



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



Public Hearing – February 9, 2009
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Gina McCarthy
Department of Environment Protection

Proposed Senate Bill No. 262 - AN ACT PERMITTING THE IMPORTATION OF REINDEER.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Proposed Senate Bill No. 262 - An Act Permitting the Importation of Reindeer. Despite the good intentions of the sponsor, the Department of Environmental Protection must oppose passage of this bill.

The proposed bill would allow the importation of reindeer into Connecticut for the holiday season. In 2003, regulations were adopted by the Department of Agriculture prohibiting the import of any cervids (i.e. white-tailed deer, mule deer, black-tailed deer, elk, moose, reindeer) into the State in response to the threat of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Any exception to these regulations could place our native deer populations at risk of contracting the disease. Once established, CWD is extremely costly and difficult to contain, and nearly impossible to eradicate. CWD persists in the environment for years. Attempts to contain or eradicate the disease by state and federal agencies have been extremely expensive and labor intensive.

CWD is a fatal disease of cervids similar to mad cow disease in cattle and scrapie in sheep. No relationship has been documented between CWD and humans to date, however, CWD has the potential to seriously impact Connecticut's native white-tailed deer herd. No test, treatment, or vaccination exists and if contracted by cervids, the disease is always fatal. Most outbreaks of CWD have been linked to the movement of captive cervids within and between states. CWD has an incubation period of 3-5 years. Therefore a captive cervid could have been on a farm in New York and over a three-year period been transported to many other locations. Within those years the animal could have contracted or spread the disease to numerous other cervids before the animal demonstrated any symptoms of CWD.

Prior to 2005, it was believed that moose and reindeer might not be susceptible to CWD because there was no documentation of CWD in these 2 species. However, this was likely due to the fact that relatively few moose and reindeer have been tested for CWD. In 2005, the first moose tested positive for CWD in Colorado. Two additional moose tested positive for CWD in 2006 (Colorado) and 2008 (Wyoming). Based on molecular similarities in deer, CWD potentially could be transmitted to all species in the deer family (cervids), including red deer, fallow deer, sika deer, and reindeer.

Prior to 2000, CWD was found in only a few US states in the Midwest and the Canadian Province of Saskatchewan. Since 2000, most jurisdictions in North America have developed surveillance programs to determine the presence or absence of CWD in both captive and wild

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cervid populations. Now that more states are conducting CWD surveillance, more states are finding the disease. Since 2000, the geographic distribution of CWD has expanded on farms and in the wild to include 2 Canadian provinces (Alberta and Saskatchewan), 14 states (Colorado, Wyoming, Wisconsin, Kansas, New Mexico, New York, West Virginia, Minnesota, Illinois, Montana, Utah, South Dakota, Nebraska and Oklahoma), and Korea. (Additional information on CWD can be found of the DEP website at:

http://www.ct.gov/dep/cwp/view.asp?a=2700&q=323412&depNav_GID=1633)

It is critically important to prevent CWD from entering Connecticut due to the serious impact that it would have on the State's deer population. An outbreak of CWD would require drastic and very costly deer population reductions. Until a live test for CWD is developed, the importation ban on cervids is the only practical way to prevent introduction of the disease into Connecticut.

On balance, we feel that the threat of the introduction of CWD into the state significantly outweighs the benefit of allowing imported reindeer to be utilized at holiday displays in Connecticut, and therefore we must oppose the passage of this proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert La France, Legislative Liaison at 424-3401.