

**OPENING STATEMENT FOR THE
HONORABLE SCOTT McINNIS, CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE**

May 16, 2002

At the outset, I want to thank my colleague and the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Fisheries and Wildlife, Mr. Gilchrest, for joining with me in convening this hearing today. I also want to thank our witnesses who have come from far-flung parts of the country to be part of this important dialogue. I must say – I haven't seen this many Coloradans and Wisconsins in the same place since the Broncos ran-roughshod over the Packers in the Super Bowl a couple years back. But as a courtesy to our guests from Wisconsin, I promise that that will be both my first and last reference to a Super Bowl memory that I suspect many of our Wisconsin friends have tried to repress.

Today, this joint Subcommittee hearing will explore an issue of immeasurable importance to a growing number of communities in wide-ranging parts of this country – the growing incidence of Chronic Wasting Disease in North America's wild and captive deer and elk populations. In a matter of just a few months, this once parochial concern has grown into something much larger and more insidious than anyone could have ever imagined or predicted. As each day passes, and this problem grows in its size, scope and consequence, one thing becomes clear: Chronic Wasting Disease a Colorado problem, or a Wisconsin problem, or a Nebraska or Wyoming problem. This is a national problem. And anything short of a fully integrated, systematic national assault on this disease simply will not do.

Which is precisely why we are here. I joined with my Colleague Mr. Gilchrest in convening this hearing because I wanted to get all of the best and most knowledgeable minds in America on Chronic Wasting Disease into the same room to begin the process of developing an integrated and long-term vision focused on containing and, ultimately, eradicating this scourge.

Let me be clear on one point at the outset, however – just because this hearing is being held in Washington, DC before a Subcommittee in the U.S. House of Representatives doesn't mean that I – or I dare say any of my colleagues – are even remotely hinting at the outside possibility that the federal government interfere with the primacy of the States when it comes to managing the nation's wildlife and this disease. We emphatically are not. The States are and will continue to be the decision-makers-in-chief when it comes to managing this disease. That's the way it ought to be. For my part, I can't think of a better person than my good friend Russell George to spearhead the attack on Chronic Wasting Disease in Colorado. Russ and the other officials on our State panel are the world's preeminent authorities on Chronic Wasting Disease. Any attempt to take the reigns of control out of their hands would be nothing short of foolhardy. On that point, I would venture to say everyone agrees.

But as this problem has evolved and expanded over the course of the last several months, another reality has become readily obvious – our friends in the States need help. Without question, the time has come for Congress and federal agricultural and wildlife officials to bring meaningful resources to bear in support of the state led attack on Chronic Wasting Disease. Our role in day-to-day decision-making should not

increase, but the measure of our financial assistance and technical support must. In particular, the federal government should immediately step up and expand Chronic Wasting Disease related research. The long-term solution to this problem is summed up in three words – research, research, research. There are other important ways for the federal government to assist, but research should be our job one.

Before we start throwing money at this problem, though, the federal government needs to get its own house in order by developing a unified game plan between all of the many involved federal agencies. It is abundantly clear that no such unified game plan now exists. To be fair to the multitude of involved federal departments and agencies, this is a complex issue that exploded onto the national scene just months ago, and so I'm somewhat sympathetic to the fact that our federal partners aren't yet singing from the same song sheet. But unfortunately, with the disease popping up in new places all the time, and appropriations season just around the corner, we don't have the luxury of time. So my charge to the involved federal agencies is this: before Memorial Day, get Congress a unified and integrated game plan that lays out in specific terms how the federal government intends to support state decision-makers, what the division of labor between the federal agencies should look like, and how much money each of the agencies will need to fulfill its assigned mission. I don't want one proposal from AG, one proposal from Interior, one proposal from APHIS, and one proposal from USGS. I don't want overlapping costs. I want one integrated, comprehensive proposal. So you've been put on notice.

Now, if we don't get a unified recommendation out of the agencies in the next 10 days, I've got a bill drafted and ready to go, and I know some of my Colleagues do as well. My preference would be for the agencies to write the game plan. You're the experts. But if we don't get a unified proposal out of the agencies and soon, I've got one here for you. I look forward to discussing this matter further with our federal panel.

It is with this that I thank all of our Members and witnesses for taking part in this critical discussion today. I look forward to hearing each of your comments.

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