

# **Chronic Wasting Disease**

Courtney Colley, Conservation Education Coordinator for KECA

## **What is it?**

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a neurological disease that affects the brain, nervous system, and lymphoid tissues in deer, elk, and moose. CWD is believed to be spread by an infectious prion (proteins) that kills infected individuals months to years after initial infection. The method of transmission between animals is not known however evidence shows that CWD may be spread through direct contact between infected individuals as well as through indirect exposure to infected environments (i.e. soil).

## **Where is it?**

CWD was initially found in Colorado in the 1960's in a small group of deer. Since then the disease has spread to 14 states and 2 Canada provinces, including Pennsylvania. To date CWD is found in three areas in Pennsylvania and still remains south of interstate 80. Counties in Pennsylvania in which CWD is believed to be established include Jefferson, Clearfield, Cambria, Huntington, Bedford, Somerset, Fulton, Adams, and York.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Animals that are infected with CWD may not show symptoms for months after infection. As the name implies deer (or other Cervids) infected with CWD experience substantial weight loss, excessive drooling, droopy ears, and strange behaviors (including the loss of fear of humans).

## **What can we do?**

Currently there is no known cure for CWD and since we do not know the exact methods of transmission it is hard to prevent. As you may predict if CWD crosses interstate 80 north into elk country it could be devastating to our elk population (as well as deer). If you see a deer displaying any of the above symptoms please report it to your local conservation officer. As with most diseases the only way to fully understand it is to collect as much data on the disease as possible. In addition, if you hunt in CWD established areas be cautious. Only take animals that appear to be healthy and avoid handling the brain and spinal cord of any Cervids.

For more information on CWD check out the Pennsylvania Game Commission website at <http://www.pgc.pa.gov/Wildlife/Wildlife-RelatedDiseases/Pages/ChronicWastingDisease.aspx>.