



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Marketing and
Regulatory
Programs

Washington, DC
20250

Ms. Judith Camuso
President
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
1100 First Street, NE, Suite 825
Washington, DC 20002

November 25, 2024

Dear Ms. Camuso:

Thank you for your November 14, 2024, letter requesting the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) provide an opinion on the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Resolution 2024-09-10 titled, *In opposition to the release of captive-bred cervids into free-ranging white-tailed deer populations*, specifically concerning the release of captive-bred cervids into free-ranging populations.

The resolution touches on two components I would like to respond to: the use of genomically estimated breeding value predictive genetics by farmed cervid owners, and the release of captive-bred cervids into the wild.

Ongoing research and implementation of predictive genetics is an important tool for the farmed cervid industries, providing an opportunity for producers to generate herds that are less susceptible to chronic wasting disease (CWD), thereby avoiding the establishment of CWD within a herd after an exposure or limiting the spread within the herd if infected. Additionally, predictive genetics may be useful in certain circumstances to clean up CWD-infected herds. At the same time, APHIS recognizes this tool as limited to decreasing the susceptibility of cervids to CWD rather than developing full resistance to the disease on an individual animal basis and that its utility for creating herd immunity will require long-term field studies.

APHIS remains committed to supporting ongoing research, including field studies, and to assisting industry in implementing genetic selection strategies to further evaluate the utility of whole genome predictive genetics in farmed cervids through our *Farmed Cervid Chronic Wasting Disease Management and Response Activities Cooperative Agreement Funding Opportunity*.

APHIS does not support the release of livestock, including farmed cervids, into wild populations. The one allowance APHIS recognizes as a legitimate reason for releasing captive cervids is outlined in title 9, *Code of Federal Regulations*, section 81.3(b), which provides for the release of captive deer, elk, or moose that were captured from a wild population for interstate movement and subsequent release.

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As always, APHIS continues working with state partners and other federal agencies to improve methods and technologies for the management and prevention of CWD in farmed, captive, and free-ranging cervids. Once again, I appreciate the ongoing collaboration with AFWA on this important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Sifford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Rosemary B. Sifford, DVM
Deputy Administrator
Veterinary Services
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service