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WMI Outdoor News Bulletin

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Chronic Wasting Disease update:

Surveillance

Over the last year, chronic wasting disease (CWD) has been found in one new state, whereas four previously affected states have seen small increases in their CWD-positive regions, reports the Wildlife Management Institute.

In February 2006, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks confirmed that a white-tail doe harvested from deer management Unit 1 in northwestern Kansas tested positive. The addition of Kansas brings the number of CWD positive states to 11. To date, no additional CWD cases have been identified in Kansas.

Despite very extensive surveillance efforts, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has identified CWD from one deer in a new county, Grant, within the state's Herd Reduction Zone.

Similarly, Illinois added Ogle County to its CWD positive counties and saw the border of the affected area in Dekalb County expand 20 miles southward. In response, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources extended its special CWD Antlerless-only Deer Season in January to include all of Dekalb County, along with five other northern Illinois counties already included in the hunt.

The CWD control area in New Mexico has increased from 250 square miles to 400 square miles as a result of recent CWD-positive test results from areas northeast of the original control area near the White Sands Missile Range east of Las Cruces. Interestingly, one CWD positive deer was recently found southeast of San Antonio, 75 miles north of any previously identified cases in New Mexico.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department identified two deer hunt areas (4 and 11, along the northern half of the Wyoming/South Dakota border) and two elk hunt areas (16 and 22, within the southeast central core of the state) from which CWD-positive animals were taken.

Wyoming tested moose for CWD in 2006, but found no positive animals. Colorado, however, found that two moose harvested southeast of Glendevey in Game Management Unit 7 tested positive for the disease.

CWD Research

In October 2006, newly published research supported what scientists had been suspecting for some time; CWD may be transmissible through the blood and saliva of infected deer. In this study, researchers also tested the transmission of CWD through urine and feces; the results were negative. According to the authors, however, those negative results should be viewed cautiously due to the small number of animals used in the study. These findings provide new insight into how easily CWD may be transmitted through simple social interactions, particularly in situations where animals are found in high densities. Although no evidence to date shows that CWD is transmissible to humans, this study reinforces the need for hunters to use appropriate caution when handling animals harvested in CWD-positive regions. Visit www.cwd-info.org to see recommendations for hunters.

Additional evidence against the transmission of CWD to humans was presented in a September 2006 study that examined whether human deaths from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD)—the human equivalent of CWD—in residents living in CWD-positive counties are more frequent than average. By identifying the number of deaths caused by CJD over 22 years in seven Colorado counties that have a high prevalence of CWD in their deer and elk herds, the researchers found that, even though 75 percent of hunting licenses are issued locally and harvested animals generally are consumed locally, there was no significant spike in the prevalence of CJD. In fact, the rate of CJD has decreased over time. While the possibility of CWD transmitting to humans cannot be eliminated, this study reinforces that the risk of its transmission to humans is extremely low, if there is any risk at all. To view this study, go to www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eid/vol12no10/06-0019.htm. (mcd)

Conservationists irked by USDA promotion of amber waves of gas at CRP expense:

The double-barreled blow of high corn prices and the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) decision to suspend general enrollment opportunities for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), does not bode well for wildlife, according to the Wildlife Management Institute.

USDA recently announced that it does not plan to conduct a general sign-up for CRP during Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008, which it estimates will result in withdrawal of at least 4 million acres from the program over the next three years. The agency projects that more than a quarter of the land coming out of CRP is located in the major corn-producing states of the Upper Midwest—a substantial portion of the landscape that has contributed to the resurgence of many grassland-dependent wildlife species during the past two decades. Pheasants, bobwhite quail and several species of waterfowl are heavily dependent on the habitat provided by CRP in the Midwest and a significant reduction in CRP enrollment there will almost certainly result in declining numbers of those game birds, which, through recreational opportunities, generate millions of dollars annually to the region and for the management of all wildlife resources.

High corn prices, in response to growing demand for ethanol, are at the root of the matter. USDA economists project that demand for ethanol will increase by 50 percent next year, which will drive high corn prices even higher and thereby boost farmer incentive to plant even more of the crop. Since virtually all high-quality farm land is already in crop production, additional ground to address this high demand will almost certainly come from more marginal croplands, a great deal of which has been enrolled in CRP in recent years.

Beef, pork and poultry producers also have been turning up the heat on Congress and USDA to take action to address the high price of corn, because it has resulted in increased costs of their operations.

Presumably, in response to calls for an immediate increase in corn production, USDA also announced that it is considering allowing producers to opt out of existing CRP contracts without having to meet otherwise required penalties for early withdrawal. This action promptly drew fire from most of the country's leading conservation organizations. They claim that the hard-earned language, enrollment and gains of CRP for the landscape, for wildlife and for producers would be undermined by the USDA actions as announced.

On the other hand, USDA advised that continuous sign-up for buffers, wetlands and other initiatives, as well as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, will continue. The conservation organizations think it doubtful that additional enrollment in these programs will be able to offset much of the habitat lost from general CRP.

Information relative to the impact of these actions on CRP in specific states can be found at www.fsa.usda.gov. (pmr)

Tennessee provides leadership for native grass restoration in the Southeast:

To benefit grassland birds and agriculture, Tennessee conservationists are providing key leadership for the restoration of native grasses in the Southeast, reports the Wildlife Management Institute. Native grasslands and savannahs once were common throughout much of the region, but 99 percent of them have been eliminated. The Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) has identified the restoration of native grass/forb communities across most of the bobwhite range as the primary management objective for recovery of sustainable quail populations. Several priority grassland songbirds also can benefit, such as eastern meadowlarks, field sparrows, Henslow's sparrows, grasshopper sparrows, and dickcissels.

A major barrier to native grass and bobwhite restoration in the region is a long-standing and pervasive reliance by agriculture on invasive exotic forage grasses, which are easier to establish and manage. Native, warm-season grasses, on the other hand, can outproduce exotics, are more drought tolerant, require lower inputs and lengthen the period of active forage production.

In 2006, the University of Tennessee established the Mid-South Center for Native Grasslands Management in Knoxville, with collaboration and funding from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Center is a unique institution in the South, and begins the process of filling a major regional conservation void. Dr. Pat Keyser is the Center's Coordinator, a research and extension position envisioned to work with agricultural producers and other landowners throughout the state and beyond.

The Center and its collaborators wasted no time demonstrating the potency of such dedicated institutions. In January, the Center collaborators convened the first "Tennessee Native Grasslands Workshop," in part to raise awareness and examine the status of the Volunteer State's grassland resources. The workshop was geared to the professional conservation and agricultural community, but interest was so extensive that the workshop had to be moved to a larger facility at the last minute to accommodate more than 240 people.

A primary aim of the workshop was to launch a coordinated statewide effort to restore native grassland communities for birds and agriculture. TWRA Director Gary Myers attended the entire workshop to demonstrate the priority his agency is placing on native grassland restoration. Such initiative, adopted and replicated across the Southeast, would greatly accelerate the pace and expand the scope of grassland bird restoration in the region.

For more information about the native grassland-restoration initiatives and efforts of the Mid-South Center for Native Grasslands Management, contact Pat Keyser 865-974-0644. (dfm)

National Wildlife Refuges to suffer large cutbacks in staff:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will cut 565 of its staff on national wildlife refuges nationwide by 2009, reports the Wildlife Management Institute. Several years of stagnant or declining budgets have exacerbated a backlog in refuge operations and maintenance of more than $2.5 billion, forcing the dramatic 20-percent reduction in staff.

The Service personnel actions are part of regional workforce restructuring plans that not only eliminate refuge staff, but also cut back on refuge programs and even close refuges in response to persistent and projected budget shortfalls. To date, five of the Service's seven regions have released staff-reduction plans, including plans for two regions—the Pacific and Southwest—released this month.

The Pacific region of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which consists of 64 refuges encompassing more than 3.5 million acres, will have reduced field staffing at refuges by 49.5 positions from fiscal years 2005 to 2009. Over this five-year period, refuge staffing will be reduced by 29 percent in Idaho, 28 percent in Washington, 18 percent in Oregon, and 8 percent in Hawaii and the other Pacific Islands. The Service reports that these staff reductions will result in scaling back and, in some cases, eliminating biological-monitoring projects, invasive species-control programs, habitat-restoration projects, interpretive activities, environmental education programs and facility maintenance.

The Southwest region will eliminate 38 positions during the next three years on its 45 refuges, which consist of 2.86 million acres in Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. In New Mexico, only one refuge will provide adequate biological and educational programs to wildlife and visitors, while six refuges will suffer the effects of reduced or no staff. For instance, staff cuts at the Bitter Lake refuge will hamper efforts to manage adequately its water habitats, which are surrounded by a harsh, dry environment. In Oklahoma, the loss of the refuge manager at Little River refuge will make it extremely difficult to manage properly some of that state's last remaining bottomland hardwoods.

To help reduce refuge staff losses and other cuts to refuge operations and maintenance, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE)—a diverse coalition of 21 wildlife, sporting, conservation and scientific organizations that represent a national constituency numbering more than 5 million—is recommending that Congress provide $451.5 million for these purposes in fiscal year 2008 and increase funding nearly $1 billion by 2013. An effort to support the fiscal year 2008 CARE request is being led by Representatives Ron Kind, Jim Saxton, Mike Thompson and Michael Castle, who are the co-chairs of the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus.

Information on the Service's Pacific and Southwest region workforce reduction plans may be found at www.fws.gov/pacific/refuges/workforce_planning/index.html and www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/index.html. (rpd)

Rio Grande Bosque legislation introduced:

A multi-year effort by several agencies and citizen organizations to save important habitats along the Rio Grande in New Mexico would receive a needed boost in funding if federal legislation introduced recently in Congress is passed, reports the Wildlife Management Institute.

The Bosque Restoration Bill was introduced by Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM) to address threats to this habitat that is home to many native and endangered wildlife species, such as the southwestern willow flycatcher and the silver minnow. The "bosque," Spanish word for woods, refers to important woody riparian habitats along the river. Conservationists have long recognized the ecological importance of this habitat, not only to wildlife but also to people.

Changes in water flows, including a deepened river channel have reduced available moisture to cottonwood stands that are basic to these habitats. Many trees have died resulting in downed wood with invasion of non-native vegetation and undergrowth. Also human populations have encroached on the bosque via houses, freeways, bridges, and dams. This combination makes the habitats vulnerable to wildfires that are threatening not only to wild animals but to human safety as well.

The proposed funding would authorize $10 million in fiscal year 2008 for ecosystem restoration activities. There are a number of other initiatives and federally supported programs the proposed legislation could compliment. Most notable would be the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) that must be reauthorized. Both the House and Senate passed this legislation in 2005 and 2006 respectively, but negotiations on the final legislative package were not completed in the 109th Congress.

Recent droughts and a burgeoning human population growth are putting severe stresses on rivers throughout the southwest. If these systems are to be sustained, many more efforts requiring significant funding will be required. To learn more about the bosque and associated ecological issues in New Mexico, see www.esri.com/news/arcnews/winter0506articles/middle-rio-grande.html and www.fws.gov/southwest/mrgbi. (lhc)

Worth reading:

Next week, Richard Louv will be a keynoter at the Opening Session of the 72nd North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, in Portland, Oregon. His remarks will center on the subject of his best-selling book, *Last Child in the Woods*, a really important volume and a much better read that you might expect. But that's not the title reviewed here. Instead, I want to tell you about a book I read and thoroughly enjoyed shortly after its release in 2000, and which I just reread and liked even more. It is *Fly-Fishing for Sharks: An American Journey*, also written by Richard Louv.

Fly-fishing for sharks—mainly blue sharks, but the occasional Mako (which smacks of dodging grenade shrapnel for the fun of it)—truly relates to only one segment of the narrative and is about the only thing that hasn't enamored me about this work. "Gone Fishing" would have been a more apt title, but maybe that was taken.

The rest of the book is a quest to determine "how fishing renews us, and how we can renew fishing by rethinking our roles as stewards." Mostly the former, actually. It is a Charles Kuralt-type probe of the angling culture in the United States, but with less deadpan. "Angling cultures" is more accurate, because there are a lot of them.

Through investigative reporting, personal experience, and the eyes and preoccupation of anglers from Pacific waters off Southern California to Vermont streams to frozen lakes of Michigan's Upper Peninsula to the Florida Keys to the rivers of Harlem and beyond, Louv examines what differentiates the fishing cultures. They vary by equipment, bait or lures, angling techniques, waters, species of fish sought, and in what and how much people invest of their time, dollars and persona. But there is more to Louv's travelogue (he modestly claims no expertise at angling). He unveils that fishing is infinitely psychological. He reports that fishing perhaps "is not so much about introspection…as it is about outer inspection." It "is about the pursuit of happiness," serendipity and "just a good excuse to look into water or up at stars." This resonates oddly metaphysical…or Rotarian.

But it's not, because the people he meets and interviews, from all walks and shores of life, are obsessive anglers, which is somewhat redundant, because there apparently are no casual fishers. Some of these people are certified eccentrics. There is Nick of New Mexico, who opines that being a fly-fisherman is the only thing better than being a Marxist. There is a Montana guide who knows that hooking a fish changes everything. There is a fishing guide of Florida's *pay-hay-okee*, who is known by some as Captain Dirt because of his advanced age. There is intense Robert Kennedy Jr., whose brother Joe finds fishing a contact sport. There is Whitefish Willy (aka Roadkill Willy), who, when told that his locale probably is God's country, offered that if God ever showed up there, He'd probably get lost. There are icons, such as Joan Wulff and Sugar Ferris, corporate execs, charter captains, piscatorial purists, rubes, gearheads, doddle sockers, steelheaders, tweedies, dappers, and many delightful more.

Louv writes about (and participates in) tournament fishing ("among the most American of sports"), about the retail giant Bass Pro ("something of a church, in the southern-midwestern branch of the religion of fishing…Our Lady of Abu Garcia"), about the accoutrement of fishing ("Thoreau, encountering a fully equipped Roland Martin, would have wept"), about mullet thunder. Angler readers will know or know about the transcendental aspiration to "deep fishing" and "rivertime." Non-obsessed readers will learn the compelling nature of a drifting Royal Coachman or a twitchy jitterbug or a nervous bobber.

On the one hand, Louv suggests, fishing is an escape. He later supposes that people fish because they don't truly know what's down there. It may be a meal, or dollars, or trophies, or daydreams, or bragging rights, or time away from the human condition and

cynicism, or maybe a monster. But with each cast or release of a fishing line, there lurks in the mind of the fisher the same gripping suspense expressed by the foiled bank robber in Dirty Harry I: "Man, I just gots to know."

Dame Juliana Berners, the Lady Prioress of Sopwell Nunnery, who may have written *The Book of St. Albans* (England), published in 1486, is thought to have penned the first essay on sport fishing. With *Fly-fishing for Sharks*, all 494 pages, Rich Louv penned one of sport fishing's best-ever guide stories. What's a guide story? Read the book; the definition is in there somewhere; fish for it. But know going in that you will find the work informative, refreshing and enormously entertaining. And it carries with it the seeds of *Last Child in the Woods*.

Fly-fishing for Sharks was reissued in 2001 in soft cover and can be purchased on-line at www.simonsays.com for $6.49 or by calling 1-800-331-6531.

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