives, public health issues, carcass disposal, public perspectives, game farms, and the future. Colorado has conducted surveillance on free-ranging cervids since the late '70s. Endemic areas are in northeastern Colorado. Mule deer in one county in northwestern Colorado are infected with CWD probably as a result of the migration corridor from northeastern Colorado. Michael W. Miller, of the Colorado Division of Wildlife, believes that observed trends suggest both prevalence and distribution of CWD in mule deer has slowly increased over the last decade in northeastern Colorado. The state currently has a program to eliminate up to 70,000 deer in the endemic areas.

Wyoming is the second state with substantial CWD infection rates. Wyoming was slow to react to the danger of CWD. Consequently, some herds in the southern part of the state have infection rates of 15-20%. Dr. Terry Kreeger, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, said, "Since 1997, the prevalence of CWD in the core endemic area was 12% in mule deer, 16% in white-tail deer, and 3% in elk. While CWD

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appears to be expanding its range within Wyoming, annual prevalence rates have not increased."

Other states currently recognizing CWD in the free-ranging cervid lands are New Mexico, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. Wisconsin will eradicate up to 15,000 deer in the hopes of eliminating CWD in the Wisconsin herds. Canadian provinces with CWD in the free-ranging cervid land are Saskatchewan and Alberta. Surveillance programs are underway in all CWD-infected animals in all states and provinces.

Most states will utilize hunters as their major force in eradicating herds infected with CWD. Government hunters will also be used where quotas cannot be filled. It is extremely important that all sick cervids are reported, regardless of whether the state that has positively confirmed cases of CWD. Sick and emaciated deer may be the sign of other diseases and old age, but state fish and game departments should be contacted whenever such animals are recognized. Your immediate response could help stop the spread of an infectious disease.

Although there is no confirmation of any case of CWD-CJD in any human being in North America, precautions should be taken by any hunters in endemic areas. Gloves should be worn when handling meat. The carcass should be boned out, taking precautions not to cut the skullcap, backbone or lymph glands. Internal organs should be handled with care. Samples of the tissue should be sent to the state fish and game department where you hunt. Meat should not be consumed until you are certain it is free of CWD.

We are informed that in cattle and human beings, a substantial genetic barrier exists for the transmission of CWD. Dick Steele, of the Western Colorado Sportsmen's Council, believes that the total sample of CWD (35,000) is too small to lead to any confirmation that CWD will penetrate the specie barriers. In Europe, the jumping of the specie barrier of bovine spongiform encephalitis to humans, which ultimately killed over 100 people, involved millions of samples.

Good reasons for great caution still exist, however, as prion diseases have jumped the specie barrier from sheep to cattle and cervids. Tests conducted on mice by Glenn

Telling of the University of Nebraska reflect that about ten percent (10%) of the inoculated mice contracted CWD. Once transmitted, the disease spreads quickly. The startling revelation was that when infected mice were put in with uninfected mice, 100% of the uninfected mice contracted CWD. We also know that the disease has been transferred to cattle by inoculation. This information underscores the need for precaution and the elimination of all CWD-infected live animals and carcasses.

It appears the greatest source of spreading CWD is through contact with other infected animals, both living and dead. Dick Steele tells us that: "Hunters should not be required to consume deer or elk harvested in endemic areas. If the CWD prion adapted to just one human, it could potentially instigate an epidemic. The really threatening aspect is that we would not know it existed until it had spread among the population for ten or more years, when the first person exhibited clinical symptoms. Therefore, we need to consider protecting the entire human population, not just the individual hunter's safety. Locker plant amplification of exposure is likely, since prion is not deactivated by currently used cleansing methods of hot water. One pound of sheep brain infected with scrapies contains 454 million infective doses of prion. Very minute amounts of lymph node tissue from CWD could contaminate an entire locker plant and every carcass that passes through it subsequently." Hunters should insist that processing plants process their animals individually, to prevent cross-contamination.

Gary Wolfe, Chairman of the Boone and Crockett Animal Health Committee and Chairman of the CWD Coalition, said that he and his wife have elk tags in the endemic area in Colorado. They will hunt this fall, but will take prudent care in the harvest of their game. They will use rubber gloves during the butchering process, will be careful not to cut critical areas of the elk, they will bone out the carcass and will submit samples to Colorado Fish and Game before consuming the meat.

Like Gary, hunters should continue to seek big game even in the endemic areas. Even though no CWD has been found in humans, I caution you to take every reasonable precaution. ■