

# PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

In a rapidly changing world, our natural resources are exposed to an array of environmental alterations and associated threats. From habitat loss and fragmentation to invasive species to financial challenges, natural resources and those who conserve them face diverse obstacles. One of the hallmarks of natural resource management is called the precautionary principle. Its basic tenet is that lack of certainty regarding environmental threats should not be used as an excuse for avoiding action to avert those threats. As threats from chronic wasting disease (CWD) continue to grow, there is a movement to thwart the precautionary principle and maintain a “business as usual” approach to deer management. Motivated by those who fear inevitable changes caused by CWD, the movement questions the relevance of this disease and confounds well-meaning efforts to manage it. The Boone and Crockett Club knows better. We continue to fund research projects to better understand the molecular structure, transmission, and detection of CWD through our William I. Spencer Conservation Grants Program. Even so, I ask you to beware of the misleading movement being advanced by CWD naysayers for reasons eloquently described by Professional Member David Hewitt and colleagues in their peer-reviewed CWD factsheet (page 26 in this issue).

The small group of wildlife professionals creating confusion about CWD questions some of the disease’s most basic attributes, including its identity as a disease and its ability to kill deer. Do not fall victim to these misconceptions. Hewitt and colleagues explain that despite CWD’s atypical disease agent (prions), it is a disease recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The authors also describe how deer can die directly from clinical CWD or be compromised by it, making them susceptible to death by other causes such as predators and vehicle collisions. Whether CWD causes death directly (which it can) or indirectly, CWD has the ability to reduce deer populations with negative effects on the hunting industry. Clearly, this is cause for concern.

The naysayers would also have you believe that a misleading view of CWD’s rarity—it occurs in four percent of U.S. counties—makes it an insignificant “non-factor.” In fact, CWD extends from Texas to Alberta and Utah to New York, not to mention its presence outside the country. Failing to classify this range as “widely spread,” as the naysayers do, is unreasonable. In their peer-reviewed CWD factsheet, Hewitt and colleagues describe the rapid spread of CWD from Colorado and Wyoming to the Midwest, central Canada, and the Great Lakes in only 20 years. Although the naysayers claim that CWD cannot be prevented or controlled, it is clear that stopping movement of infected deer will help prevent the spread of CWD. Indeed, stopping movement of CWD is the most powerful

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management tool we have; once it is established, there are no viable options for eliminating it.

CWD is a fatal, widely spread disease that can—and should—be prevented and controlled. Fearful of change, the naysayers object to all of these facts. They are attempting to control the message about CWD and suppress precautionary management. Indeed, CWD is alarming, as are the changes it will cause. But these are not reasons to maintain the status quo. As passionate hunter-conservationists, it is our duty to combat CWD head-on, not fall prey to science denials. ■



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## LEARN MORE:

- Read how researching the genetics of deer is helping give more insight to CWD on page 32.
- In the Fall 2017 issue of *Fair Chase* part 3 of the CWD series outlines the Club’s involvement with CWD since 2001.