

SOUTH DAKOTA CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE ACTION PLAN, 2025-2029



**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH AND PARKS
PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA
WILDLIFE DIVISION REPORT 2025-10
UPDATED October 2025**

This action plan will be used by South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) staff on an annual basis and will be formally evaluated at least every five years. Plan updates and changes, however, may occur more frequently as needed.

In addition, GFP has created a supportive document to this action plan, the “Management of Chronic Wasting Disease in South Dakota”, which provides a historical background, known distribution, surveillance, public outreach, challenges, and opportunities, and citizen involvement related to chronic wasting disease and can be found at <https://gfp.sd.gov/management-plans/>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan is a product of substantial discussion and input from many wildlife professionals and is rooted on previous comments and suggestions received from landowners, hunters, and other stakeholders were considered and incorporated where appropriate.

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The GFP Chronic Wasting Disease Internal Workgroup and other staff that assisted with plan writing, developing maps, data review and analyses, critical reviews and/or edits to the South Dakota Chronic Wasting Disease Action Plan included: Nathan Baker, Byron Buckley, Stephanie Buckley, Steve Griffin, Trenton Haffley, John Kanta, Tom Kirschenmann, Chad Lehman, Andy Lindbloom, Julie Lindstrom, Samantha Nichols, Andrew Norton, Kevin Robling, Dan Sternhagen and Lauren Wiechmann.

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Department Mission

We serve and connect people and families to the outdoors through effective management of our state's parks, fisheries, and wildlife resources.

Department Vision

We will conserve our state's outdoor heritage to enhance the quality of life for current and future generations.



INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of South Dakota residents and visitors enjoy the opportunity to view, photograph, or hunt deer and elk across the state's diverse landscapes. However, in many parts of the state, some of these animals are dying from a fatal illness known as chronic wasting disease (CWD). Unlike fast-acting infections caused by viruses or bacteria, CWD progresses slowly—infected animals may appear healthy for months or years before ultimately succumbing to the disease.

CWD is a degenerative and always fatal disease that affects cervids (i.e., deer, elk, and moose), which is caused by an abnormal form of a protein called a prion, that leads to brain damage over time. Infected animals may exhibit signs such as progressive weight loss, behavioral changes, excessive salivation, increased thirst and urination, lethargy, loss of coordination, and ultimately death. The prion can be passed through excreted body fluids (i.e., saliva, urine, and feces) and can be passed from individual to individual or can persist in the environment for decades. Additionally, infected animals may appear healthy for months or years, which leads to this “silent” incubation period and the high probability of transmitting the disease to other animals. It is important to note that these symptoms are not unique to CWD, making diagnosis based on observation alone unreliable.

The first confirmed case of CWD in free-ranging deer in South Dakota occurred during the 2001 hunting season in Fall River County. Since then, the disease has been detected in wild deer or elk in numerous counties including Bennett, Buffalo, Butte, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Fall River, Jackson, Haakon, Harding, Hughes, Meade, Mellette, Lawrence, Lyman, Pennington, Perkins, Stanley, Sully, Tripp, Union, Yankton, and Ziebach, as well as within Custer State Park and Wind Cave National Park (Figure 1). The disease has been documented in wild cervids in all states neighboring South Dakota and across vast sections of North America.

In 2021, the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks (GFP) Commission implemented regulations related to carcass transportation and disposal of deer and elk remains to limit the spread of infectious CWD prions. This action plan attempts to provide relevant information to reduce the spread of CWD using the best available science and management recommendations, public engagement, and a commitment to ongoing research and monitoring.

Managing CWD involves navigating a complex web of biological, ecological, and social factors for both wild and captive cervid populations. Reducing the spread of the disease may require changes to long-standing practices to decrease both natural and human-caused transmission. Effective communication and public education will be essential components of GFP's response, helping stakeholders understand and support management actions and their intended benefits.

The GFP is committed to managing wildlife and habitats for the benefit and enjoyment of South Dakota's citizens and visitors. As public interest and human influence on these resources continue to grow, so too must the intensity and sophistication of our management strategies. This action plan is designed to guide decisions over the next decade, while remaining flexible and responsive to new biological findings and public input. Above all, it serves as a foundation for shared understanding among sportsmen and women, landowners, and the broader public—uniting all in the effort to address one of the most pressing wildlife health challenges of our time.

Due to its perplexing nature, CWD presents a serious challenge for wildlife managers. With no known vaccine, cure, or ability to denature the prion in the environment, effective management options are

limited. The long-term implications for the sustainability of deer and elk populations are significant and require a strategic, science-based approach to explore the basic nature of the pathogen and its transmission. Our goal with this action plan is to provide the best available information on CWD in the state of South Dakota and provide a service for hunters and the public with regard to CWD in our cervid populations. As new information and tools become available through scientific research, we will implement those in our fight to reduce the spread of CWD in the state of South Dakota.

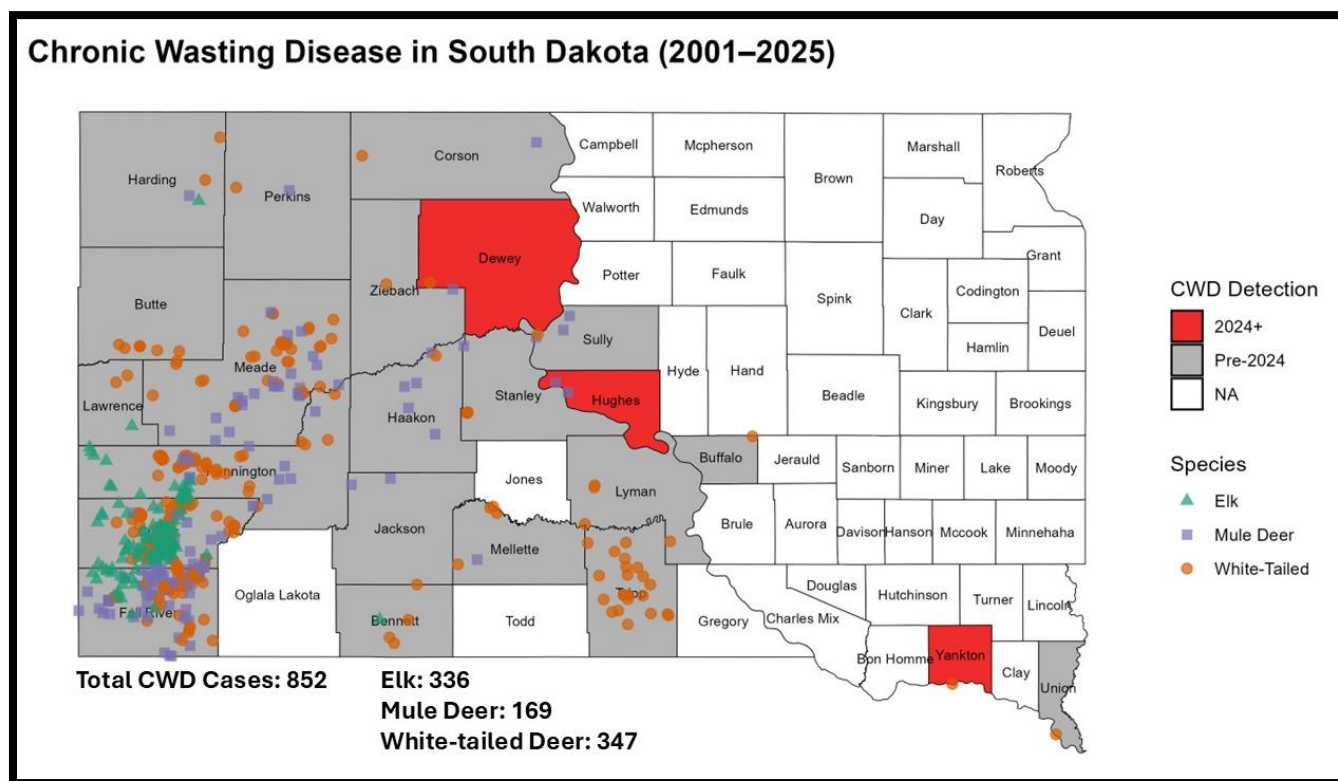


Figure 1. Locations of CWD-infected free-ranging cervids in South Dakota, 2001-2025.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following statements have guided the development of the CWD management goals, objectives, and management strategies and reflect the collective values of GFP in relation to the management of CWD in South Dakota:

- that CWD is a highly infectious and fatal disease that is transmitted between cervids by direct contact with infectious saliva, urine, and feces.
- that CWD can also be transmitted through environmental contamination, and once established in an area, has never been effectively eradicated.
- that there is **no** current evidence that CWD can infect humans.
- that wildlife, including white-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk, contributes significantly to the quality of life in South Dakota and therefore must be sustained for future generations.
- that a healthy cervid population plays an important role in the rangeland and forest ecosystems.

- in management of healthy cervids following biologically sound principles, while considering social tolerances.
- in providing accurate and timely information to the public concerning CWD issues and how CWD could impact future recreational opportunities in South Dakota.
- that the future of healthy cervid populations in South Dakota depends on a public that appreciates, understands, and supports CWD management.

GOAL STATEMENT

To determine the presence/absence of CWD across South Dakota, reduce the geographic spread of CWD with the aid of hunter and public compliance, and have an informed public that understands, supports, and participates in CWD management practices to ensure a viable, healthy deer and elk population for future generations.

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives have been identified to achieve the goal statement listed above:

Short-term (<15 years)

- To provide accurate, timely, and targeted information through GFP communication platforms to all publics, agency partners, and GFP staff, and incorporate public involvement as necessary regarding CWD in South Dakota.
- Promote best management practices (BMPs) and, where deemed necessary, implement regulations to reduce the spread of CWD in free-ranging and captive cervids in South Dakota.
- Work with local, state, tribal, and federal government agencies to monitor and manage CWD within South Dakota.

Long-term (>15 years)

- Evaluate how recreational opportunity is affected by CWD limiting population growth and age-structure of cervids in endemic areas.
- Maintain intrinsic value, including recreational opportunities and hunting heritage associated with wild cervids, despite increasing numbers of sick animals and the potential for reduced recreational opportunities.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Since there is currently **no known cure** for CWD, proactive actions that include preventive measures (i.e., proper carcass disposal) to reduce the spread of CWD are a high priority. Having an informed public on the issues and concerns of CWD and its unknown long-term influence on deer and elk populations in South Dakota is the foundation of this action plan. This action plan, including Best Management Practices (BMPs) and current regulations, will need to be shared using a variety of methods with our public and both resident and nonresident hunters.

A. Summary of Regulations

Below is a summary of regulations finalized by the GFP Commission at its May 2021 meeting to help reduce the spread of CWD via carcass transportation and disposal. The following regulations became effective beginning with the 2021 deer and elk hunting seasons:

1. Interstate (carcass movement into South Dakota from another state), carcass transportation, and disposal

41:06:03:16. Interstate cervid carcass transportation and disposal requirement. Unless delivered to a licensed taxidermist or game processor, anyone transporting whole or partial cervid carcasses from another state into South Dakota shall dispose of all remaining cervid carcass parts with a waste management provider or a permitted landfill. Whole or partial cervid carcasses being transported through the state are exempt from this section.

2. Intrastate (carcass movement within South Dakota) carcass transportation and disposal

41:06:03:18. Intrastate cervid carcass transportation and disposal requirement. Unless delivered to a licensed taxidermist or game processor, anyone transporting whole or partial cervid carcasses from the county of harvest shall dispose of all remaining cervid carcass parts with a waste management provider or a permitted landfill.

3. Carcass disposal requirements for game processors:

41:06:03:19. Carcass disposal for wildlife processing facilities. Wildlife processing facilities, as defined by § 41:06:03:10, shall dispose of all remaining cervid carcass parts with a waste management provider or permitted landfill. Game processors licensed by another state or federal entity shall dispose of carcasses as required by the conditions associated with their license.

4. Carcass disposal requirements for taxidermists:

41:09:11:07. Cervid carcass disposal for taxidermist. A taxidermist shall dispose of all remaining cervid carcass parts with a waste management provider or permitted landfill.

B. Best Management Practices (BMPs)

In September 2018, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), of which GFP is a member, passed a resolution adopting “Best Management Practices for Prevention, Surveillance, and Management of Chronic Wasting Disease”. The full technical report (Gillin and Mawdsley 2018) and AFWA Summary Report can be found at the links at the end of this document. The Best Management Practices (BMPs) were developed by wildlife biologists and disease specialists, veterinarians, and agency leaders from those states with first-hand experience with CWD in their respective deer and elk populations. In addition, BMPs were developed from peer-reviewed publications from biological and social research, field-tested methods, and past experiences. Developed with the best information available at the time, these BMPs will be periodically reviewed by AFWA members and updated as necessary.

The following are BPMs or recommendations to reduce the spread of CWD in South Dakota:

Proper Carcass Transportation and Disposal

- Hunters are recommended to leave as much of the unusable carcass as possible at the location of the harvest in a discrete location on both public and private lands. Hunters are recommended to make arrangements with the landowner on the property where permission has been granted.
- When transporting a cervid carcass from the location of harvest, only transport the following: cut and wrapped meat; quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached; antlers, hides, or teeth; and antlers attached to skull caps that are cleaned of all tissue.
- If the whole carcass is removed from the location of harvest, dispose of all unused cervid carcass parts at a permitted landfill or in a trash container provided by a waste management provider.
- If you are not moving a deer or elk carcass from the county of harvest, the regulations do not apply unless the carcass is delivered to a game processor or a taxidermist.
- Returning carcass remains to public lands or using road ditches to dispose of carcass remains is **illegal**. Make sure permission is granted if disposing of on private land.

Supplemental Feeding

- **Do not feed wildlife** (i.e., salt licks, corn feeders, or any activity that congregates animals).
 - While livestock feeding operations are recognized as a necessary agricultural practice, intentionally feeding wildlife increases the risk of CWD transmission.
 - New research indicates that deer feeders increase the risk of CWD transmission by concentrating wildlife in a smaller space, leading to more frequent contact between animals. (Huang et al., 2025).
 - Prions were detected on deer feeder surfaces, even in areas where CWD was newly detected.
 - Additionally, in an area with ~30% CWD prevalence, researchers found that ***all*** established gravity feeders became contaminated with CWD prions at least once during a study period from September 2022 to March 2023.
- For areas where deer or elk could be attracted to bird feeders, avoid placing bird feed on the ground or at a height below 6 feet from the ground surface.
- Currently, GFP does not have a supplemental or recreational feeding ban for cervids in South Dakota. It is highly recommended that the feeding of cervids in all areas of South Dakota cease, which will assist in substantially reducing and ultimately stopping the anthropogenically induced spread of CWD and other diseases, in addition to behavioral consequences of feeding wildlife (i.e., reduced fear of humans) in South Dakota.

Urine-based Scents and Lures

- Use full synthetic urine-based products.
- If using natural urine-based products, practice the following:
 - Use products that are labeled with the Archery Trade Association's Deer Protection Program seal
 - Avoid the application of products directly onto the ground or plants
 - Use a scent-wick type system placed above ground, and remove it after hunting
 - When not used, keep products enclosed in a container
 - Dispose of all products into containers supplied by a waste management provider or a permitted landfill

Processing and Disposing of Carcasses

- Wear gloves, bone out the meat from the animal, and minimize handling of the brain and spinal cord tissues when field dressing an animal. Research indicates a five-minute, submerged soak in a 40 % bleach solution will deactivate prions on washed **stainless steel items only**.
- All remaining deer and elk carcass parts from private processing facilities should be properly disposed of with a waste management provider or at a state-permitted landfill.
- Encourage the public through a media campaign to properly dispose of remaining deer and elk carcass parts.

Taxidermy

- All remaining deer and elk carcass parts from those who practice their own taxidermy should be properly disposed of with a waste management provider or at a state-permitted landfill.
- Water waste from boiling skulls for European mounts should be disposed of by the following:
 - Dig and bury in a hole and cover with one foot of soil
 - Private septic systems
 - Pour into a container and dispose of with a waste management provider or permitted landfill

SURVEILLANCE

Presence/Absence and Monitoring Prevalence Rates

The primary objective of South Dakota's CWD surveillance strategy is to monitor hunter-harvested and sick or ill reported cervid in wild, free-ranging cervid populations (Figure 1). The state of South Dakota will accept voluntary samples from hunters and the public to aid in the statewide surveillance of CWD.

South Dakota has not established formal prevalence-based management thresholds for CWD. Accordingly, current management actions are not driven by prevalence estimates. Should future research or management objectives require quantitative prevalence data (e.g., triggering specific management strategies if prevalence exceeds a defined threshold), representative sampling with appropriate statistical rigor may be implemented. If CWD is detected in a captive cervid facility, GFP will coordinate with the South Dakota Animal Industry Board (AIB) to determine an appropriate surveillance response, which may include focused sampling efforts in the surrounding area.

Strategies for CWD Sampling

Across the state of South Dakota, CWD surveillance relies primarily on voluntary sample submissions from hunters, as well as testing of animals that exhibit signs of illness before death (e.g., emaciation, excessive salivation, disorientation). This provides presence/absence data for wildlife biologists to monitor hunter-harvested and sick-reported cervids across South Dakota.

Hunter Submission for Testing

Hunters who harvest deer or elk are also welcome to submit samples for testing. In such cases, hunters may be responsible for certain costs (e.g., shipping, professional sample collection) if submitted personally. However, GFP will cover the laboratory testing costs at the SDSU Animal Disease Research & Diagnostic Laboratory (ADRDL) or if the samples or cervid carcass are brought to an official GFP collection station. Test results will be provided to both the hunter and GFP.

Instructions for collecting and submitting samples are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/docs/cwdtestinfo.pdf>. Hunters will be contacted directly by phone with the testing results of their animal.

If a hunter-harvested animal tests positive, the hunter may choose either to retain the animal or to return it (including antlers, hide, and carcass) to GFP in exchange for reinstatement of preference points and draw eligibility for the following year.

Tribal Surveillance

Nine Native American reservations are within South Dakota, including the Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Flandreau Santee, Lower Brule, Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Sisseton Wahpeton, Standing Rock, and Yankton. Each respective Native American tribe manages itself under tribal sovereignty and its respective tribal council. Most tribes have a wildlife department that conducts various wildlife surveys, research, disease surveillance, and makes hunting recommendations to the tribal councils. With a combined land base of approximately 5,000,000 acres under tribal jurisdiction, or approximately 10% of the total state land base, coordination between the state and tribes on the management of CWD is crucial.

MANAGEMENT AND RESEARCH COORDINATION

The GFP should continue strengthening relationships with wildlife management agencies in neighboring states and federal entities. Sharing information on ongoing and planned CWD management actions, as well as test results, will be mutually beneficial. States should also pursue collaborative research aimed at developing spatially explicit models for disease risk and spread, as well as strategies for efficient spatial monitoring. These efforts will help refine sampling goals by identifying priority locations for sample collection.

When available, GFP will incorporate data from GPS-collar research projects to evaluate deer and elk resource use, seasonal movements, migration distances, dispersal patterns, and overall movement ecology. Collaboration with state, tribal, and federal agencies (e.g., AIB and Wind Cave National Park), non-governmental organizations such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, private landowners, hunters, and other stakeholders will be essential for successfully implementing this action plan.

Since 2023, GFP has been conducting a CWD research project on elk in the Black Hills to assess the disease's effects on survival across three study sites. To date, 200 female elk have been captured and fitted with GPS collars for daily monitoring. An additional 50 female elk will be captured during the winter of 2025–2026 to increase the sample size. Data collection will continue through 2027, after which the study will transition to the analysis phase. This research will improve understanding of CWD's effects on female elk, which are critical to population growth, and inform population-level management decisions.

In 2024, GFP initiated a companion study to examine elk core-use areas in the Black Hills using the movement data collected in the survival study. Soil samples are being collected from these areas and tested for environmental CWD prions using RT-QuIC, the most sensitive testing method currently available. This research will provide critical insights into environmental CWD prevalence in the Black

Hills.

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

An extremely important aspect of CWD management is providing communication and outreach, which will further increase the awareness and education of CWD and management efforts to combat the disease in South Dakota. These efforts will be modified accordingly to meet communication and outreach objectives that are currently being developed. For instance, to address the BMP regarding feeding wildlife, GFP will develop a public participation plan focused on understanding recreational feeding in South Dakota and how that might impact the spread of wildlife diseases. The GFP department will gather input from the public using various survey methods (i.e., public opinion survey), which can aid in how we improve outreach and communications designed to voluntarily reduce recreational feeding. The GFP department will then use this scientific data to craft theoretically informed, targeted communication strategies to strengthen our management objectives and implementation.

Important CWD informational material about the disease and the presence of CWD in South Dakota can be found on the GFP website at: <https://gfp.sd.gov/chronic-wasting-disease/>. Individuals will find frequently asked questions, a glossary of terms, where the disease has been confirmed in South Dakota, what is being done, and how individuals can help by submitting samples upon harvesting a deer or elk. New information will be added as it becomes available.

Social media marketing will serve as a secondary hub of information through Facebook, X, and Instagram. Infographics promoting “Protect Your Herd” have been developed and will be used with social media efforts.

The GFP’s “PodCast and Blast” provides podcast topics related to previous GFP issues, stories, outdoor topics, and more. Podcasts discussing CWD, deer management, and regulation changes or updates related to CWD can be found at <https://gfp.sd.gov/pages/podcast/>.

The online Hunt Planner tool and deer application process (both paper and online) will also provide content and need-to-know information before applying for deer and elk hunting seasons. Informing hunters of BMPs and any applicable rules related to inter- and intra-state carcass transportation and disposal is a priority.

The South Dakota Conservation Digest will serve as another delivery platform. A direct mailer to approximately 35,000 landowners will be completed via the Landowners Matter Newsletter, informing this target audience about how this wildlife disease impacts them as hunters and non-hunters.

Other platforms for awareness delivery may include a Facebook Live question-and-answer session. In addition, a South Dakota Public Broadcasting Focus program was aired in May 2019 discussing how we can all help slow the spread of CWD. This program is archived and available for viewing at <https://watch.sdpb.org/video/sdf-2420-chronic-wasting-disease-ineiof/>.

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