



MINNESOTA ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

January 25, 2025

Chair Aric Putnam
Senate Agriculture, Veterans, Broadband and
Rural Development
3215 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Torrey N. Westrom
Senate Agriculture, Veteran, Broadband and
Rural Development
2201 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator Nathan Wesenberg
2325 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: SF 553

Chairs Putnam and Westrom, Senator Wesenberg and Members of the Committee,

We appreciate your attention to the extreme burden requiring a second barrier to prevent physical contact between farmed cervidae and wild Cervidae has created for Minnesota farmed cervid owners. Since this provision was enacted in 2023, over 25% of elk breeders in Minnesota have left the industry with more expected to leave in coming years because of the unnecessary burden exclusionary fencing has created.

We support SF 553 as proposed to strike the words, “and physical contact between farmed Cervidae and free-roaming Cervidae.”

- Adding a physical barrier is not scientifically supported to prevent the spread of CWD. Research from the University of Minnesota has concluded that transmission of CWD by nose-to-nose contact through a single fence is unlikely. (<https://cwdbiosecurity.umn.edu/transmission-pathways/>)
- No other state requires the addition of a physical barrier to existing 96” fencing or double fencing of all farmed cervid facilities.
- By nature, elk and deer do not interact with each other in the wild or at the fence line.
- There has not been a case of CWD in Minnesota farmed elk in 16 years.

While the exclusionary fencing requirement deadline was September 1, 2024, many breeders have not fully completed their exclusionary project due to financial constraints, personal and time constraints, brush and tree removal or the difficulties that arise when having to complete a project of this magnitude. Many breeders have passed inspection by moving their animals to interior pens and leaving their outside pens open until they can complete the work. While the deadline has passed, removing this provision would be of great financial and personal relief to many remaining producers.

We also support removing the language “If the board revokes a facility’s registration, the commissioner of natural resources may seize and destroy animals at the facility.” While this language has existed for many years, to our knowledge, the DNR has never seized and destroyed a farmed cervid herd to date. No one would want to see that happen. Destroying someone’s animals because they failed to correct a fence deficiency is an extreme penalty. There are other ways to gain compliance rather than killing healthy, productive animals.

We stand ready to work with you on achieving our shared desire for healthy cervid herds on both sides of the fence without eliminating our remaining small family farms through extreme regulations in doing so.

Sincerely,

Mark Luedtke, President