



Board of Animal Health's Oversight of Deer and Elk Farms

Project Description

November 2017

BACKGROUND

The Board of Animal Health (BAH) is responsible for protecting the health of Minnesota's domestic animals. This responsibility extends to livestock, such as cattle, sheep, swine, poultry, elk, and deer, as well as cats and dogs raised by breeders and kennels. The board has five members, including veterinarians and livestock producers, who are appointed by the governor. In Fiscal Year 2016, BAH reported expenditures of about \$6.5 million.

Among the board's responsibilities is the oversight of farmed deer, elk, and other members of the family "cervidae," also known as "cervids." As of late 2017, Minnesota had 421 deer and elk farms. Cervid producers must register their animals with BAH, which annually inspects farms to ensure that deer and elk are properly registered and inventoried, and that farms have adequate facilities and record-keeping practices. The board also monitors and regulates the movement of deer and elk from one farm to another and issues permits for the importation of cervids from other states.

BAH is responsible for monitoring chronic wasting disease within captive cervid populations and managing Minnesota's response when the disease is found. Chronic wasting disease is a contagious neurological disease affecting deer, elk, and moose. During the fall 2016 hunting season, 11 wild deer tested positive for the disease. Since then, two Minnesota deer farms have also identified infected deer among their herds. Given that chronic wasting disease is easily transmitted and always fatal, the discovery of new cases in Minnesota is cause for concern. The Department of Natural Resources is responsible for responding to chronic wasting disease outbreaks among the wild cervid population.

POSSIBLE EVALUATION ISSUES

1. How well has the Board of Animal Health carried out its duties related to the oversight of deer and elk farms?

2. How has the Board of Animal Health responded to the recent outbreak of chronic wasting disease, and how effective have these efforts been?
3. To what extent have the Board of Animal Health and the Department of Natural Resources successfully coordinated their efforts to contain the spread of chronic wasting disease?

DISCUSSION

To determine how well BAH has overseen deer and elk farms, we will compare its activities with its responsibilities outlined in Minnesota statutes and rules. We will analyze data and files related to farm inspections and other oversight activities.

We will review literature and information from other states to gain a better understanding of chronic wasting disease and its management, allowing us to evaluate whether the board's strategies are in line with the current understanding of the disease.

While the Department of Natural Resources also plays a role in containing chronic wasting disease, we will examine the department's efforts only to the extent that it must coordinate with BAH. We will interview the staff of both agencies in order to gain a better understanding of their relationship and their combined efforts to stop the spread of chronic wasting disease. We will not, however, evaluate the Department of Natural Resources itself, either with respect to its efforts to manage chronic wasting disease in particular or deer more generally.

This evaluation is scheduled to be completed in spring of 2018. For additional information on this evaluation, contact Sarah Delacueva, evaluation manager, at 651-296-1226 or sarah.delacueva@state.mn.us.