

The Great CWD/Processing Debate on the Border!

A few weeks ago Mr. Outdoors attended a meeting at the Janet Huckabee Arkansas River Valley Nature Center (JHARVNC) arranged by State Senator Bruce Holland and State Representative Charlotte Douglas. State Representatives Deffenbaugh and Fight, as well as, many Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) employees including Ralph Meeker were also in attendance. There was also a contingency of processors there too. John Valencia of J & D Meat Processors represented the Greenwood area. The issue was the closing of the Arkansas border to bringing deer to be processed from other states.

It started out with AGFC Deer Program Coordinator Cory Gray giving all the history and statistics of chronic wasting disease and the plan for controlling CWD if it is found in Arkansas. The information was verified by Assistant Deer Program Coordinator Ralph Meeker. The processors were given a chance to speak about the possible results of closing the border from Oklahoma hunters bringing their deer in to Arkansas to be processed. Money lost, workers laid off, and carcasses being dumped by the road side were just a few of the issues. Senator Holland mediated between the two entities and thanked the AGFC for their deer management but wanted to compromise and look at a buffer zone on the border so processors could help be a line of defense to prevent CWD from entering the state. It was decided that no decisions could be made at this meeting, so it was decided that the processors would be given an opportunity to present their case to the Regulations Committee meeting held at the Springdale City Council Chambers. Meanwhile the clock was ticking for the start of bow season on September twenty-eighth.

This meeting was held last week and all the information that was presented at the meeting held at the JHARVNC was presented again. The Chair of the AGFC Regulations Committee Fred Brown led the discussions and State Representative Charlotte Douglas was optimistic about the buffer zone idea that was presented by the group of deer processors. Tick, tick, tick, the clock was still counting down to the first day of bow season during this meeting on September twenty-fifth. Three deer processors that were labeled the Cervid Carcass Importation Restrictions Delegation gave their side of what they thought would happen, including the dumping of carcasses and the turning away of business and it was brought to the attention of the AGFC that whole carcasses of deer from Oklahoma were being transported to a rendering facility in Arkansas were being allowed. Another interesting note was that an Elk and two mule deer are roaming freely around in Crawford County. The AGFC believe these animals escaped from a facility across the border in Oklahoma. The AGFC wants to eliminate these animals and have them tested for CWD.

Finally, as the clock was still ticking for the start of deer bow season this past weekend, Commissioner Fred Brown voted to keep the importation restriction in place and all the other commissioners fell in line to protect the deer herd from importation of out of state deer and the possibility of CWD. It was too little too late for the processors or legislators to make any changes. After all, the rules and regulations books had already been printed.