Dear Montana Processor:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks needs your help and expertise.

As you know, chronic wasting disease was detected in Montana last fall. This poses a challenge not only to us as a wildlife management agency but also to you and your clients in terms of health and safety. CWD is not known to infect humans, but it is strongly recommended that humans not eat meat from infected animals.

It is in everyone’s best interest for us to work together to keep our wildlife herds healthy so that Montana’s long tradition of hunting continues for generations to come.

This fall, FWP will do surveillance in high-priority areas in parts of northern, western and southern Montana, primarily from hunter-harvested animals.

How you can help

Well, in several ways:

1. You can help us notify your clients that we’re interested in sampling and testing deer, elk or moose harvested from any of our priority surveillance hunt districts (see attached map). You can encourage them to bring the head of their animal to a regional FWP office for sampling. Any animal collected outside of this year’s CWD priority surveillance area will have to be submitted and tested at the hunter’s expense.

2. Place CWD informational cards at your front desk. FWP will supply the informational cards.

3. If you are willing to work closely with FWP, we are looking for processors near or within our priority surveillance areas that are willing to either:
   a. Let FWP staff set up a sampling station outside of their shop where we could intercept hunters to ask for their voluntary participation, or
   b. work with hunters directly to fill out a data card with precise location information and save tagged heads in a barrel for FWP to collect on a regular basis.

What to expect

You may start seeing deer, elk, or moose arrive at your shop with a special yellow ID tag, reading “MTFWP CWD TEST.” This tag indicates that the animal has been sampled for CWD by FWP. Test results will be delivered to hunters within three weeks of sampling.

If an animal tests positive for CWD, the hunter will be advised not to consume the meat based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Although there are no known cases of humans contracting CWD, health officials are advising caution. If the positive animal was processed at a commercial facility, we will notify the processor of the positive test and work with the processor to determine whether the animal was processed in a batch with other animals. Any hunter that received meat that was processed as part of a CWD-positive batch will be contacted and advised not to consume their meat. Thus, it helps us and hunters if there are good records available about which
animals were processed together. In other CWD-positive states, processors have stopped batch processing to help avoid affecting a large number of hunters should a CWD positive animal be discovered.

**Best practices in the context of CWD**

CWD is caused by infectious mis-folded proteins (not a bacteria, virus or fungus) called “prions” that are extremely resistant to conventional disinfecting techniques (e.g. bleach, boiling water, etc.). CWD prions are found throughout the body of an infected animal but are most concentrated in the brain, spinal cord and lymph nodes. Although conventional cleaning and disinfecting techniques are unlikely to inactivate or remove all prions, we recommend the following practices to limit human exposure and inadvertent environmental transmission:

- Follow normal cleaning/disinfecting protocols.
- Dispose of all large tissue or carcass waste (bone, etc) in a landfill. Infectious tissues or carcass parts that are improperly disposed of may contribute to ongoing environmental transmission of CWD to deer, elk, or moose.
- Wear rubber gloves and eye protection when processing wild game.
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal tissues.
- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after processing is completed.
- Avoid processing/consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes of harvested animals.

Please let us know if you are interested in helping. We are extremely appreciative of any cooperation on this issue.

Sincerely,

Emily Almberg