



**To:** Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Republican Members  
**From:** Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Republican Staff,  
Sang Yi ([Sang.Yi@mail.house.gov](mailto:Sang.Yi@mail.house.gov)) (202-821-9930) and  
Meghan Holland ([Meghan.Holland@mail.house.gov](mailto:Meghan.Holland@mail.house.gov)) (202-897-7480)  
**Date:** April 25, 2022  
**Subject:** Hybrid Oversight Hearing on “*Preventing Pandemics Through U.S. Wildlife-borne Disease Surveillance*”

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The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will hold a hybrid oversight hearing titled “*Preventing Pandemics Through U.S. Wildlife-borne Disease Surveillance*” on **Thursday, April 28, 2022, at 10:00 a.m.** in room 1334 Longworth House Office Building and via Cisco WebEx.

Republican members are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in person from the hearing room.

Member offices are requested to notify Sang Yi ([Sang.Yi@mail.house.gov](mailto:Sang.Yi@mail.house.gov)) **no later than Wednesday, April 27, at 4:30 p.m.** if their Member intends to participate in person in the hearing room or remotely via his/her laptop from another location. Submissions for the hearing record must be submitted through the Committee’s electronic repository at [HNRCDocs@mail.house.gov](mailto:HNRCDocs@mail.house.gov). Please contact David DeMarco ([David.DeMarco@mail.house.gov](mailto:David.DeMarco@mail.house.gov)) or Everett Winnick ([EverettWinnick@mail.house.gov](mailto:EverettWinnick@mail.house.gov)) should any technical difficulties arise.

## I. KEY MESSAGES

- Preventing future pandemics requires a broader discussion beyond the surveillance of wildlife diseases in the United States. Effective reduction of pandemic risk must include accountability for bad actors, such as China, whose support for wildlife trafficking and similar practices is destructive.
- Current federal funding for wildlife disease surveillance systems must be evaluated prior to allocating additional resources or creating new bureaucracies to avoid creating duplicative programs or wasting taxpayer dollars.

## II. WITNESSES

### Panel One

- Ms. Anne Kinsinger, Associate Director - Ecosystems, U.S. Geological Survey, Washington, D.C.

### Panel Two

- Ms. Catherine Semcer, Research Fellow, Property and Environment Research Center (PERC), Washington, D.C. [*Republican Witness*]
- Dr. Colin Carlson, Assistant Research Professor, Center for Global Health Science and Security, Georgetown University Medical Center, Washington, D.C.
- Dr. David Stallknecht, Professor in Wildlife Health, College of Veterinary Medicine, Director, Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, University of Georgia, Athens, GA
- Dr. Julie Thorstenson, Executive Director, Native American Fish and Wildlife Society, Northglenn, CO

## III. BACKGROUND

### *Defining Zoonotic Disease*

A zoonotic disease is an “illness that can spread between animals and people.”<sup>1</sup> Sixty percent of infectious diseases found in people are classified as zoonotic diseases.<sup>2</sup> Examples of zoonotic diseases include: the West Nile virus, the Plague, Rabies, Ebola, and coronaviruses, including SARS-CoV-2.<sup>3</sup>

### *Current U.S. Wildlife Disease Surveillance Activities*

The National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), is responsible for the detection, surveillance, and management of wildlife diseases in the United States.<sup>4</sup> To conduct disease surveillance, NWHC partners with other federal agencies, state and local governments, universities, and environmental organizations.<sup>5</sup> Anne Kinsinger will likely discuss the status of USGS’s current surveillance work, as well USGS research relating to several zoonotic diseases identified as priorities for the United States.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Press Release, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, *8 Zoonotic Disease Shared Between Animals and People of Most Concern in the U.S.*, (May 6, 2019), <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/s0506-zoonotic-diseases-shared.html>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *See Id.*; Pervaze A. Sheikh & Katarina C. O’Regan, *Wildlife Trade, COVID-19, and Other Zoonotic Diseases*, CONG. RESEARCH SERVICE (Feb. 19, 2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11494>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, NAT’L WILDLIFE HEALTH CENTER, *About*, <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/nwhc/about> (last visited Mar. 17, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, NAT’L WILDLIFE HEALTH CENTER, *Partners*, <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/nwhc/partners> (last visited Mar. 17, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> *See The USGS One Health Approach to Wildlife Disease and Environmental Change*, ECOSYSTEMS, Nov. 2, 2021, <https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/ecosystems/news/usgs-one-health-approach-wildlife-disease-and->

Other federal agencies also contribute to wildlife surveillance efforts. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) operates the National Wildlife Disease Program, which conducts wildlife disease monitoring throughout the United States.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) partners with NWHC, as well as other organizations, to investigate wildlife mortality events and develop disease management strategies.<sup>8</sup>

Recently, wildlife surveillance detected COVID-19 in deer.<sup>9</sup> USDA scientists tested deer from Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania, finding antibodies in about 40 percent of the deer they examined.<sup>10</sup> Researchers continue to study deer in 30 states to assess the presence of COVID-19.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (Pub. L. 117-2) allocated six million dollars to support efforts to study COVID-19 in deer.<sup>12</sup> Notably, researchers concluded that while COVID-19-infected deer deaths were reported, the virus itself was not the cause of these deaths.<sup>13</sup> In response to deer contracting COVID-19, the National Park Service (NPS) emphasized that “the risk of getting COVID-19 from animals in the United States, including wildlife, is low.”<sup>14</sup> Further, NPS noted that there was no evidence humans could contract COVID-19 from eating wild game.<sup>15</sup>

Recently, APHIS revealed detection of avian influenza in 27 states since February 2022.<sup>16</sup> In response, APHIS, along with federal and state partners, is conducting additional surveillance.<sup>17</sup> Importantly, this detection of avian influenza does not pose an immediate

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environmental-change. (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Dep't of the Interior (DOI), and U.S. Dep't of Agriculture (USDA) collaborated to release a 2019 report identifying the eight zoonotic diseases of greatest concern in the United States).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. DEP'T OF AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL PLANT AND HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE, *Nat'l Wildlife Disease Program* (last modified Apr. 16, 2021, last visited Mar. 18, 2022),

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage/programs/nwdp>.

<sup>8</sup> *Examining the Impacts of Disease on Wildlife Conservation and Management: Hearing before the S. Comm. on Environment and Public Works*, 116th Cong (2019) (Testimony of Mr. Stephen Guertin, Dep'y Dir. of Policy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dep't of the Interior).

<sup>9</sup> Evan Bush, *Covid is Rampant Among Deer, Research Shows*, NBC NEWS, Jan. 2, 2022,

<https://www.nbcnews.com/science/science-news/covid-rampant-deer-research-shows-rcna10181>.

<sup>10</sup> *See Id.*; Jeffrey C. Chandler et al., *SARS-CoV-2 Exposure in Wild White-Tailed Deer*, 118 PNAS 47, (Nov. 3, 2021), <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2114828118>.

<sup>11</sup> *Supra* note 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Ari Daniel, *Researcher Finds 'Stunning' Rate of COVID Among Deer. Here's What it Means for Humans*, NPR, Mar. 9, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2022/03/09/1084440012/researcher-finds-stunning-rate-of-covid-among-deer-heres-what-it-means-for-human>.

<sup>14</sup> Rob Hotakainen, *D.C.-area Deer Test Positive for Covid-19*, E&E NEWS, Mar. 4, 2022,

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2022/03/04/d-c-area-deer-test-positive-for-covid-19-00014332>.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> Laura Reiley, *Avian Flu Has Spread to 27 States, Sharply Driving Up Egg Prices*, THE WASH. POST, Apr. 16, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/04/16/bird-flu-egg-prices/>.

<sup>17</sup> Press Release, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRICULTURE, *USDA Confirms Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Idaho*, (Apr. 15, 2022), [https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/newsroom/stakeholder-info/sa\\_by\\_date/sa-2022/hpai-id](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/newsroom/stakeholder-info/sa_by_date/sa-2022/hpai-id).

public health concern, and no cases of human infection from these avian influenza viruses have been detected in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

#### IV. REPUBLICAN APPROACH

Although Democrats identified a narrow discussion topic, this hearing provides Republican Members the opportunity to present a more holistic approach to preventing future pandemics. Preventing the next pandemic requires more than domestic wildlife surveillance. Combatting pandemics, by their nature, requires international strategies to address disease outbreaks and global coordination in surveillance.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) recognizes the importance of developing comprehensive, global disease detection abilities.<sup>19</sup> Hot spot areas for disease emergence, including Central Africa and Southeast Asia, were flagged by USAID, emphasizing the need for those areas to receive disease detection support.<sup>20</sup> Effectively reducing the risk of another pandemic requires consideration of international factors like illegal wildlife trafficking, conservation efforts, and actions of other countries, along with wildlife disease surveillance efforts.

International levels of success in combatting wildlife trafficking will influence the likelihood of another zoonotic disease outbreak. As illegal wildlife traffickers evade health inspections and transport animals in poor conditions, increased illicit trafficking can correspond to increased disease spread.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, discussions surrounding pandemic prevention should analyze responsible management of ecosystems. For example, Chinese companies often eliminate species' habitats through deforestation practices in the Congo basin.<sup>22</sup> When habitats are lost, more animals are confined to a smaller space, increasing the likelihood of zoonotic disease spillover between species.<sup>23</sup> Evaluating international environmental management, especially in zoonotic disease hot spots, and the effectiveness of USAID programs are necessary components for determining best practices to prevent future pandemics.

Strategies to prevent future pandemics are incomplete without accountability for bad actors. Democrats failed to take action and investigate China's culpability for the outbreak of COVID-19. In response, Republicans on the Select Committee on the Coronavirus

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<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, *Emerging Pandemic Threats*, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/emerging-pandemic-threats-program> (last updated July 12, 2021, last visited Mar. 16, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Stopping the Spread: Examining the Increased Risk of Zoonotic Disease from Illegal Wildlife Trafficking: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Environment and Public Works*, 116th Cong. (2020) (Testimony of Ms. Catherine Semcer, Research Fellow, PERC).

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> Vanda Felbab-Broan, *Preventing Pandemics Through Biodiversity Conservation and Smart Wildlife Trade Regulation*, Brookings, Jan. 25, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/preventing-pandemics-through-biodiversity-conservation-and-smart-wildlife-trade-regulation/>.

Crisis held a forum to analyze the origins of COVID-19, as well as China's responsibility in the pandemic's spread.<sup>24</sup>

This hearing presents an opportunity for Republican Members to call attention to China's and other bad actors' practices in Africa, which contribute to the spread of zoonotic diseases. Ms. Catherine Semcer, the Republican witness, will describe China's role in habitat destruction in Africa, as well as the continued demand for illegal wildlife products.<sup>25</sup> Future pandemic prevention requires the analysis of Chinese practices' contribution to increased likelihoods of zoonotic disease outbreaks.

Certain environmental groups called for wildlife trade bans to prevent future pandemics.<sup>26</sup> Republican Members, however, have an opportunity to counter assertions that the risk of transferring zoonotic diseases justifies blanket bans against wildlife trade. Dan Ashe, the former USFWS Director for the Obama administration, deemed such bans on wildlife trade as irresponsible.<sup>27</sup> Past bans on wildlife trade have been unsuccessful in various ways.<sup>28</sup> Previous bans resulted in trade being driven to unregulated, underground markets, actually increasing the likelihood of zoonotic disease outbreaks.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Democrats have unsuccessfully attempted to restrict the importation of hunting trophies to the United States.<sup>30</sup> If implemented, such a ban would also ultimately deny African countries an important source of funding for conservation and anti-poaching efforts, both of which contribute to pandemic prevention.<sup>31</sup>

## V. ISSUES DEMOCRATS MAY RAISE

Democrats will likely focus on efforts within the United States to monitor wildlife diseases, and the role surveillance plays in preventing the spread of diseases. Dr. Julie Thorstenson is expected to describe the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society's efforts to support Tribal management of wildlife on their lands, including monitoring diseases.<sup>32</sup> Dr. David

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<sup>24</sup> See Press Release, COMM. ON OVERSIGHT AND GOV'T REFORM, *Select Subcommittee Republicans Announce Expert Witness Forum on COVID-19 Origins*, (June 23, 2021), <https://republicans-oversight.house.gov/release/select-subcommittee-republicans-announce-expert-witness-forum-on-covid-19-origins/>.

<sup>25</sup> *Supra* note 21.

<sup>26</sup> See Rebecca Beitsch, *Two Green Groups Call For End to Wildlife Trade to Prevent Next Pandemic*, THE HILL, May 18, 2020, <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/498376-two-green-groups-call-for-end-to-wildlife-trade-to-prevent-next>; Press Release, CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, *Animal, Environmental Organizations Call on White House to Support G20 Ban on Wildlife Trade*, (Aug. 17, 2020), <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/animal-environmental-organizations-call-white-house-support-g20-ban-wildlife-trade-2020-08-17/>.

<sup>27</sup> See *Nat. Res. Dems Forum: Virtual Roundtable: Crossing the Species Barrier: The Growing Threat of Wildlife Diseases to Human Health and What We Can Do About It*, 116th Cong. (2020) (Response to questions from Chair Grijalva, by Dan Ashe, CEO, Association of Zoos and Aquariums) *available at* <https://naturalresources.house.gov/hearings/virtual-roundtable-crossing-the-species-barrier-the-growing-threat-of-wildlife-disease-to-human-health-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>.

<sup>28</sup> *Supra* note 21.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> See H.R. 2245, the CECIL Act (116th Cong.); H.R. 4372, § 436 (117th Cong.).

<sup>31</sup> *Supra* note 21.

<sup>32</sup> Native American Fish and Wildlife Society, *Initiatives: Wildlife Health*, <https://www.nafws.org/initiatives/wildlife-health/> (last visited Mar. 23, 2022).

Stallnecht is expected to discuss the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study's partnership with USGS,<sup>33</sup> as well as potential improvements to wildlife surveillance efforts.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Colin Carlson may discuss the effectiveness of disease prediction tools, and how artificial intelligence can aid wildlife disease surveillance.<sup>35</sup>

Democrats may encourage USGS to create a program similar to USAID's PREDICT Project. The PREDICT Project focuses on increasing the international community's ability to detect zoonotic viruses by strengthening surveillance and improving models for predicting diseases.<sup>36</sup> Given the emphasis of this hearing, Democrats may assert a need to fund an additional federal program focused solely on disease surveillance within the United States.

*Republican Response:* Creating new federal programs for animal disease surveillance would be redundant. In the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (Pub. L. 117-2), Congress gave the USDA \$300 million to implement surveillance measures for emerging zoonotic diseases, including SARS-CoV-2.<sup>37</sup> Last month, the USDA announced its Final Strategic Framework for implementing its surveillance of zoonotic diseases.<sup>38</sup> Rather than creating a duplicative program, the NWHC should utilize its existing partnership with the USDA,<sup>39</sup> and support the USDA's efforts to implement a surveillance system.<sup>40</sup>

On March 23, 2022, Ms. Kinsinger briefed staff from the Committee on Natural Resources on USGS' research on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).<sup>41</sup> CWD is an infectious disease that impacts the deer family.<sup>42</sup> Along with researching CWD, NWHC partners with state

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<sup>33</sup> *Supra* note 5.

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. Andrew Ramey et. al, *Lessons Learned from Research and Surveillance Directed at Highly Pathogenic Influenza A Viruses in Wild Birds Inhabiting North America*, 518 *Virology* 55-63 (2018), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29453059/>.

<sup>35</sup> *Humans Have Given Wild Animals Their Diseases Nearly 100 Times, Researchers Find*, SCIENCE DAILY, Mar. 23, 2022, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/03/220323101259.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, *Emerging Pandemic Threats*, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/emerging-pandemic-threats-program> (last updated July 12, 2021, last visited Mar. 16, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> Press Release, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRICULTURE, *USDA Announces Proposed Framework for Advancing Surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 and Other Emerging Zoonotic Diseases Through the American Rescue Plan*, (Aug. 24, 2021), <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/08/24/usda-announces-proposed-framework-advancing-surveillance-sars-cov-2>.

<sup>38</sup> Press Release, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRICULTURE, *APHIS Announces Final Strategic Framework for Enhancing Surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 and other Emerging Diseases Under the American Rescue Plan*, (Feb. 9, 2022), <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/02/09/aphis-announces-final-strategic-framework-enhancing-surveillance>.

<sup>39</sup> See *supra* note 5.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. DEP'T OF AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE, *APHIS' American Rescue Plan (ARP) Surveillance Program: Strategic Framework* (Feb. 2022) available at [https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/aphis\\_general/arp-strategic-framework.pdf](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/aphis_general/arp-strategic-framework.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> *Briefing on Chronic Wasting Disease*, from U.S. Geological Survey and Dep't of the Interior staff to H. Comm. on Nat. Res. staff (Mar. 23, 2022 12:00 p.m.).

<sup>42</sup> *Chronic Wasting Disease*, NAT'L WILDLIFE HEALTH CENTER, June 1, 2019, <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/nwhc/science/chronic-wasting-disease>.

and local governments to detect and monitor the disease.<sup>43</sup> Democrats may highlight USGS's work on CWD to show the importance of wildlife surveillance. On June 25, 2019, Democrats held an Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee hearing on CWD where they highlighted their concerns and speculations of spread beyond deer.<sup>44</sup>

*Republican Response:* NWHC should continue to work with its partners to monitor CWD. It is important to note, however, there have been no reported cases of CWD infection in people.<sup>45</sup>

Democrats may also use this hearing to advocate for provisions altering the *Lacey Act* (16 U.S.C. 3371-3378), included in the *America Creating Opportunities for Manufacturing, Pre-Eminence in Technology, and Economic Strength (COMPETES) Act of 2022*. Under the guise of pandemic prevention, these provisions would give the Secretary of the Interior broad authority to issue emergency designations prohibiting the importation of species that the Secretary deems “injurious.”<sup>46</sup>

*Republican Response:* These provisions in the *America COMPETES Act* would result in a broad expansion of federal authority, yet they did not go through regular order by being considered in the committee of jurisdiction, the Committee on Natural Resources. If enacted, these alterations to the *Lacey Act* would create a “white list” for imported species, meaning animals not on the list are treated as injurious species by default.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, these changes could limit access to veterinary care for exotic pets,<sup>48</sup> and ban the interstate transport of certain species.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> *Chronic Wasting Disease: The Threats to Wildlife, Public Lands, Hunting, and Health: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Oversight and Investigations of the H. Comm. on Nat. Res.*, 116th Cong. (2019).

<sup>45</sup> CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PROTECTION, *Chronic Wasting Disease*, <https://www.cdc.gov/prions/cwd/index.html#:~:text=To%20date%2C%20there%20have%20been,from%20infected%20deer%20or%20elk> (last visited Mar. 19, 2022).

<sup>46</sup> H.R. 4521 § 71102 (2020).

<sup>47</sup> Press Release, U.S. ASSOCIATION OF REPTILE KEEPERS, *America COMPETES Act of 2022*, (Feb. 4, 2022), <https://usark.org/2022lacey1/#:~:text=The%20Lacey%20Act%20amendments%20concealed,medical%20care%20a%20cross%20state%20lines>.

<sup>48</sup> Jennifer Fiala, *Exotic Pets Ensnared in Federal Legislation to Boost U.S. Economy*, VIN NEWS, Mar. 15, 2022, <https://news.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=210&Id=10811745>.

<sup>49</sup> *Supra* note 47.