



Chronic Wasting Disease in Georgia

Surveillance and Management Plan
Department of Natural Resources
February 2025

Hunting in Georgia

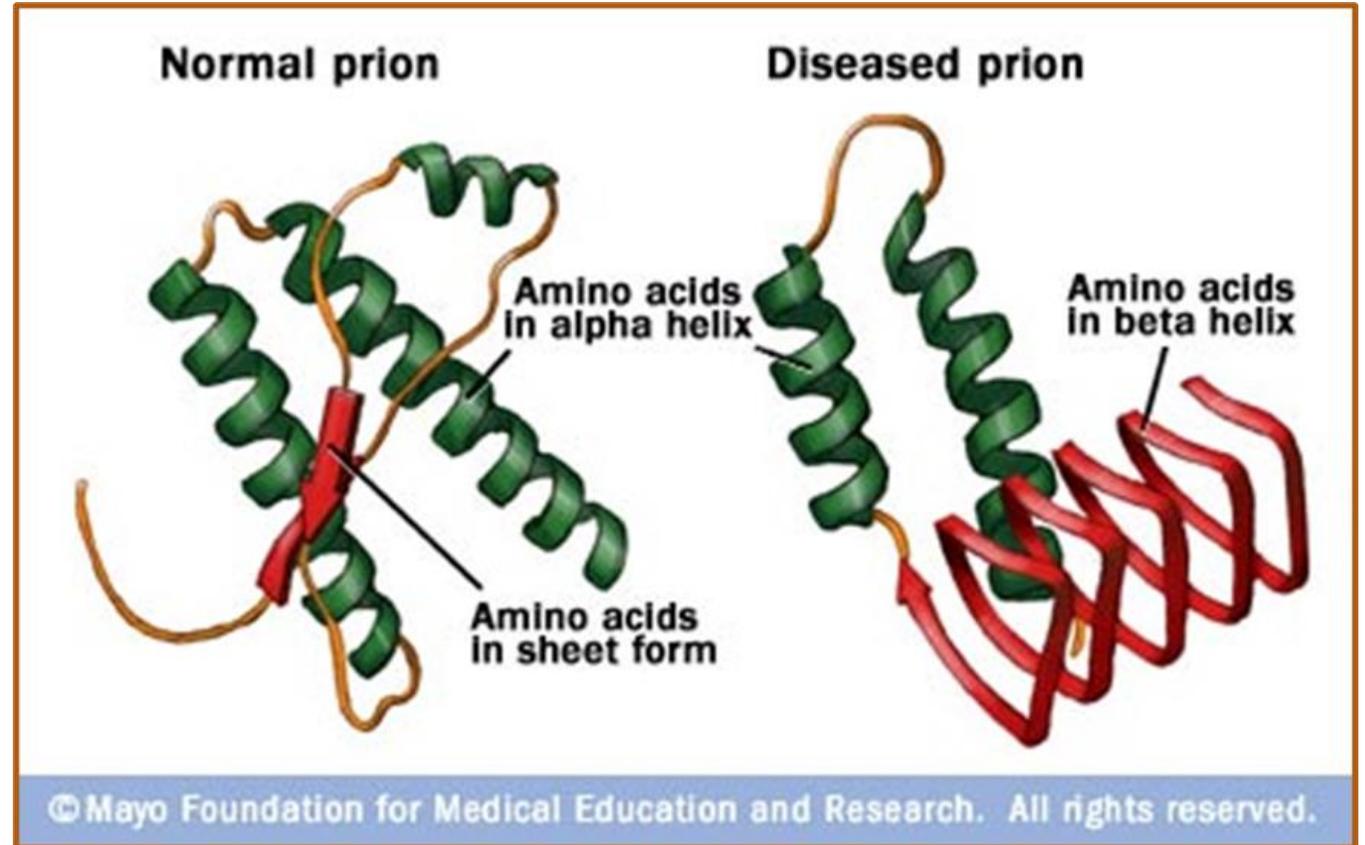
- State mammal of Georgia
 - White-tailed deer
- \$1.6 billion economic impact in Georgia
- ~280,000 deer harvested annually



What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

- Neurological disease affecting deer, elk, & moose.
- Caused by infectious, misshapen prion protein.
- 18-30 months incubation period.

100% of infected deer die.



Visible Signs and Symptoms

- The incubation period is so long that most deer with CWD die of other causes or are killed by hunters before becoming symptomatic.
- **Most infected deer look normal** until the final few months of the disease.
- Infected deer shed prions, contaminating the environment and exposing other deer they contact before symptoms appear.



An Invisible Disease?

- Few sick deer are seen until prevalence is high
 - Symptoms
 - Dramatic weight loss
 - Droopy head and ears
 - Drooling
 - Abnormal behavior
- Appear months/years after infection
– final stages of CWD

**This is why routine surveillance
is needed to catch it when
prevalence is low.**



How Is It Spread?

Moving live deer is the #1 way CWD has (and continues to) spread long distances.

Direct:

- Deer-to-deer contact
 - Saliva, urine, and feces

Indirect:

- Infectious carcass parts
 - Brain and spinal column
- Contaminated environments

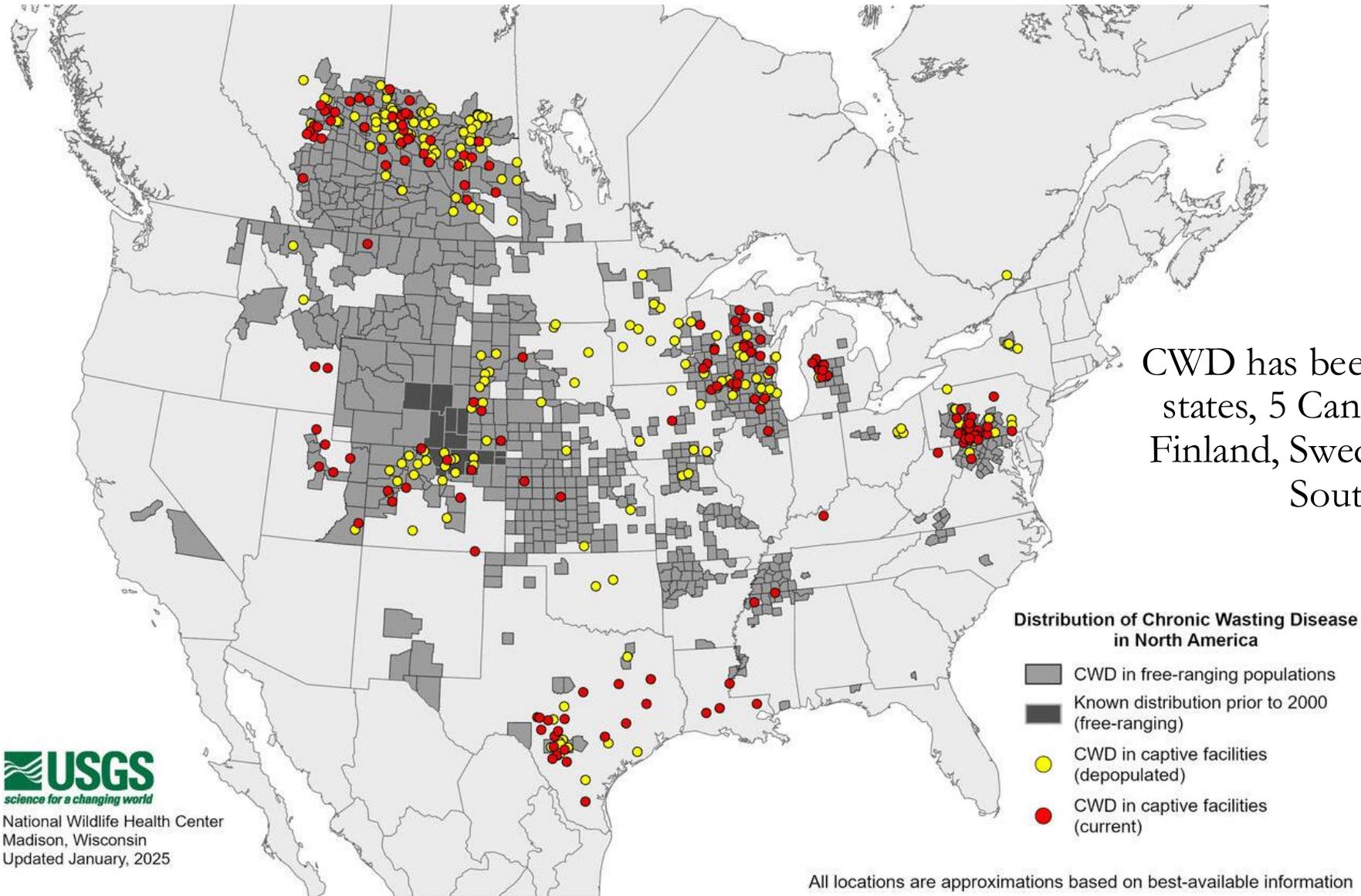


What If We Do Nothing?

- Unlike other diseases that come and go as survivors develop immunity, CWD steadily spreads if left unmanaged.
- Eradication in a wild population isn't feasible.
- Larger geographic area becomes contaminated as prevalence increases over time.

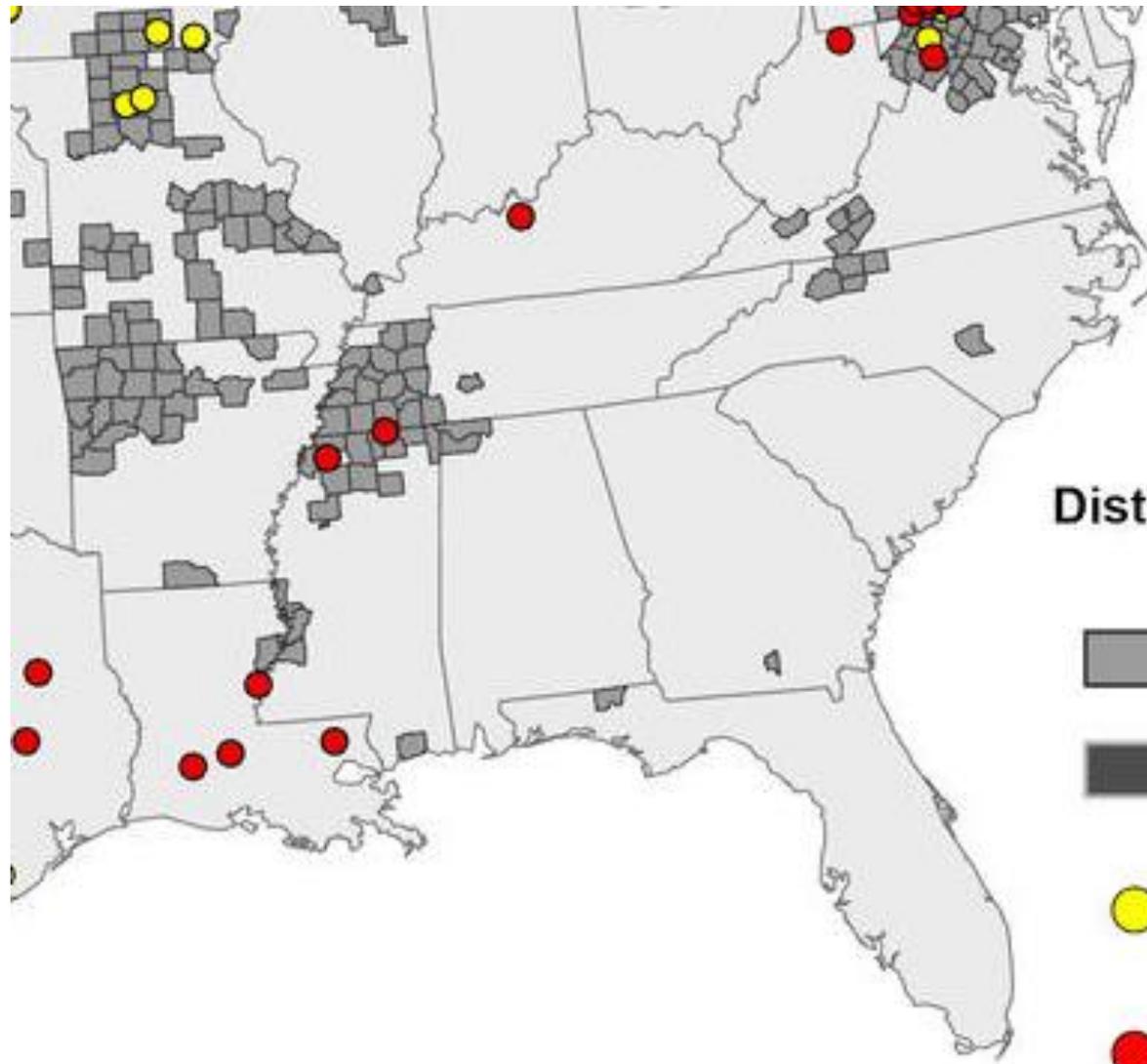


2025 Distribution of CWD



CWD has been found in 36 US states, 5 Canadian Provinces, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and South Korea

CWD in the Southeast



**Distribution of Chronic Wasting Disease
in North America**

- CWD in free-ranging populations
- Known distribution prior to 2000 (free-ranging)
- CWD in captive facilities (depopulated)
- CWD in captive facilities (current)

Human Health Concerns?

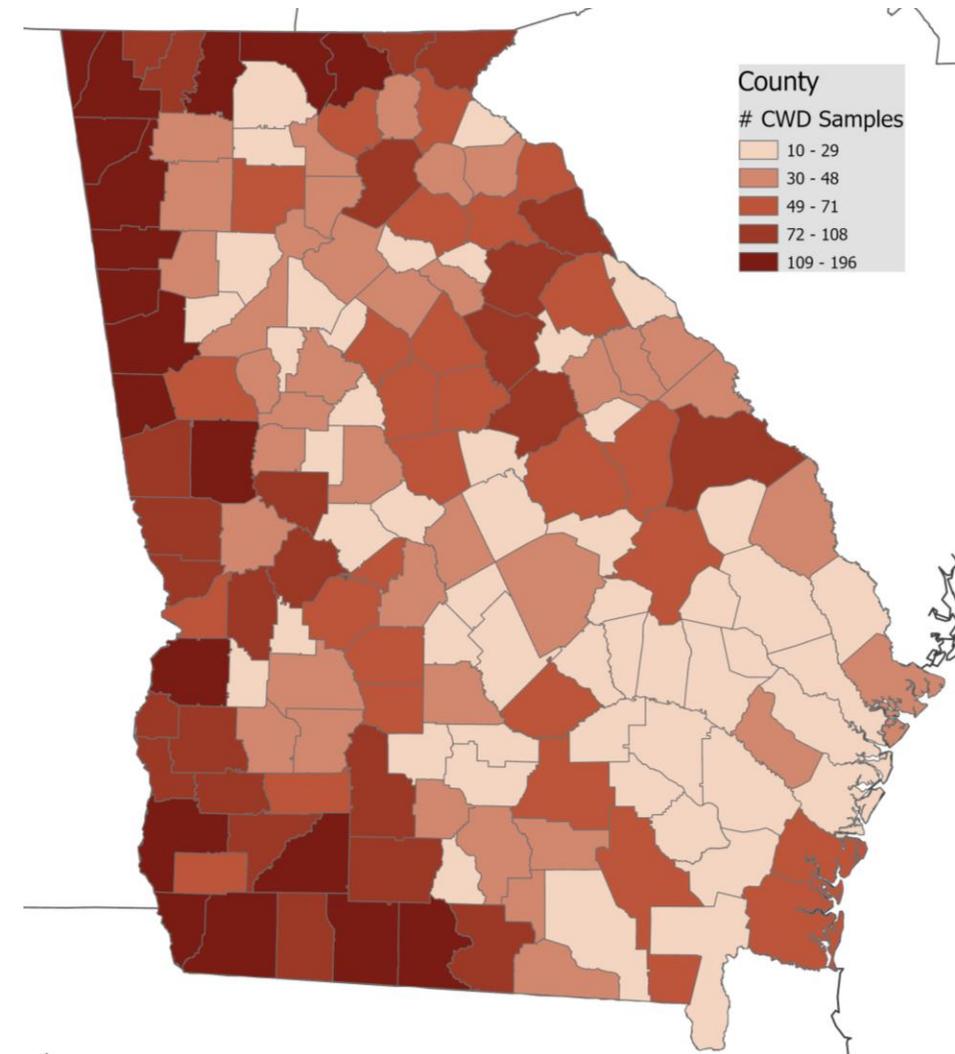


- CWD hasn't been shown to infect people
- No cases of CWD have ever been documented in people
- Consider having deer from CWD management areas tested
- Avoid consuming CWD positive deer

CWD Surveillance and Prevention

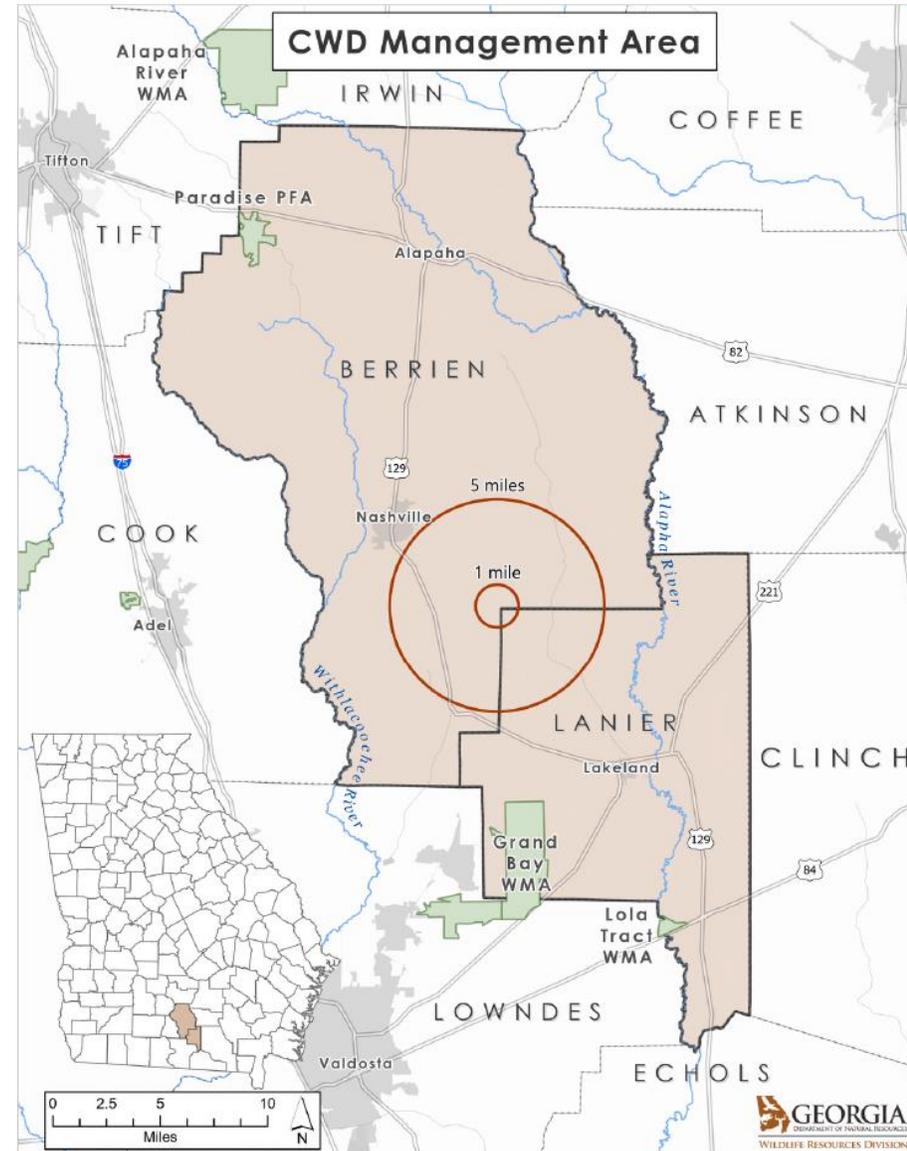
- Statewide surveillance since 2002.
- Worked with legislature to prohibit importation of live deer and carcasses from CWD states in 2005, further amended in 2022.
- Investigated unlawful importations of live deer and tested them all for CWD.
- Increased CWD surveillance around captive deer facilities and other risk factors.

CWD Samples Collected by County Since 2019



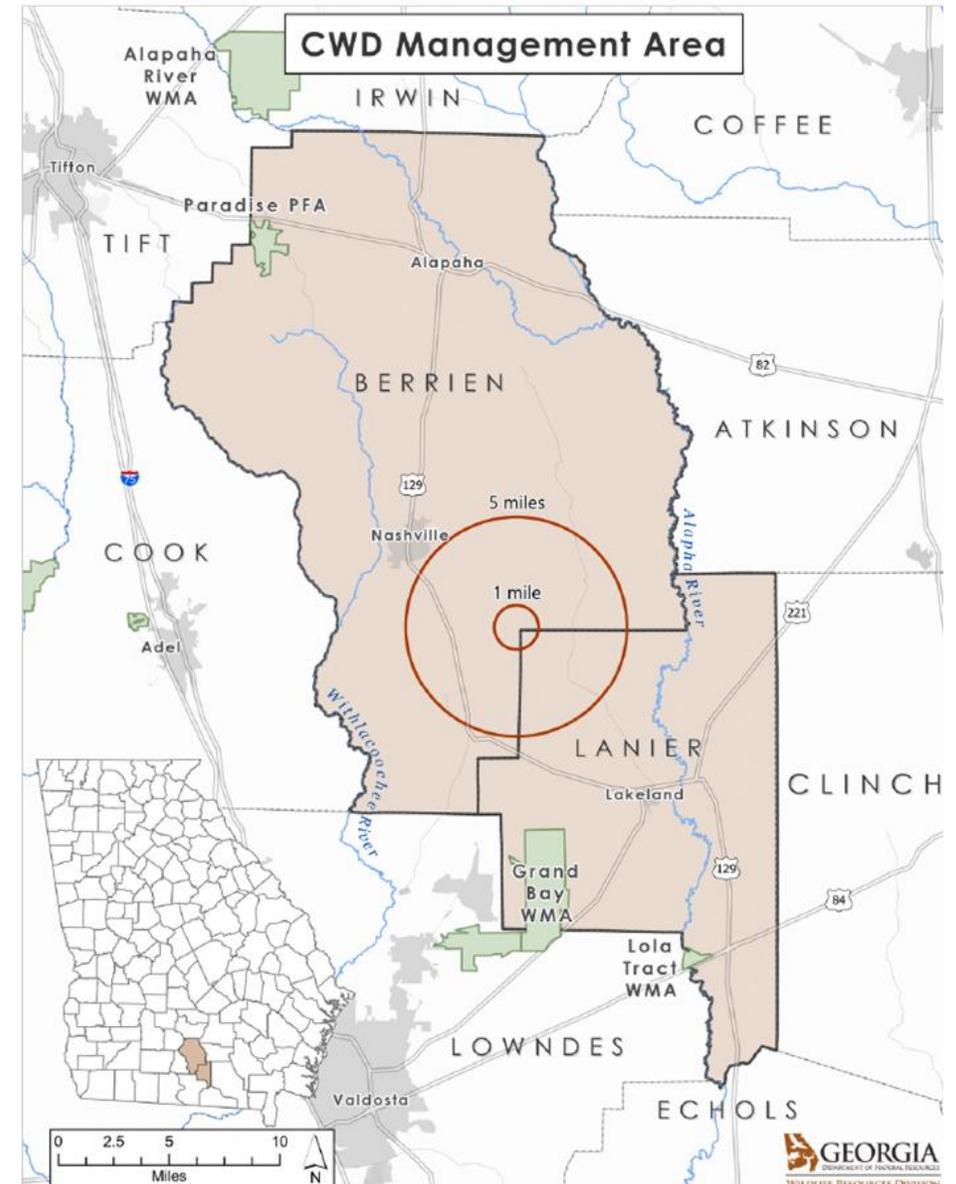
Where was CWD Detected in Georgia?

- Routine testing of a hunter-killed 2.5-year-old male deer
- Harvested on the Lanier/Berrien county line
- Counties that touch a 5-mile radius are included in the CWD Management Area (CMA)
- CMA may expand if more positives are discovered



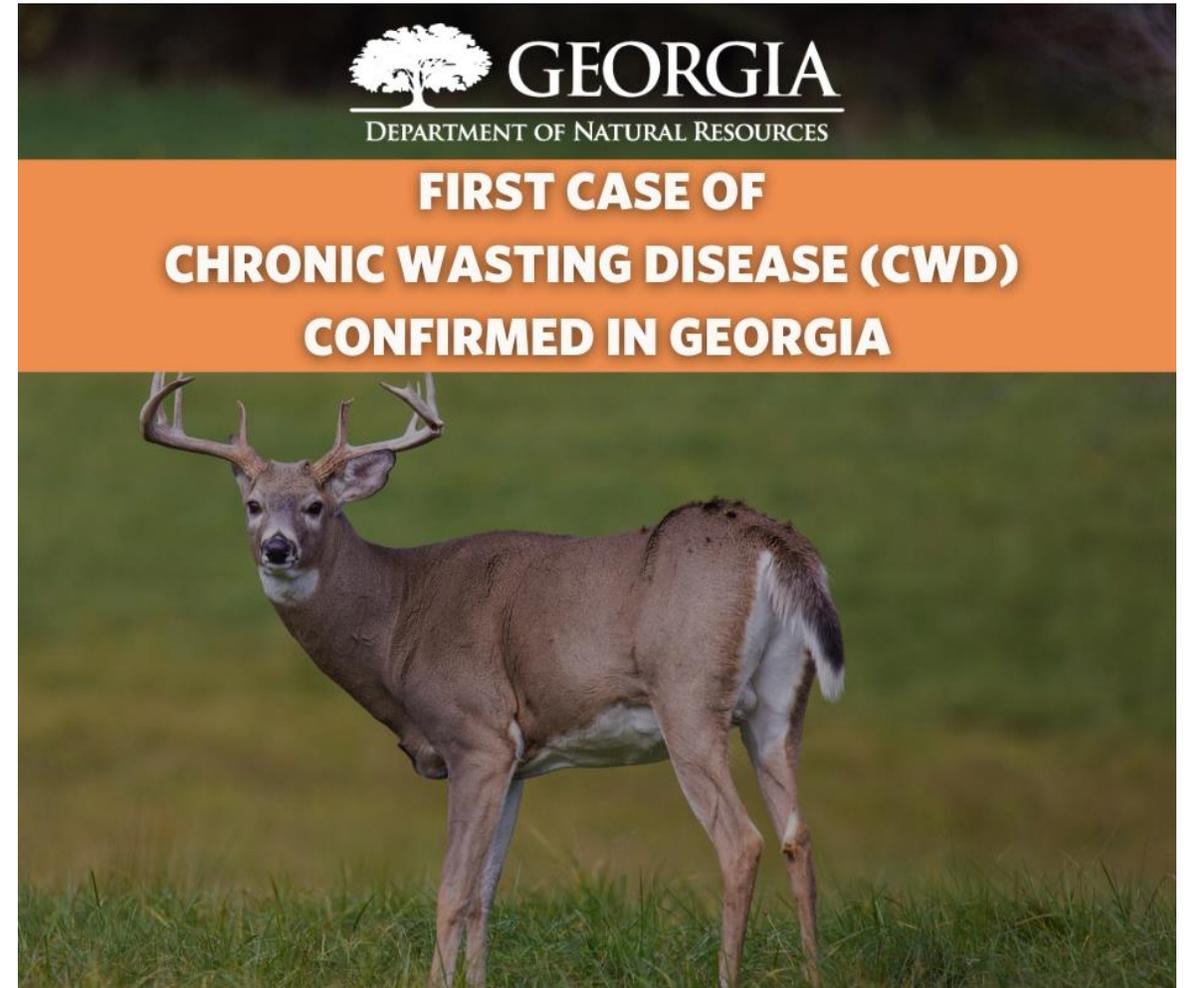
Initial Response from DNR

- DNR's CWD response plan activated immediately.
- Hunter & landowner notified.
- Location where deer was harvested identified.
- Contacted landowners within 1-mile radius.
- Contacted all area processors and taxidermists.



Initial Response – Public Outreach

- Press release (Jan. 23)
- Updated website
- Press conference (Jan.24)
- Social media engagement
 - Providing answers to questions via comment section and direct message
 - Continued source of information
- Information Sessions
 - 3 in-person in surrounding area
 - Virtual meeting (Feb 6)
- Continue to update Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) with answers



Initial Response – Sampling Efforts

- Currently working with landowners and hunters to collect additional samples (20-30 within the 1-mile radius).
- Collect samples from crop damage permit deer and road-killed deer until hunting season begins in September 2025.

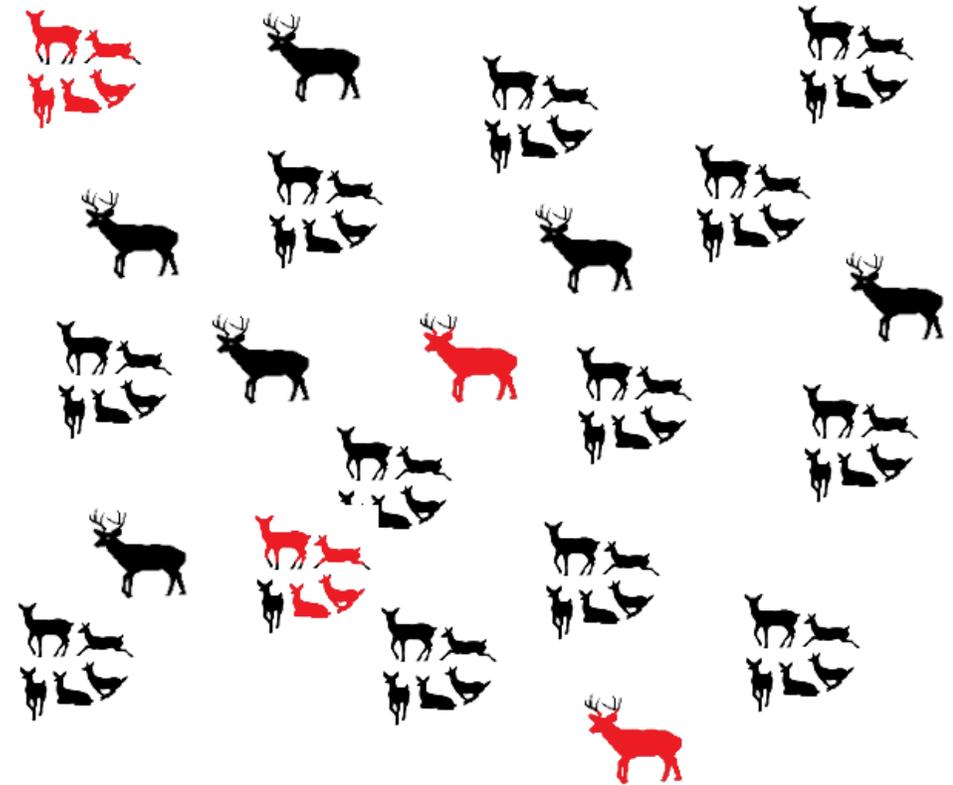
Why?

- Determine the prevalence and geographic extent.
 - Prevalence - percent of deer herd that tests positive.
 - Geographic extent - how far it has spread.

CWD Management – Cluster Sampling

Goal- Keep Prevalence Low

- Work with landowners to follow-up on any additional positive deer
- Focus in the immediate vicinity where each positive deer was located
- Selectively targets deer most likely to have had contact with the positive deer

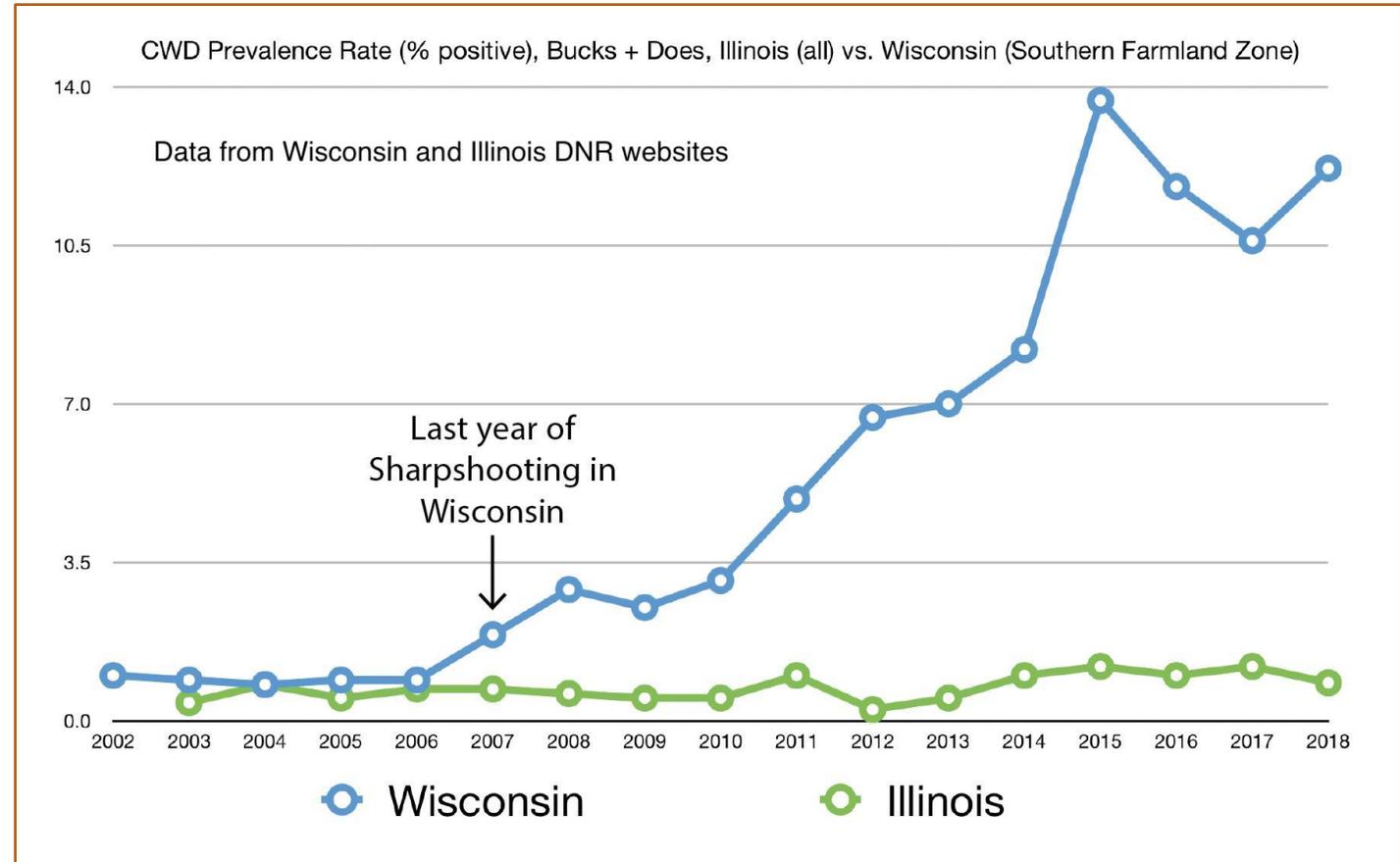


CWD Management – Now Until Deer Season

- No regulatory changes are planned for Berrien or Lanier Counties.
- Cluster sampling only removes individual deer most likely to have CWD.
- Cluster sampling is not used to reduce local deer densities; it occurs at the property level.
- All sampling being conducted by landowners and managers in cooperation with DNR.
- Significant herd reductions are not a tool we are using to manage CWD.
- Surveillance and monitoring will continue to be primarily from hunter-harvested deer as well as road kills and deer taken under crop permits.

Long-term Management

- Keep prevalence low through cluster sampling, ideally below 5%.
- Continue increased sampling to monitor geographic extent.
- Continue providing access to testing for hunters.
- Maintain Georgia's rich deer hunting heritage for future generations.



Credit: Lindsay Thomas, Jr. National Deer Association

Key Takeaways

- No new regulations for Berrien or Lanier counties.
- DNR has been planning and preparing for this since 2002
 - Our response plan has evolved over 22 years of monitoring the 35 states who found it before us.
- CWD management will be conducted locally, in cooperation with landowners and hunters.
- CWD is likely here to stay and will require continual monitoring and adaptive management long term.



How YOU can Help

- If you hunt in the CMA, have your deer tested.
- Dispose of all deer carcass parts by:
 - Placing in landfill
 - Burying deep
 - Leaving on property of harvest
- Don't move deer carcass parts into or around the state.
- If you bait or feed:
 - Broadcast feed over large area
 - Avoid trough and gravity feeders or piles on the ground
 - Move feeding locations periodically
 - Limit feeding to while actively hunting



For More Information

GA DNR's CWD Website

<https://georgiawildlife.com/cwd>

Email for Questions or Concerns

CWD@dnr.ga.gov

Regulation Comments

gm.comments@dnr.ga.gov

