



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Testimony presented to the Environment Committee of

The Connecticut General Assembly

By the Connecticut Department of Agriculture

March 7, 2012

H.B 5258 AN ACT PERMITTING THE POSSESSION OF REINDEER YEAR ROUND

The Department has some concerns about the advisability of enacting legislation that may affect Connecticut's deer population by potentially introducing communicable diseases that are not resident in the state at this time. The most serious of which is chronic wasting disease. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal nervous system disease known to naturally infect cervids (members of the deer family). It belongs to the family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) or prion diseases. Though it shares features with other prion diseases, like mad cow disease in cattle and scrapie in sheep, it is a distinct disease known to only affect members of the deer family. The disease is progressive and always fatal. CWD has been discovered in wild deer, elk, or moose in 15 states and two Canadian provinces. Connecticut is presently a CWD free state. In addition to CWD, like any livestock, deer in general can harbor and transmit several diseases to other livestock.

Consideration should be given to legislation that would address all captive deer. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture should be recognized as the regulator of captive deer raised for agricultural and exhibition purposes. Instead of a piecemeal approach focused solely on reindeer the Department believes this is an opportunity to modify the ban on the importation of deer and facilitate the ownership of deer and deer farming. Presently, there are three deer farms in Connecticut but the ban on importation inhibits growth in this agricultural sector. A system should be developed that protects the indigenous wild herd and other species of livestock by allowing importation from CWD free herds that meet basic health requirements and provide for common sense regulations that prevent captive deer from coming into intimate contact with wild deer.

The Department offers the following language for the Committee's consideration which is largely crafted from language utilized by the USDA and the State of Vermont:

"Cervid" means any animal which is a member of the family "cervidae" kept for the purpose of exhibition, breeding or producing food or fiber whether captive or wild and all subspecies, including but not limited to the following: mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*); black-tailed deer (*O. hemionus columbianus*); elk (*Cervus elaphus*) including red deer or wapiti, moose (*Alces alces*); fallow deer (*Dama dama*); caribou or reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and silka deer (*Cervus nippon*);



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“Certificate of veterinary inspection” means a document issued by an accredited veterinarian or a veterinarian employed by the United States Department of Agriculture attesting to health status of the subject captive cervidae.

"Chronic wasting disease" ("CWD") means a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) of cervidae.

"Escape-resistant" means so constructed that the cervidae will remain confined under all circumstances, except when natural catastrophe or other incidents occur over which the owner or the owner's agent has no control.

"Herd" means one or more captive cervidae that are under common ownership or supervision and are grouped on one or more parts of any single premises, and all cervids under common ownership or supervision on two or more premises which are geographically separated but on which cervids have been commingled or had direct or indirect contact with one another.

“Official identification” means an identification system approved by the USDA and the commissioner or the commissioners designated agent, and a tag, mark or device approved by the USDA and the commissioner or the commissioners designated agent for use in identifying individual captive cervid’s.

"Owner" means the person or the legal entity that has title to the animals.

"Premises" means the property, grounds, area, buildings, water sources and equipment commonly shared by a herd captive cervidae.

“USDA” the United States Department of Agriculture.

"USDA/APHIS" means the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

Importation and transfer of captive cervids shall comply with the following:

(a) At least fifteen days prior to the date of importation or ownership transfer of captive cervidae any person, firm or corporation importing or transferring captive cervids shall notify the commissioner or the commissioners designated agent in writing of the intent to import or transfer ownership of captive cervids. Such notification shall be on forms provided by the commissioner or the commissioners designated agent. All imported captive cervidae shall bear official identification and shall be accompanied by a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection prepared by an licensed and accredited veterinarian which shall state:

1. the captive cervidae identified on the Certificate of Veterinary Inspection originate from a USDA recognized CWD free state or, from a herd enrolled in the USDA/APHIS Chronic



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Wasting Disease Herd Certification Program or equivalent state program in which the herd is monitored for, and certified free of CWD by the State Veterinarian or an Animal Health Official employed by the state of origin.

2. the captive cervidae identified on the Certificate of Veterinary Inspection aged six (6) months of age and older have tested negative for brucellosis by a test administered no more than thirty (30) days prior to entry into this state;
 3. the captive cervidae identified on the Certificate of Veterinary Inspection aged six (6) months of age and older have tested negative for tuberculosis by a test administered no more than sixty (60) days prior to entry into this state or originated from a herd that has been proven, through a whole herd tuberculin testing program to be free of tuberculosis;
 4. the captive cervidae identified on the Certificate of Veterinary Inspection have tested negative for Anaplasmosis and Bluetongue by a test administered no more than thirty (30) days prior to importation; and
 5. the captive cervidae identified on the Certificate of Veterinary Inspection are free of contagious and infectious diseases.
- (b) Annually in the month of February, owners of captive cervidae shall register each premise where captive cervids are kept. Such registration shall be on forms and in a manner prescribed by the Commissioner.
- (c) Owners of captive cervidae shall maintain and keep captive cervids within escape-resistant enclosures or when outside of an enclosure under the control of a person over the age of sixteen employed or authorized by the owner.
- (d) The Commissioner of Agriculture may adopt regulations, in accordance with the provisions of chapter 54 to enforce this section. In ensure the safety of captive cervids and those who may handle captive cervids, such regulations may include the proper type and construction of enclosures, fencing, animal handling facilities, temporary exhibitions and, shall provide for a implementation periods for those captive cervid enclosures existing at the time of adoption. Commissioner of Agriculture may adopt regulations concerning a Chronic Wasting Disease testing program, record keeping, exhibition, ownership transfer, captive cervid identification and transportation requirements.
- (e) Any violation of this section for a first offense shall be an infraction and for a second or subsequent offense shall be a class D misdemeanor.

Thank you for consideration of the views of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.