



## RESOLUTION 2024-09-10

### IN OPPOSITION TO THE RELEASE OF CAPTIVE-BRED CERVIDS INTO FREE-RANGING WHITE-TAILED DEER POPULATIONS

**WHEREAS**, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ("Association") recognizes that free-ranging cervids, including white-tailed deer, are a valuable and important wildlife resource; and

**WHEREAS**, the primary authority and capacity to protect and manage cervid species in trust for the public rests with state, provincial, and territorial governments, which have a paramount interest in protecting the health of their native resources; and

**WHEREAS**, chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal degenerative disease of species within the family Cervidae and is arguably the most important disease threatening North American cervids, and

**WHEREAS**, while some genotypes have been identified in the prion protein gene that influence susceptibility to infection and rate of progression of clinical signs associated with CWD and prion shedding in individual cervids, none of these genotypes result in complete protection from or resistance to CWD, meaning infected cervids eventually will develop and succumb to the disease and, in some instances, may have prolonged incubation and prion shedding periods; and

**WHEREAS**, recently, the captive cervid industry and their partners have supported and promoted selective breeding and the release of selectively-bred captive white-tailed deer into the wild, aspiring to alter free-ranging white-tailed deer genetics to enhance the durability of free-ranging populations against CWD as a management approach; and

**WHEREAS**, the intentional release of captive cervids into free-ranging cervid populations undermines the authority of state, provincial, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies and neighboring jurisdictions that oppose such releases and undermines the public trust tenet of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation; and

**WHEREAS**, the effort to release selectively-bred captive white-tailed deer into the wild relies on assumptions that have not been adequately researched and is not based on the best available, peer-reviewed science and indeed poses a disease transmission risk to susceptible free-ranging deer, in addition to other unknown risks for which, states, provinces, and territories lack appropriate management tools, ; and

**WHEREAS**, it has not been demonstrated that the release of captive-bred deer is capable of altering the genetics of free-ranging deer populations to enhance the durability of free-ranging populations against CWD, because the genotypes associated with susceptibility to infection and rate of progression are recessive, and random removal due to harvest and natural selection will maintain the observed rarity of these genotypes in light of the vast distribution and abundance of white-tailed deer; and

**WHEREAS**, the release of captive cervids poses risks to the health and genetics of free-ranging cervid populations through the potential to carry unknown deleterious traits, may lead to new CWD-prion strains, and may inadvertently release CWD-positive animals into susceptible herds;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Association recognizes the severe threat of CWD in captive and free-ranging cervid populations, supports the need for further scientific research of this threat, and endorses management practices based on the best available scientific information; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Association reaffirms and supports the authority of state, provincial, and territorial governments to protect and manage cervid species held in public trust; and

**BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED**, that the Association opposes the release of any captive cervids into the wild to influence free-ranging cervid population genetics for the purpose of controlling or managing CWD, based on the current best scientific information, and encourages its members in their own jurisdictions to promote and implement the best scientific management practices for CWD.

*Submitted by the Fish and Wildlife Health Committee.*

*Adopted by the Association on September 25, 2024 in Madison, Wisconsin.*