

Testimony of Robb Miller

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Before the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and Game and Fisheries Committee

Good morning distinguished members and guests.

My name is Robb Miller and I administer the Governor's Advisory Council for Hunting, Fishing and Conservation, which is made up of twenty volunteer members from around the state.

I'd like to begin by thanking Senators Vogel, Schwank, Stefano and Brewster for bringing the issue of CWD to the forefront today. Several members of the Senate have hosted, or are planning to host, CWD forums in their districts. I wanted to thank them as well for helping to educate the public about this horrific disease.

I've been thinking a lot lately about how blessed I am as a Pennsylvania sportsman. Years before I was born, conservationists, led by hunters and anglers, were thinking about my generation, concerned that we might not have healthy stocks of wildlife to observe and learn about, and yes, hunt. In those years, industrialization and unregulated market hunting ruled the day. Many species, including deer, were driven to near extinction. Pennsylvania's indigenous elk lost their battle to survive in the late 1870's.^{1,2} But our forefathers were visionaries who understood the intrinsic value of open space, and who wisely advocated that some of it should be preserved for the public good, ensuring that native species of birds and mammals, both game and non-game, could thrive.

Our own former Governor, Gifford Pinchot, who in his earlier years worked for the U.S. Forest Service, is credited with defining conservation as "the wise use of the Earth and its resources for the lasting good of men."

In a few decades, these forward-thinking conservationists worked with policymakers to enact some of the most far-reaching wildlife programs ever conceived, and you know them by name:

- Dingell-Johnson
- Wallop-Breaux
- The Pittman-Robertson Act (which just celebrated its 80th birthday)

These enactments, along with the federal duck stamp, are some of the vehicles used by the federal government to fund conservation in the 50 states. Hunters, anglers, boaters and recreational shooters support these programs by paying excise taxes on a great variety of equipment.

Today, every state has laws and programs in place to protect our natural resources. In Pennsylvania, our wildlife agencies don't receive support from the General Fund. Instead, revenues from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses are the primary method of funding conservation. Combined, all of this is referred to as the North American Wildlife Model. To most, the model represents the legacy of our forefathers.

Our generation now finds itself confronted with a wildlife challenge that is on par with those confronted by generations past. CWD, in my humble opinion, is the most significant wildlife challenge we've faced in about a 100-years. I say that because the disease afflicts our most popular game species, the whitetail deer.

This won't come as a surprise to anyone here, but it's worth noting that in 2011, about 92% of both resident and non-resident Pennsylvania hunters went deer hunting, about 714,000 of them. In terms of popularity, turkey hunting comes in a distant second, with 234,000 participants. About 85,000 people hunted bear.³

Without a doubt, **it's the whitetail deer that fuels our hunting economy** and helps us do our part to sustain the model. It's an economy that today, I would list as "threatened" not only in Pennsylvania, but in 23 other states and two Canadian provinces (Alberta and Saskatchewan). One leading scientist called CWD, "an emergency in slow motion."⁴

To understand what's at stake, we must first appreciate what we have.

Pennsylvania has a robust hunting economy!

Per a report entitled *Hunting in America*, produced by Southwick Associates for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the total multiplier effect from all hunting is \$1.6 Billion. Of that, \$1.027 billion is attributed to deer hunting.⁵

The strength of Pennsylvania's hunting economy has a direct correlation with the health of our deer herd. Because elk are also susceptible to contracting CWD, the potential ramifications for the PA Wilds is especially troubling.

I want to leave the numbers and statistics for a moment and just share that hunting in Pennsylvania is a treasured pastime, the personal and social value of which is hard to put into words.

It's during the deer season that many hunters get to spend time with family and friends that they may only see at that time of year ... it's time afield with a young daughter or son or grandchild ... passing along skills honed through the generations. Lifelong memories are made.

Hunting provides a chance to observe nature and take respite from the noise and static of modern life. For many Pennsylvanians, hunting defines their quality of life.

Today, we've come before you to share the information we've collected to date on Chronic Wasting Disease.

As we prepare to do battle with this disease, it's important to remain hopeful about a few things:

- We've faced wildlife challenges like this before
- Many other states have been addressing CWD far longer than PA; we can learn from their mistakes and replicate their victories
- A great deal of scientific research is being conducted by multiple states and provinces, by academia and by the USDA, USGS and many others
- We have considerable expertise and cutting edge technology on our side
- Lastly, the clear majority of our deer herd remains disease-free

We need to continue building public awareness about CWD and to increase monitoring, testing, and research. Many aspects of this disease remain a mystery.

Unfortunately, this is no longer an issue of prevention, but one of response and containment. We need to put programming in place to address each of these components, in perpetuity.

In terms of containing the disease, and keeping the prevalence low, the resources we commit today will be a wise investment. If we fail to contain the disease early, in the years to come, available resources will be spread-out over an even larger area and costs will rise.

We all have a role to play in maintaining healthy deer and elk populations and these are challenging times. Pennsylvania needs to lead on this issue because we have more to lose than most.

In closing, I'd like to thank Secretary Redding for the time that he and his staff have devoted to this problem, especially Dr. Wolfgang, Dr. Brightbill, Deputy Secretary Hostetter and many others at PDA. Thanks also to the dedicated staff at the PA Game Commission, led by Bryan Burhans, Wayne Laroche, Dr. Brown and their team of experts.

Together, the coordinated work of these lead agencies and their stakeholder partners, lifts my hopes that we can intensively manage the outbreak.

We greatly appreciate your time and attention and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

LITERATURE CITED

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