

Ramblings on a Scourge



STORY BY LANN M. WILF

While the Mississippi Bowhunters Association (MBA) solicited this article for publication, it does not serve to represent MBA's stance on this topic.

If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.
- Ecclesiastes 11:3

My friend, William “W” McKinley, is very fond of this scripture. William is the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) Statewide Deer Program Coordinator. W and I spent many happy, yet challenging, years together in the Deer Program and learned the full meaning of this scripture together. W has been and continues to be much better at putting this scripture into practice than I am. We canceled each other out in dark times. If I was in a rage, W was finding humor in horrible circumstances. If

I was shaking my fist at the sky, W was calming me down and channeling my passion. If W was too easy going, I was hurrying him up. We made a good team.

In our time working together, what we both feared most was Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) infecting the deer herd in any part of our home state. As we matured, we both came to realize that this dreaded disease was inevitable. One day it was going to come home, and we knew that day would wound us deeply. That day has come and our grieving has passed. Now is the time for all Mississippi sportsmen to accept what has happened and do what we can to save our precious natural resource.

The following thoughts are not intended to scare anyone. They are

simply the truth. Accept them or reject them.

1) Do not panic. Simultaneously, do not be complacent. This may not be the end of deer hunting, but this will change deer hunting as we know it. While we begin to learn more about the spread of CWD and other Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs), we also must critically evaluate the impacts of this disease on meat consumption and transportation of animal parts and tissues. As I write this, we do not know the extent of the damage, but we do know that CWD is in Issaquena County and will be there indefinitely. Our only hope is that MDWFP and their partners can minimize the impacts or slow down the spread of this disease. In reality,

if MDWFP can keep the hunting public abreast of where the disease is located, this will be a huge win for the agency. Therefore the public should have realistic expectations about what the agency can provide. In this disaster, the MDWFP's goals should be to protect the natural resource and protect the hunting public through testing and determining the extent of the damage.

2) Sportsmen should encourage MDWFP to provide an avenue to test deer from the CWD containment zone. Based on sound science and the most recent research, hunters should have deer from the containment zone tested prior to meat consumption. This is unfortunate but has become necessary. If readers want more details, they can research this topic on their own. However, recent press releases from the Mississippi Department of Health should clarify this concern. Ideally, testing opportunities would be provided statewide, however we live in a world with limitations.

3) Sportsmen and wildlife professionals should encourage MDWFP to ban supplemental feeding of wildlife statewide. The ban in proximate counties is laudable, but no one saw this CWD positive in Issaquena County coming. Therefore, the next positive may also be in an unexpected portion of the state. As wildlife stewards, we should proactively take measures to slow the spread of the disease and not provide accelerants like feed and bait. Therefore, a responsible move, in drastic times would be remove supplemental feed from the list of



contributors. This may even have some side benefits, such as improved deer movement and perhaps a few more turkeys, since the aphlatoxin threat would be reduced.

4) Landowners and managers in the CWD containment zone should take efforts to work closely with the biologists and officers on site. The biologists and officers in the field are paying a significant price while working on this project. All will likely be emotionally invested and likely working long, grueling hours. The hunting public will not know or fully understand what the MDWFP personnel on the ground are dealing with. Please remember that people like W are your greatest allies in this war. Dealing with CWD is a war. It is long, bloody, and painful. It will be painful for everyone involved, but, in order to protect the state's resource, a price will have to be paid. Please allow

these great people to do what they have been trained to do. Please make a conscious decision to keep criticism of field personnel to an absolute minimum.

In closing, please allow me to reinforce the fact that I have the highest confidence in William McKinley and the field personnel of the MDWFP to handle this horrible disease with the prudence, urgency, and diligence that it requires. The state has lost some biologists in the last couple of years, but the best were retained. Those are what is needed now, and they are out there, fighting for the resource and sportsmen. God bless them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: An avid sportsman, **LANN M. WILF** of Monroe County holds an Associate's degree in Forestry Technology from Itawamba Community College and a Bachelor's degree in Wildlife Management from Arkansas State University. He has 16 years work experience as a Wildlife Biologist in State and Federal agencies, as well as the private sector.