

State of California
Fish and Game Commission
Amended Initial Statement of Reasons for Regulatory Action

Amend Sections 360 and 708.5
Title 14, California Code of Regulations
Re: Chronic Wasting Disease: Mandatory Testing and Late Season D7 Buck Hunt

I. Date of Amended Initial Statement of Reasons: February 24, 2025

II. Dates and Locations of Scheduled Hearings

(a) Notice Hearing:

Date: December 12, 2024

Location: San Diego, CA

(b) Discussion Hearing:

Date: February 12, 2025

Location: Sacramento, CA

(c) Adoption Hearing:

Date: April 16, 2025

Location: Sacramento, CA

III. Description of Regulatory Action

(a) Statement of Specific Purpose of Regulatory Change and Factual Basis for Determining that Regulation Change is Reasonably Necessary

Unless otherwise specified, all section references in this document are to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR). Changes in the Initial Statement of Reasons since the publication on January 17, 2025 are designated by underline and strikeout.

The Fish and Game Commission (Commission) periodically considers the recommendations of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) in amending deer hunting regulations. Considerations include recommendations for adjusting tag quotas, setting hunt periods, modifying area boundaries, authorizing methods of take, among others, to help achieve management goals and objectives for deer management. Section 360 provides descriptions of hunt area boundaries, season opening and closing dates, methods of take (e.g., general methods, archery only, apprentice), tag designations (bull, spike bull, antlerless, either-sex), tag quotas (total number of hunting tags to be made available), bag and possession limits, and special conditions. To maintain appropriate harvest levels and hunting quality, tags must be adjusted periodically in response to dynamic environmental, biological, and social conditions.

One such environmental condition is the confirmation of chronic wasting disease (CWD), for the first time, in two California mule deer populations in May 2024. Given these detections, the Department enacted emergency regulations in June 2024 to define Chronic Wasting Disease Management Zones (CMZs) and to require that deer hunters in affected hunt zones submit appropriate samples from their harvest for CWD testing.

The proposed changes focus on defining the outbreak and mitigation of CWD transmission in identified CMZs through mandatory testing and increased late-season hunter opportunity for buck hunting. At January's Wildlife Resources Committee meeting of the Commission, the

committee members specifically requested that hunter-harvest carcass handling regulations be included in this proposed regulatory package. Department staff added additional language to the proposed regulations in Section 708.5 that would require hunters in defined deer hunt zones to leave high-CWD-risk materials at the site of the harvest, and provided appropriate exceptions to facilitate CWD sampling and testing. The regulations governing cervid importation and movement, as well as mandatory testing in CMZs, were last modified in July 2024 (2024-0201-01S, 2024-0529-02SR, 2024-0712-02E). Additional hunts in subsection 360(c) have not been added in at least 20 years, but subsection 360(c) was last amended in 2020 (2020-0518-01S) to adjust the season for the additional hunt J-10 (Fort Hunter Liggett Apprentice Either Sex-Deer Hunt).

The proposed amendments here represent the cumulation of the Department's internal discussion, application of [California's Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan](#), and input from [Petition 2021-017](#). The proposed changes are necessary to address the recent detection of Chronic Wasting Disease in California, as well as to respond to hunter requests for late season hunts.

Background

Chronic Wasting Disease

Chronic wasting disease is caused by a misfolded, infectious protein called a prion. These prions concentrate in the central nervous system of an infected animal, but can be found in most tissues, secretions, and excretions including muscles (meat), lymphatics, blood, glandular fluids, saliva, feces, and urine, respectively. The disease is always fatal, there is no vaccine or treatment, and all cervid species native to North America – deer, elk, moose, and caribou – are susceptible. Despite efforts to manage and contain the disease, it has continued to spread due to prion ecology, limited management options, and anthropogenic movement of infectious animals or materials. Prions are extremely stable in the environment, remain infective for years to decades, and shed by infected animals long before they show any signs of disease. This can lead to seeding of the environment with infectious prions, an important factor in the spread and maintenance of CWD, before any diseased animals are seen on the landscape. Once established in an area, eradication of CWD has proven to be infeasible, if not impossible.

The detection of CWD in California will require changes of the Department's deer and elk management strategies. As CWD prevalence increases in a population, population growth rates (λ) can decrease and lead to population declines. Human dimensions research suggests that hunter participation may decrease in areas where CWD has been detected, particularly as CWD prevalence increases in a population. Decreasing hunter participation and tag sales, coupled with increasing costs to manage this disease could compound and significantly affect the Department's ability to manage CWD, deer, elk, and other species in California.

While CWD has never been linked to any human diseases, significant public health concerns remain due to many unknowns when it comes to prion diseases. For instance, increasingly sophisticated diagnostic and molecular assays have shown that there are multiple strains of CWD and that CWD prions can differentiate when passed through multiple hosts, creating new strains with altered host susceptibilities and disease characteristics. Indeed, the predominant

CWD prion strain in Norway is different than the predominant strain in North America, with different characteristics. Additionally, CWD is in the same class of diseases as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (aka BSE or Mad Cow Disease), a prion disease of cows that was linked to variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD), a neurodegenerative disease in people, through the consumption of BSE-tainted meat. Public health officials are recommending individuals and agencies do whatever possible to keep the agents of all known prion diseases from entering the human food chain.

The Department has been monitoring California deer and elk populations for CWD since 2000, testing over 6,500 deer and elk, and has been working to increase surveillance efforts with the voluntary help of hunters, taxidermists, and meat processors since 2018. Tests are done on postmortem samples and the majority of those come from hunter-harvested deer and elk, though we are only sampling and testing a small proportion of the deer and elk harvested in California. The first response action, following communication of the detections, is to enhance surveillance in the areas of the detections to determine the prevalence of CWD in the affected populations and the geographic extent of the infections. Hunter-harvested deer from the affected hunt zones is by far the most scalable and accessible source of samples for CWD testing. The Department will also increase its response to and sampling of other mortality sources or take. Enhanced surveillance in the affected populations is the necessary first step to providing better information to hunters, partners, and decision makers following these first detections of CWD in California. Knowing the prevalence and geographic extent will allow the Department to make informed decisions on CWD and deer management where CWD is detected.

Late Season (D7) Buck Hunt

Now that CWD has been detected in California, additional measures are essential to manage and mitigate its spread. The Department proposes a late-season buck hunt as a strategic tool to increase sampling of high-risk individuals, particularly mature bucks. This demographic is more likely to be CWD-positive and engage in high levels of social interaction during the rut, increasing transmission and disease spread risk. By targeting this segment of the population, we can better detect CWD cases and increase the likelihood of removing infected animals.

The hunt will enhance biological sampling efforts and target animals most likely to be CWD-positive, i.e. adult bucks. Collecting samples (e.g., retropharyngeal lymph nodes) from harvested animals is critical to:

- 1) meet the state's surveillance objectives,
- 2) better define an outbreak once CWD has been detected to inform management decisions, and
- 3) monitor that outbreak to assess management actions,

as outlined in [California's Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan \(Munk et al. 2024\)](#). Targeting mature bucks later in the hunt season and closer to peak breeding season increases the likelihood of removing infected individuals, decreasing transmission and decreasing disease prevalence within the population ([Conner et al. 2021](#)).

Finally, this hunt is being proposed in response to [Petition 2021-017](#) and public requests for additional hunting opportunities, as voiced during Commission meetings. These requests

included calls for expanded hunts, and this proposed regulatory change will act as a pilot to evaluate both hunter interest and harvest success. Additionally, it provides the Department with a practical opportunity to refine its approach to establishing new hunts through the formal regulatory framework.

Existing Authorities

Current statutory authorities focus mostly on regulating the take, possession, or movement of animals and their parts and include:

~~F&G CODE~~ **Fish and Game Code (FGC) Section 200** provides the Commission with the power to regulate the take or possession of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and reptiles.

~~F&G CODE~~ **FGC Section 2118** provides that animals of the order Artiodactyla are considered wild animals. Animals of the family Cervidae are of the order Artiodactyla.

~~F&G CODE~~ **FGC sections 2120 and 2122** authorize the Commission, in cooperation with CDFA, to adopt regulations regarding the entry, importation, possession, transportation, keeping, or confinement of wild animals that are “not normally domesticated in this state as determined by the Commission.”

~~F&G CODE~~ **FGC Section 3950** provides a definition for game mammals: deer, elk, prong-horned antelope, black and brown or cinnamon bears, mountain lions, jackrabbits, and varying hares, brush rabbits and pygmy rabbits, and tree squirrels. Nelson bighorn sheep are game mammals only for the purposes of sport hunting as described in ~~F&G CODE~~ **FGC** Section 4902.

~~F&G CODE~~ **FGC sections 4301-4371** provide guidelines for deer management, including taking of deer, possession and importation, hunting license tags, and archery hunting.

Current Regulations

Current Title 14, CCR regulations governing deer hunting and management and mitigation of disease transmission are as follows:

Section 264 provides conditions for the use of lights while hunting.

Section 265 prohibits the use of dogs for the take of deer during archery seasons and provides criteria and limitations for the use of dogs for the take of deer during general methods seasons.

Sections 350 and 351 provide definitions for big game and forked-horn buck, antlerless, and either-sex deer.

Section 352 provides hunting and shooting hours on big game.

Section 353 provides methods that are authorized for taking big game.

Section 354 provides definitions and regulations for methods of taking big game.

Sections 360 and 361 provide regulations for general methods and archery deer hunting.

Sections 450-460 provide general regulations for the management of deer, including conservation, hunting seasons, deer herd management units, management plans, and annual deadlines for Department recommendations (December 15) regarding deer hunting.

Section 681 provides regulations for the importation of live cervids.

Section 712 explicitly includes all members of the family Cervidae and defines “skull plate.”

Section 714 makes it unlawful to import or possess any material that contains or is labeled or advertised as containing any biological fluid derived from a cervid.

Emergency Regulations Adopted

The Commission adopted emergency regulations on June 19, 2024, which became effective on July 22, 2024, and will expire on January 22, 2025. The [emergency regulations](#) enacted the following changes:

Section 708.5; Deer Tagging, Reporting, and Testing Requirements.

Added subsection 708.5(e): Added a new subsection defining CWD Management Zones (CMZ) for purposes of implementing mandatory deer sampling in deer hunt zones where CWD has been detected in deer or is expected based on recent CWD detections in deer. (Figure 1).

Added subsection 708.5 (f): Added a new subsection requiring hunters who take a deer within a CMZ to provide the Department with samples for CWD testing. This subsection also prescribes the permissible methods for hunters to provide the Department with samples.

Added subsection 708.5 (g): Added a new subsection establishing the minimum amount of information that hunters subject to subsection (f) must provide the Department to accompany CWD samples.

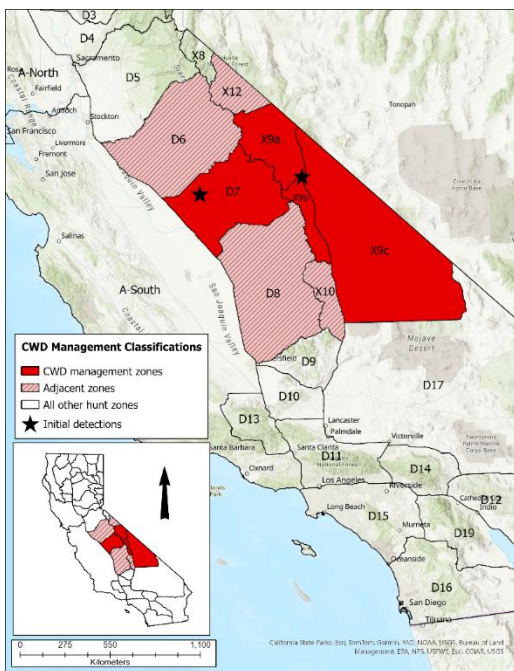


Figure 1. CWD Management Classifications

These emergency regulations ~~will be allowed to expire~~expired on January 22, 2025, as the final deer season closure occurs at the end of November 2024. The following proposed regulations will provide a framework for mandatory testing for CWD (as in the previous emergency regulations), with amended language to enumerate the criteria for a hunt zone to be a CMZ.

Proposed regulations

Proposed regulations comply with the Department’s Deer Management Plan and California’s Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan.

Section 360 Deer

No changes to subsections (a) through (b).

Add subsection (c)(16) G-40 to establish a late season buck hunt in a portion of D-7.

Renumber subsections (16) through (44).

Establishing a late season buck hunt in deer hunt zone D-7, where CWD was recently detected, will serve as a strategic tool to increase sampling of mature bucks, the demographic most likely to be CWD-positive. These animals engage in high levels of social interaction during the breeding season, increasing transmission risk. By targeting this segment of the population, we can better detect CWD cases, aiding early detection and response efforts. This action aligns with objectives identified in California’s Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan (Munk et al. 2024) and public requests for expanded hunting opportunity submitted in Petition 2021-017 and at Commission meetings.

Section 708.5 Deer Tagging, Reporting, and Testing Requirements

No changes to subsections (a) through (d).

The proposed changes add subsections 708.5(e)-(h), as did the emergency regulations (2024-0712-02E) promulgated following the first CWD detections in California.

Amend all subsections:

- There have been several changes to tense and/or possessive language for consistency and clarity of the section.

Add subsection (e) to define Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management Zones (CMZs).

Based on the history and current understanding of CWD, it is likely, if not certain, that CWD will be detected in areas outside of the four hunt zones identified in the emergency regulations (D7, X9a, X9b, and X9c). In this proposal, what defines a CMZ is reframed to allow for new CMZs if CWD is detected outside of the currently affected zones to prevent delays in management actions. Adding a definition of a CMZ is necessary to adaptively manage the CWD outbreak in California over time, as target zones for mandatory testing will be variable based on current detections. Adaptive management is a cornerstone of the definition of “credible science” as defined in F&G

CODEFGC Section 33.

The defining criteria for inclusion as a CMZ are:

- (1) any deer hunt ~~zones~~zone, excluding Zone A, in which a CWD-positive animal has been ~~taken~~detected,
- (2) any deer hunt ~~zones~~zone, excluding Zone A, within five miles of the location from where a CWD-positive animal ~~was taken~~has been detected, and
- (3) any county within Zone A where a CWD-positive animal ~~was~~has been taken detected, or is within five miles of where a CWD-positive animal ~~was taken~~has been detected. The specified distance of five miles is necessary to create a biologically reasonable boundary for detections that fall on or near county or hunt zone boundaries. Zone A is too large and must be broken up into counties to create manageable CMZ boundaries.

Amend subsection (e):

- (e)(1) - Change “zones” to “zone” for consistency and clarity with the rest of the subsection.
- (e)(1) through (3) - Change “taken” to “detected” to allow for CWD detections from carcasses that do not fall under the definition of “take.” “Take” is defined in FGC Section 86 as: hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill.

Add subsection (f) define a “Testing CMZ” designated by the Department’s Director, which allows the director to designate what, if any, requirements there may be for CWD “testing” and carcass “handling” within a CMZ, resulting in two types of CMZs: “testing CMZ” or a “testing and handling CMZ.” This change is necessary to make it clear that the Director may designate a particular CMZ for the mandatory testing requirement, and in addition, may also consider the potential for transmission of CWD during carcass handling and transport. This subsection describes the criteria to be used when designating what will be required in a CMZ. This subsection allows for the Director to designate any CMZ for the mandatory testing requirement listed in subsection 708.5(g). As a CMZ is defined by 708.5(e)(1) through (3), rather

Rather than having the default of every CMZ, as defined by 708.5(e)(1) through (3), have requiring the submission of mandatory sample testing or handling requirements, it is of to the benefit to of both the Department and to hunters to initiate or stop the mandatory submission of samples testing or handling of hunter harvested deer within CMZs prior to the start of all hunt seasons (July 1 annually). Following identification of (a) hunt zone(s) as a CMZ (or a county in the case of Zone A), the Department can then determine if mandatory sampling testing and/or handling is warranted based on the factors listed in proposed subsections (f)(1) through (2). For example, there may be situations where the Department has collected enough disease surveillance information to define a CWD outbreak and additional where continued mandatory testing would not contribute any novel information significantly to inform decision making. In these situations, it would be beneficial for the Director to un-designate a discontinue CWD sampling requirements in a Testing CMZ, which would result in a reduced burden on the

hunter to cease submitting samples and a reduced cost on the Department for funding and staff time associated with receiving, processing, and analyzing samples. Similarly, there may be situations where carcass handling requirements may be too burdensome or unwarranted in a CMZ. Other situations could include whether new sampling data is needed from a particular CMZ, and support management actions, such as direct sampling and targeted removal of CWD-positive animals, or adjustment to hunt zones for harvest, towards the overall protection of natural resources.

The defining criteria to designate requirements for a CMZ are as follows:

- (1) Testing CMZs will be designated by the need to better define an outbreak, department capacity and to support management actions.
- (2) Testing and handling CMZs will be designated based on the criteria in (1), in addition to risk of spreading the movement of CWD through the movement of hunter-harvested carcasses or their parts, and the Department's capacity to facilitate both CWD sample and disposal of high-risk materials.

Subsection (f)(1) describes how a "testing CMZ" is designated. Subsection (f)(1)(A) replaces previously proposed subsection (g), and moves the mention of submission of the preferred sample type (retropharyngeal lymph nodes, or the head) further down to (f)(1)(A)1. through 3. Language about permissible sampling methods is restructured for clarity. Samples are required to be submitted within 10 days of harvest to allow for the hunter to complete a hunting trip from a potentially remote location, and prep for submission of the sample in accordance with this subsection.

Amend section (f) to adjust capitalization in accordance with the Commission's style and remove redundant references to subsection (e) and the Department's website.

Subsection (f)(1)(A)1. through (B) Add subsection (g) to establishes a mandatory sampling requirements for a testing CMZ. Mandatory testing is needed to enhance CWD surveillance within CMZs to determine prevalence and the geographic extent in affected areas, to clearly define the initial outbreak, and is one of the main objectives when responding to initial CWD detections as outlined in California's Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan (Munk et al. 2024). Knowing the prevalence and geographic distribution of a CWD outbreak informs decision makers and directs management actions. Tests are done on postmortem samples and the majority of those come from hunter-harvested deer and elk. Hunter-harvested deer from the affected hunt zones is by far the most scalable and accessible source of samples for CWD testing. The Department will also increase its response to and sampling of other mortality sources or take. Enhanced surveillance in the affected populations is the necessary first step to providing better information to hunters, partners, and decision makers following these first, and any future detections, of CWD in California. Knowing the prevalence and geographic extent will allow the Department to make informed decisions on CWD and deer management where CWD is detected.

Former subsection (f)(1)(A)1. to bring the deer is moved to subsection (f)(1)(A)3 to allow for language for testing and handling CMZs to match the order of presentation in (f)(2). The mention of bringing the harvested head is moved from subsection (f)(1)(A)1. to re-

numbered subsection (f)(1)(A)2 to separate out the permissible sampling methods by body part. Former subsection (f)(1)(A)2. is re-numbered to (f)(1)(A)1., and provides direction for hunters to bring the deer head with retropharyngeal lymph nodes or the retropharyngeal lymph nodes to a participating meat processor or taxidermist, and adds in the option to do so for CWD sampling station, to be sampled for CWD to provide maximum permissible options for sampling. Re-numbered subsection (f)(1)(A)2. describes information for hunters who self-sample the retropharyngeal lymph nodes and where to find information on this sampling method. Changes the possessive language for consistency and clarity of the section for the hunter self-sampling the deer, and removes a redundant reference to the Department's website. Subsection (f)(1)(A)3. from previous (f)(1)(A)1. gives the direction for hunters to bring the entire deer, clarifying that retropharyngeal lymph nodes must be included a CWD sampling station, and adds in the option to do so for a participating meat processor or taxidermist.

Subsection (f)(1)(B) is moved from previous subsection (h), with language changed from "Hunters shall provide the following information..." to "When submitting a sample, the following information shall be provided." This subsection defines the minimum information that hunters must provide with their sample. The hunter's name, GO ID number, deer tag or document number, and harvest location (GPS coordinates preferred) must accompany any CWD sample. This minimum sample information is to ensure the department knows the location of the harvest and can contact the hunter with testing results if warranted.

Subsection (f)(2)(A) through 2. Subsection (f)(2) describes how a "testing and handling CMZ" is designated and is necessary to specify carcass handling restrictions. Subsection (f)(2)(A) mimics the language of (f)(1)(A) for testing CMZs, except via (f)(1)(A)1. and 2., limits the permissible sampling methods to providing a head, or self-sampling (does not allow for providing a whole deer as the goal is to limit carcass transport). Subsection (f)(2)(A) is necessary to limit the movement of high-risk materials, including brain and spinal column, by requiring hunters to leave those portions at the harvest site. Limiting the movement of tissues that, in CWD-positive animals, have high concentrations of infectious CWD prions is an important regulatory and management action that can decrease the chances of anthropogenic movement of CWD to unaffected areas. Restricting the movement of potentially infectious materials is a foundational tenant of disease management.

Subsection (f)(2)(B) mimics the language of (f)(1)(B) regarding minimum information that hunters must provide with their sample. This addition is necessary to ensure that hunters know which information to submit with samples for testing and handling CMZs.

Subsection (f)(2)(C) specifies that all portions of the brain, spinal column and gut pile from an animal harvested in a testing and handling CMZ must be left at the harvest site. Subsection (f)(2)(C)1. describes the exceptions to this to allow hunters to bring heads and nervous tissue to the Department for mandatory CWD testing. Subsection (f)(2)(C)2. gives the exceptions for the heart, liver, and kidneys when possessed for human consumption in case hunters wish to consume these parts from a testing and handling CMZ.

Together subsections (f)(1) and (f)(2) provide the director and the Department ways to identify a CWD management zone and consider current CWD knowledge and outbreak status when determining what, if any, requirements should be required to effectively manage CWD in California.

Subsection (h) has been moved to subsections (f)(1)(B) and (f)(2)(B) for clarity and organization.

Add subsection (hg) to describe the minimum information that hunters must provide with their sample.

~~This is necessary so that the Department obtains essential information for monitoring the spread of CWD, such as the geographic location of the take, and to ensure the Department can contact hunters if CWD is detected in their harvest.~~

Add subsection (i) to specify that all portions of the brain, spinal column, and gut pile from an animal harvested in a CMZ must be left at the harvest site. Provide for exceptions to this to allow hunters to bring heads with nervous tissue to the Department for CWD testing.

Add subsection (j) to indicate how and where the Department will provide current information on CWD detections in California, and ~~current Testing~~ different types of CMZs pursuant to subsection (f) as designated by the Director.

This is necessary to ensure hunters have a place to find appropriate and up-to-date information on CWD, and the status of their hunt zone to comply with mandatory testing.

(b) Goals and Benefits of the Regulation

~~The proposed regulations~~regulatory amendments to Section 708.5 will contribute to the surveillance of deer populations in California CMZs for CWD. These regulations allow for surveillance in the areas of the detections to determine the prevalence of CWD in the affected populations and the geographic extent of the infections, where hunter-harvested deer from the affected hunt zones is by far the most scalable and accessible source of samples for CWD testing. The designation of “testing CMZs” or “testing and handling CMZs” make it clear that the Director may designate a particular CMZ for the mandatory testing requirement, and in addition, may also consider the potential for transmission of CWD during carcass or parts handling and transport. Knowing the prevalence and geographic extent will allow the Department to make informed decisions on CWD and deer management where CWD is detected.

~~The proposed regulations~~regulatory amendments to Section 360 will provide additional deer hunting opportunities: by way of a late-season buck hunt in D7. The hunt will enhance biological sampling efforts and target animals most likely to be CWD-positive, i.e. adult bucks. This demographic is more likely to be CWD-positive and engage in high levels of social interaction during the rut, increasing transmission and disease spread risk. Targeting mature bucks later in the hunt season and closer to peak breeding season increases the likelihood of removing infected individuals, decreasing transmission and decreasing disease prevalence within the population.

(c) Authority and Reference Sections from Fish and Game Code for Regulation

Section 360:

Authority: Sections 200, 203, 265, 460, 3051, 3452, 3453, 3953 and 4334, Fish and Game Code. Reference: Sections 200, 203, 203.1, 255, 265, 458, 459, 460, 3051, 3452, 3453, 3953 and 4334, Fish and Game Code.

Section 708.5:

Authority: 200, 203, 265, and 1050

Reference: 1050, 2118, 3950, 4302, and 4336, Fish and Game Code

(d) Specific Technology or Equipment Required by Regulatory Change: None

(e) Identification of Reports or Documents Supporting Regulation Change

- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency (AFWA) Best Management Practices for Prevention, Surveillance, and Management of Chronic Wasting Disease Summary - [AFWA CWD BMPS 12 September 2018 FINAL.pdf \(fishwildlife.org\)](#)
- New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation, Management Plan for White-Tailed Deer in New York State, 2021-2030, Appendix 3: Recommendation to Prohibit Cervid Biofluids in New York. - [Management Plan for White-tailed Deer in New York State 2021-2030 \(ny.gov\)](#)
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- Chiavacci, S. J. 2022. The economic costs of chronic wasting disease in the United States. *PLoS One* 17: e0278366. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0278366>
- Numerous other states' CWD management plans accessible online through each state agency's website, including but not limited to, New York, Montana, Idaho, and Washington.

(f) Public Discussions of Proposed Regulations Prior to Notice Publication

- Wildlife Resources Committee, May 2024
- Wildlife Resources Committee, September 2024
- Wildlife Resources Committee, January 2025

IV. Description of Reasonable Alternatives to Regulatory Action

(a) Alternatives to Regulation Change

No alternatives were identified by or brought to the attention of Commission staff that would have the same desired regulatory effect.

(b) No Change Alternative

Without the proposed changes, the mandatory testing in CWD Management Zones, currently deer hunt zones D7, X9a, X9b, and X9c, would expire and the number of deer sampled and tested for CWD in affected areas would decrease significantly. A single year of robust disease surveillance data is insufficient to manage this disease effectively. Additionally, continued surveillance for this disease will be required to keep hunters informed, to adaptively manage, and to inform species management. Without the late season D7 hunt, we would decrease our ability to selectively remove deer more likely to be CWD-positive. Removing infected deer has the benefit of decreasing transmission, decreasing environmental contamination, decreasing prevalence, and mitigating the spread of the disease.

V. Mitigation Measures Required by Regulatory Action

The proposed regulatory action will have no negative impact on the environment; therefore, no mitigation measures are needed.

VI. Impact of Regulatory Action

The potential for significant statewide adverse economic impacts that might result from the proposed regulatory action has been assessed, and the following initial determinations relative to the required statutory categories have been made:

(a) Significant Statewide Adverse Economic Impact Directly Affecting Businesses, Including the Ability of California Businesses to Compete with Businesses in Other States

The proposed action will not have a significant statewide adverse economic impact directly affecting business, including the ability of California businesses to compete with businesses in other states. This proposal is economically neutral to businesses.

(b) Impact on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State, the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses, or the Expansion of Businesses in California; Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents, Worker Safety, and the State's Environment

The Commission anticipates no impact on the creation or elimination of jobs within the state, no impact on the creation of new business, the elimination of existing businesses, or the expansion of businesses in California as minor variations in hunting regulations are, by themselves, unlikely to provide a substantial economic stimulus to the state. The Commission does not anticipate direct benefits to the general health and welfare of California residents or to worker safety but anticipates benefits to the environment through the preservation of the deer population.

(c) Cost Impacts on a Representative Private Person or Business

The Commission is not aware of any cost impacts that a representative private person or business would necessarily incur in reasonable compliance with this proposed action. However, in complying with the reporting requirements for CWD in the CMZs hunters may incur a cost related to the transportation of a deer carcass, head, or lymph nodes to a testing facility. While the Department has limited information and data regarding how far hunters drive to reach a sampling station, meat processor, or taxidermist, the estimated range that a hunter is likely to drive to and from the facility is expected to be between 5-100 miles with an average expected driving distance of 52.5 miles. Applying the average California gas price of \$4.678 per gallon to the average expected driving distance of 52.5 miles, with the expectation that most hunters drive a truck or SUV with an average gas mileage of 18 miles per gallon in order to haul their gear and carcass(es), gives an estimated individual cost of \$13.64 in transportation costs for delivering a sample to a testing facility, meat processor, or taxidermist. However, this cost is not incurred if a hunter chooses to leave the brain, spinal column, and gut pile of a deer harvested in a CMZ at the site of harvest as permitted by these regulations.

(d) Costs or Savings to State Agencies or Costs/Savings in Federal Funding to the State

No new costs/savings or changes to federal funding are anticipated for state agencies.

The Commission anticipates that the proposed regulatory action will require additional expenditures of approximately ~~\$475,900~~649,856 to maintain the proposed mandatory testing of deer carcasses for CWD. The proposed action will require additional expenditures for a position to implement the proposed CWD testing program in the Wildlife Health Lab; however, this position is fully funded under a United States Fish and Wildlife Service grant for the 2025-26 hunting season and imposes no additional costs to the Department (see ~~table~~table 1 and 2 in the STD. 399 and Addendum). These costs are expected to be absorbed within the Department's existing budget and performed by staff currently operating in the capacities

described in Table 1 of the STD 399 Addendum. However, the Department is projected to experience higher deer tag sales that may result in revenue increases (see STD. 399 and Addendum). No other state agencies are anticipated to be affected by the proposed emergency regulatory action.

(e) Nondiscretionary Costs/Savings to Local Agencies: None

(f) Programs Mandated on Local Agencies or School Districts: None

(g) Costs Imposed on Any Local Agency or School District that is Required to be Reimbursed Under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4, Government Code: None

(h) Effect on Housing Costs: None

VII. Economic Impact Assessment

(a) Effects of the Regulation on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State

This regulatory action is not anticipated to induce the creation or elimination of jobs within the state.

(b) Effects of the Regulation on the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses Within the State

The Commission does not anticipate impacts on the creation of new businesses, the elimination of existing businesses within the state because the expected economic impacts of the proposed regulations are unlikely to be substantial enough to stimulate demand for goods or services related to deer hunting.

(c) Effects of the Regulation on the Expansion of Businesses Currently Doing Business Within the State

The Commission does not anticipate impacts on the expansion of businesses currently doing business within the state because the expected economic impacts of the proposed regulations are unlikely to be substantial enough to stimulate demand for goods or services related to deer hunting.

(d) Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents

Hunting is an outdoor activity that can provide several health and welfare benefits to California residents. Hunters and their families benefit from fresh game to eat, and from the benefits of outdoor recreation, including exercise. People who hunt have a special connection with the outdoors and an awareness of the relationships between wildlife, habitat, and humans, and can be a family tradition and a bonding activity. Further, given the potential implications for California's hunting and outdoor recreation economies, and for public consumption, tracking positive detections is necessary to keep known sources of infectious prions, e.g. CWD, out of the human food chain.

(e) Benefits of the Regulation to Worker Safety

The Commission does not anticipate impacts on worker safety.

(f) Benefits of the Regulation to the State's Environment

As set forth in Fish and Game Code section 1700, it is the policy of the state to encourage the conservation, maintenance, and utilization of fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of all the citizens of the state. The Commission anticipates benefits to the State's environment, in addition to those screening actions the Department is already taking, by taking this regulatory step to require testing of harvested animals from affected hunt zones. This regulatory action aims to help determine the prevalence and geographic extent of the outbreak for Department staff to provide updates to hunters. It is imperative to understand the prevalence and geographic distribution of this outbreak to better advise and implement effective management strategies. Finally, the adoption of scientifically based deer seasons and tag quotas provides for the maintenance of deer populations to ensure their continued existence and supporting recreational opportunity. The fees that hunters pay for licenses and tags help fund wildlife conservation.

(g) Other Benefits of the Regulation

The Commission does not anticipate other benefits from the proposed regulation.