

# Committee on Resources

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## TESTIMONY OF

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Concerning  
H.R. 2057  
(The Chronic Wasting Disease Support for States Act of 2003)

Before the  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH  
and the  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS  
of the  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman. I am Russell George, Director of the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to share my thoughts about the potential for increased federal assistance to States attempting to manage Chronic Wasting Disease, commonly referred to as CWD. I appreciate the support and leadership of Congress on the subject of CWD, an issue of considerable importance to the State of Colorado.

Colorado is uniquely positioned to take advantage of any federal grants or other assistance relative to managing and studying this disease. Thus far, our state agencies have invested heavily in tackling the challenge of CWD and we have done so largely with state funds, especially revenues derived from the sale of hunting licenses. Therefore, we welcome increased federal financial support.

That is why I especially applaud Chairman McInnis' bill. It provides significant new funds for state wildlife managers and it asserts the primacy of the States in policy-making authority with regard to wildlife management, both in general terms and specifically with respect to CWD. We have been concerned that this point has been overlooked too often by some federal agencies.

States that have had outbreaks of CWD, like Colorado and Wisconsin, have aggressively responded to the threats it poses to wildlife, both free-roaming and captive. States should continue to remain at the forefront of preventing or responding to chronic wasting disease. What states like Colorado really need from the federal government are additional resources, not new programs or institutions.

The needs of the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDOA) and Colorado State University (CSU) are extensive and beyond the ability of the state to fully fund. Federal assistance is crucial at this time. The knowledge that we have gained and the programs we have initiated in Colorado are often used as a model for other states just starting to respond to CWD issues. The innovative and aggressive approach that Colorado has taken allows other states to save scarce funds and limited personnel time by enabling them to focus on initiatives, technologies and approaches that we have demonstrated to be effective.

I would like to take a moment to highlight some of the actions taken by Colorado over the past two years in response to the spread of CWD. We have:

- Coordinated with local governing authorities and private landowners to reduce deer populations in areas of especially high prevalence.
- Significantly redirected existing funding and personnel to CWD control efforts.
- Increased coordination and cooperation between the CDOA, Colorado's Department of Public Health and the Environment, CSU and the Division of Wildlife on CWD issues.
- Created 8 new positions devoted to CWD within the Division of Wildlife (a field coordinator for culling activities, a statewide wildlife disease coordinator, a staff veterinarian, 4 lab technicians and a lab supervisor for a new wildlife health unit – all using hunting license fee revenues).

In addition, we joined with CSU and CDOA, to implement an extensive CWD surveillance and testing program for wild elk and deer. Members of the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association and volunteers from several federal agencies, conservation organizations and the general public also provided significant assistance. With this cooperation, we were able to offer statewide testing of hunter-killed deer and elk while validating a new rapid test that provided results in hours instead of months and allowed for large-volume testing. As a direct result of our experience, we understand that the new test is now being considered by the USDA and Canada for screening large numbers of cattle for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE).

With this integrated effort, we succeeded in testing more than 27,000 wild deer and elk for CWD with most results available within two weeks of receipt of the sample. The CDOA and the Division of Wildlife continue to coordinate, develop, and adopt comprehensive regulations that govern the importation, intrastate transportation and surveillance of captive deer and elk. As you can see, we already have in place programs to monitor and manage CWD.

Despite the unprecedented actions taken by Colorado and other states, it is clear much more work remains to be done. What we need most are additional financial resources with few strings attached. Federal funding for this work is a wise investment. We already have a proven track record of success.

In concert with CDOA and CSU, Colorado has identified several initiatives and program that are in need of additional support. Those needs include:

#### Upgrading Certified Labs

\$3.5 million to initiate the planning and construction of a new diagnostic lab on the CSU campus in Fort Collins that has the potential to share laboratory space and equipment and co-house staff from the CDOW, the CDOA and the University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, a CWD-certified testing laboratory. A proposed program plan (that currently includes CSU and CDOA in one new building) has already been approved by the CSU Board of Governors and awaits funding to proceed.

\$4 million to upgrade disposal processes at four CWD sampling/testing facilities -- in Grand Junction, Craig, Fort Collins and Rocky Ford. I would like to emphasize that these upgrades will be necessary if regulations under consideration by Region 8 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are imposed. The regulations would govern our CWD labs' waste streams and our methods of carcass disposal. We urge the EPA to proceed slowly and cautiously, and only after consulting with external third party prion disease experts, other federal agencies and all potentially affected states (including their wildlife, public health and agriculture agencies).

#### Research

\$2 million for research on therapeutics, live animal diagnostics, environmental detection, field diagnostics, genetic resistance and enhanced rapid laboratory tests.

\$5 million to relocate and upgrade our live animal research facility. The existing facility is located on property that is under a lease that will expire soon and is not likely to be renewed by the property owner. This project will provide several Colorado institutions the capability to continue a strong tradition of collaborative animal research.

### Surveillance, Monitoring and Management of Wild Deer and Elk

Colorado needs assistance with our annual expenses directly related to CWD operations (expanded surveillance, testing, reporting, culling, carcass disposal, etc.). Expenditures are estimated to be about \$3 million in the coming state fiscal year.

### Surveillance, Monitoring and Management of Captive Deer and Elk Herds

We estimate Colorado would require \$150,000 for detecting, measuring and monitoring incidence of CWD in captive Colorado herds. We also anticipate needing as much as \$1 million for reducing the incidence of CWD in captive herds (depopulation, indemnification, and carcass disposal).

### Education and Outreach

Finally, states like Colorado need money for the development of brochures, fact sheets, videos, training clinics, website enhancement, etc. for agency staff, hunters, veterinarians, meat processors, taxidermists, conservation groups and the general public.

As I conclude, I feel it is important to note that the Colorado Division of Wildlife anticipates spending an estimated \$3 million on chronic wasting disease-related actions in our upcoming fiscal year which begins on July 1, 2003. To enable us to accomplish this, our state legislature authorized us to use funds from our dwindling reserve balance. We are doing so in addition to diligently reprioritizing existing resources, at the expense of other programs, for CWD work.

H.R. 2057 would authorize programs that could help Colorado, and many other states, meet the significant challenges presented by CWD. My state has been at the forefront of efforts to understand and control CWD in the wild. We have made tremendous progress in those efforts, but we are at the point that federal assistance is urgently needed to help us, and a growing number of other states, respond to CWD.

In summary, I would like to emphasize that there are many opportunities for the federal government to assist States in CWD management and research. I urge congressional support for legislation and funding that will allow Colorado's needs to be met. I also urge you to consider the most streamlined and efficient mechanisms for making such funding available, including grant programs already well-established.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you and your distinguished colleagues. Colorado's deer and elk are among our state's most treasured natural resources. Your efforts to help us protect this valued resource are greatly appreciated.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

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