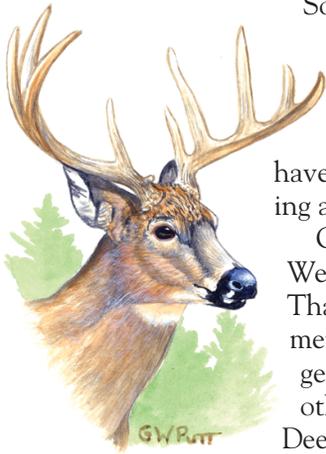


CROSSINGS

Whitetails Need You More Than Ever

WE ALL SORT of knew it was coming, that it was just a matter of time. And now Chronic Wasting Disease is here. But it is not the end of deer hunting as we know it, nor has it been in other states where it has surfaced.

CWD doesn't belong here. But Pennsylvania has it now and it will remain. Not by our choice, but simply because where CWD appears on the landscape, it's been impossible to disentangle from soils. That's unfortunate for whitetails, a game animal that has injected centuries of adventure into Penn's Woods, and billions into the Commonwealth's economy. But it's reality.



So where do we go from here? Well, if we do what hunters did in the other 20 or so states and Canadian provinces where CWD has surfaced, we hunt on using the same guidance we've always used: Don't shoot sickly deer; don't butcher deer that appear to have noticeable health problems; use gloves when processing a deer.

CWD has been present in free-ranging mule deer out West for more than 40 years. Hunting has continued. That isn't to say that hunters are reckless, or that government needs to do more. Just that the states with CWD get on with wildlife management, because CWD is another wildlife disease, like rabies, distemper or mange. Deer must be managed whether the herd harbors CWD or not, because their health and propensity to cause harm to other wildlife and property are density dependent. Too many deer is never a good thing.

Every Pennsylvania deer lost to CWD—a disease that has no business being in the wild—is unfortunate. It's here despite our vigilance. So our strategy expands from using regulations to protect our borders to include mobilizing for containment of what has slipped into our state, and checking for CWD over our more than 45,000 square miles.

The Game Commission will do all it can, but recognize CWD's carrier, in addition to captive deer, now includes free-ranging whitetails, which move mostly unobstructed across much of our landscape in dispersals and in search of food and mates. The disease will spread and show up elsewhere. It's inevitable. But don't get discouraged. Don't walk away.

Deer hunting must continue here. Because it matters to deer and myriad other creatures. Because it transcends sport for so many of us. But mostly because it's our best defense against this deadly invader. Stay afield. Deer need you now more than ever.

Joe Kosack