Report: Emergency Response to Disease Outbreaks in Wildlife

Covering the Period July 1, 2025 –June 30, 2026

As required by Minnesota Session Law 2023, Chapter 60

8/28/2026

Report to the Minnesota Legislature

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155
651-259-5240

jason.moeckel@state.mn,
mndnr.gov

Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Section 3.197, we estimate that it cost approximately $320 produce this report. This includes staff time for drafting and reviewing the report.

Upon request, this material will be made available in an alternative format such as large print, Braille or audio recording. Printed on recycled paper.

DNR CWD Spending Legislative Report

This report fulfills the reporting requirement of Minnesota Session Law 2023, Chapter 60, Article 1, Section 3, Subdivision 6 (Table 1). Specifically:

(b) $282,000 the first year and $282,000 the second year are from the general fund and $1,675,000 the first year and $1,675,000 the second year are from the game and fish fund for statewide response and management of chronic wasting disease. The commissioner and the Board of Animal Health must each submit annual reports on chronic wasting disease activities funded in this biennium to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees and divisions with jurisdiction over environment and natural resources and agriculture. The general fund base for this appropriation in fiscal year 2027 and beyond is $282,000.

(c) $5,150,000 the first year and $3,250,000 the second year are for inspections, investigations, and enforcement activities taken for the white-tailed deer farm program and for statewide response and management of chronic wasting disease. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2029.

(d) $8,546,000 the first year and $8,546,000 the second year are from the deer management account for the purposes identified in Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.075, subdivision 1.

CWD Activities, July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) spent $2,506,802 during FY26 on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)-related activities (Table 2). This spending includes staff salary for CWD surveillance and management efforts, dumpsters, diagnostic testing, fleet, partner sampling program payments to taxidermists, and CWD-related research projects. Additional activities that occurred focused on compiling data for surveillance planning for fall 2026, development of the hunting regulation book and deer rule, and planning outreach strategies to engage hunters in disease management.

In fall 2025, CWD surveillance took place in 6 zones of the state (Figure 1). CWD management zones included 17 deer permit areas (DPA) where CWD has been detected in the wild deer herd. CWD surveillance zones included 7 DPAs adjacent to management zones to ensure we are detecting disease, if any, on the edges of outbreaks. There were three new management zones designated in fall 2025 due to new CWD detections, including DPAs 666, 671, and 601.

One of the biggest changes to our surveillance footprint in 2025 occurred in the western area of the state. DPAs 666 and 671 had CWD detections in 2024, leading to the implementation of management zones. North Dakota has reported a new CWD detection approximately 1.5 miles from the Minnesota-North Dakota border. The area of these detections lies along the Red River corridor, believed to be a corridor of high deer movement. A surveillance zone containing four DPAs (239, 262, 269, and 270) was established to ensure disease detection between management zone DPAs adjacent to this corridor. The second change to our surveillance footprint occurred in the metro area. During the fall of 2024 DPA 601 had a CWD detection on the western edge, leading to the implementation of a surveillance zone containing three DPAs (229, 285, and 338).

Deer feeding and attractant bans were implemented in counties that fell within 15 miles of known CWD-positive deer. Eight new counties were added to the feeding and attractant ban since July 2024. These bans are intended to prevent artificial concentrations of wild deer in areas with a higher risk for disease.

Sampling goals were generated for each DPA involved in CWD surveillance. In surveillance zones, we hope to achieve 99% confidence in detecting the disease if present in ≥1% or higher of the wild deer population. Hunter-harvested deer provide an easily accessible supply of samples; ~45% of the total statewide firearm deer harvested are typically taken over opening weekend. Deer one year of age or older harvested over the 2025 opening weekend, November 8 and 9, and from within a surveillance or management zone were required to be tested for CWD. We deployed 87 stations in our management and surveillance zones with 59 staffed and 28 self-service. As in previous years, we determined that any station expected to receive <70 deer would be designated as self-service, rather than being staffed by DNR employees and students. This year, 53% of stations were staffed. Overall, the firearms opening weekend effort required the support of 310 individuals, consisting of 232 DNR staff/volunteers and 78 students.

A late season CWD hunt was held December 19-21 in the Southeast and Metro management zones, DPAs 605, 642, 643, 645, 646, 647, 648, and 649. Hunters were not required to submit a CWD sample but could do so voluntarily. Only self-service stations were provided, which is a change from previous years where some stations were also staffed. There was a total of 27 self-service stations available during the late season, and a total of 66 samples were voluntarily submitted by hunters.

Surveillance goals were reached in all areas except the Greater Metro Surveillance Zone. When setting goals for three DPAs (661, 666, and 671) on the western edge of the state, we expected it would take up to three years to reach the target sample number, given low deer harvest. Compliance in zones with mandatory sampling ranged between 68% and 92% with an average compliance of 82% across all zones. Statewide voluntary sampling was at 3% participation and the late CWD season had a participation rate of 0.08%. Including both mandatory and voluntary surveillance efforts, we collected 14,214 samples during the fall 2025 hunting season, September 13, 2025 - December 31, 2025.

To help mitigate risk of CWD prions entering the environment and to prevent further spread of disease from hunters moving high risk carcass parts to new areas, dedicated dumpsters were made available to hunters in all CWD management zones to offer a safer method for disposal of deer carcass remains. This program also encourages compliance with carcass movement restrictions by offering a quartering station next to each dumpster, providing an opportunity for hunters to butcher deer and leave the zone immediately with only the venison. Our dumpster program has continued to grow, resulting in 65 dumpsters placed and serviced throughout the state during fall 2025. All deer waste was hauled to either an approved lined landfill or incinerator.

Statewide hunter service testing provides CWD testing opportunities to hunters was especially important this past year because self-service sampling stations were only available during opening weekend of firearms and not the entire firearms season as in previous years. We continued to offer walk-in appointments, allowing hunters to contact their local area wildlife office to schedule a time to get their deer sampled by a wildlife biologist. The Partner Sampling Program (PSP) yielded 4,105 samples which led to 28 CWD positives. In 2025, there were 84

active sampling partners consisting of taxidermists, meat processors, and sporting goods stores. This program operated as in past years; partners would extract samples and ship them to DNR, where they were processed and sent to the lab. Partners were compensated at a rate of $20 per sample. The CWD Hunter Mail-In Kit Program continued for its 4th consecutive year. This year, 5,020 kits were distributed to hunters. A total of 1,148 samples were returned to DNR, and 9 CWD positives were detected. Hunters were able to extract the correct lymph tissue 93% of the time.

In total, MNDNR tested 14,639 deer from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 for CWD (Figure 2, Table 3). This resulted in 124 new detections of CWD in wild deer. Two of the positive detections were from deer that were reported sick, while the other 122 were hunter-harvested animals. Western DPAs 671 and 666 both had an additional positive. DPAs 604 and 684 were in their final year of surveillance following our CWD management plan; however, each DPA detected an additional positive deer this year. As of June 30, 2026, Minnesota has detected 499 positive wild deer since 2016.

Table 1. Chronic Wasting Disease Appropriation Allocation FY26.

Fund	FY26 Appropriated
General Fund - CWD	282,000
Game and Fish-Emergency Response	1,675,000
General Fund – Farmed Deer & CWD	3,250,000
Total	**5,207,000**

Table 2. Detailed spending by expense type for Chronic Wasting Disease Appropriation, July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026.

Category	Gen'l Fund - CWD	Game and Fish - CWD	Gen'l Fund - Farms & CWD	Other**	Total Spend
Salary	-	919,413	-	4,812	924,224
Dumpsters	278,823	-	205,843	-	484,665
Tissue/Tooth Sample Testing	489	624	377,808	-	378,921
Postage/Shipping	-	49,707	92,652	-	142,360
Travel/Fleet	-	26,510	104,719	428	131,657
Taxidermist Partner Program	-	91,894	-	-	91,894
MNIT	-	75,877	8,828	-	84,705
Students -CWD Sampling	-	-	69,498	-	69,498
Printing & Advertising	8,754	-	45,792	-	54,546
Fed CWD Grants-SNPS & SIM	-	3,500	-	39,540	43,040
CWD Office - Rushford	1,050	4,487	32,571	-	38,108
Supplies	4,724	3,207	24,065	-	31,997
CWD Surveillance Grants	-	-	20,106	-	20,106
Other	-	4,356	6,523	-	10,879
Equipment	-	-	203	-	203
Total	**293,840**	**1,179,574**	**988,608**	**44,780**	**2,506,802**

*Other includes Game and Fish Operating Account, Deer Management Account, Cervid Health Account, and Heritage Fund.

Figure 1: Deer permit areas in Minnesota where chronic wasting disease (CWD) surveillance occurred during fall 2025.

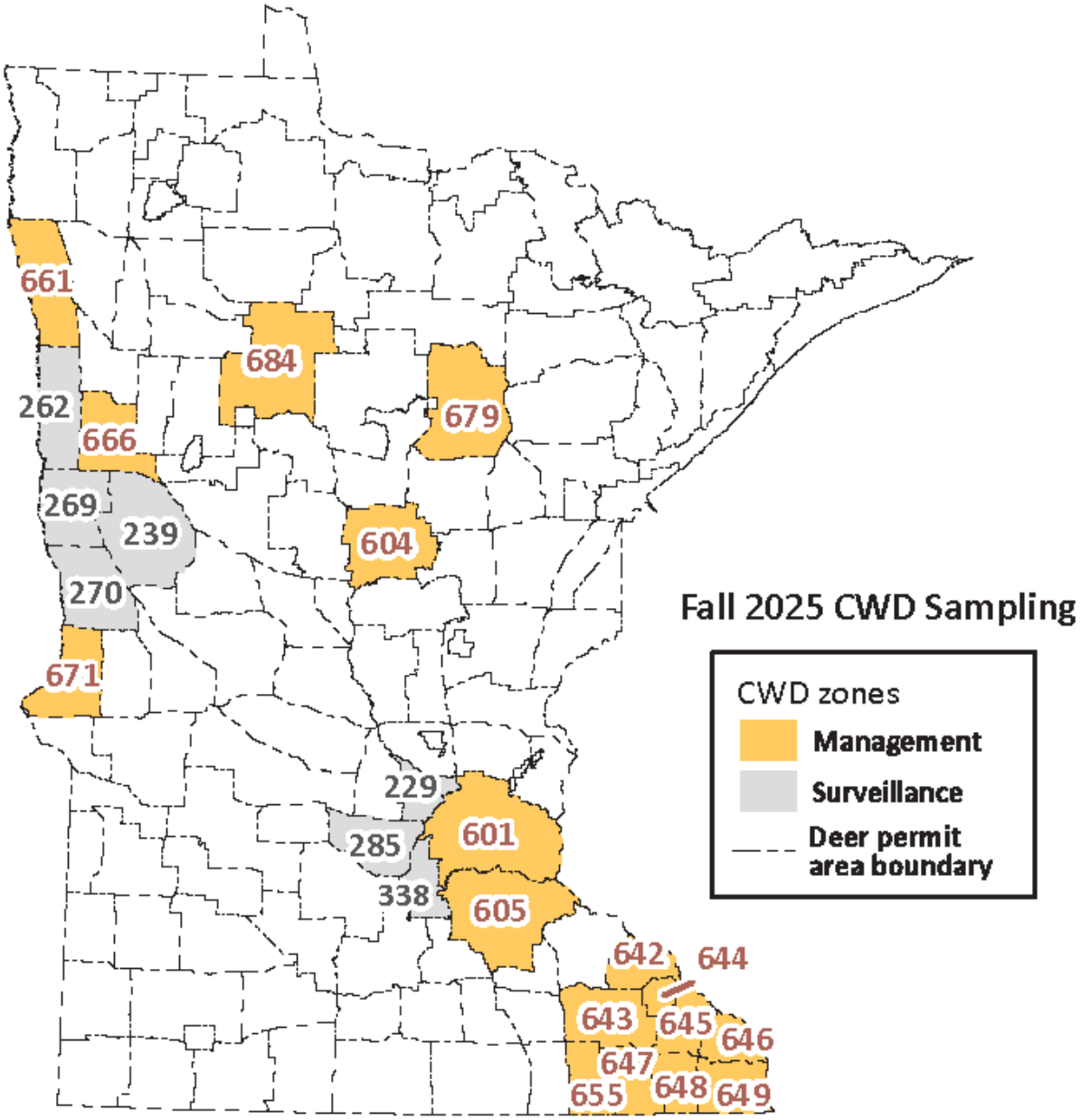


Figure 2. Total samples (n=14,639) collected for chronic wasting disease (CWD) testing in Minnesota from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.

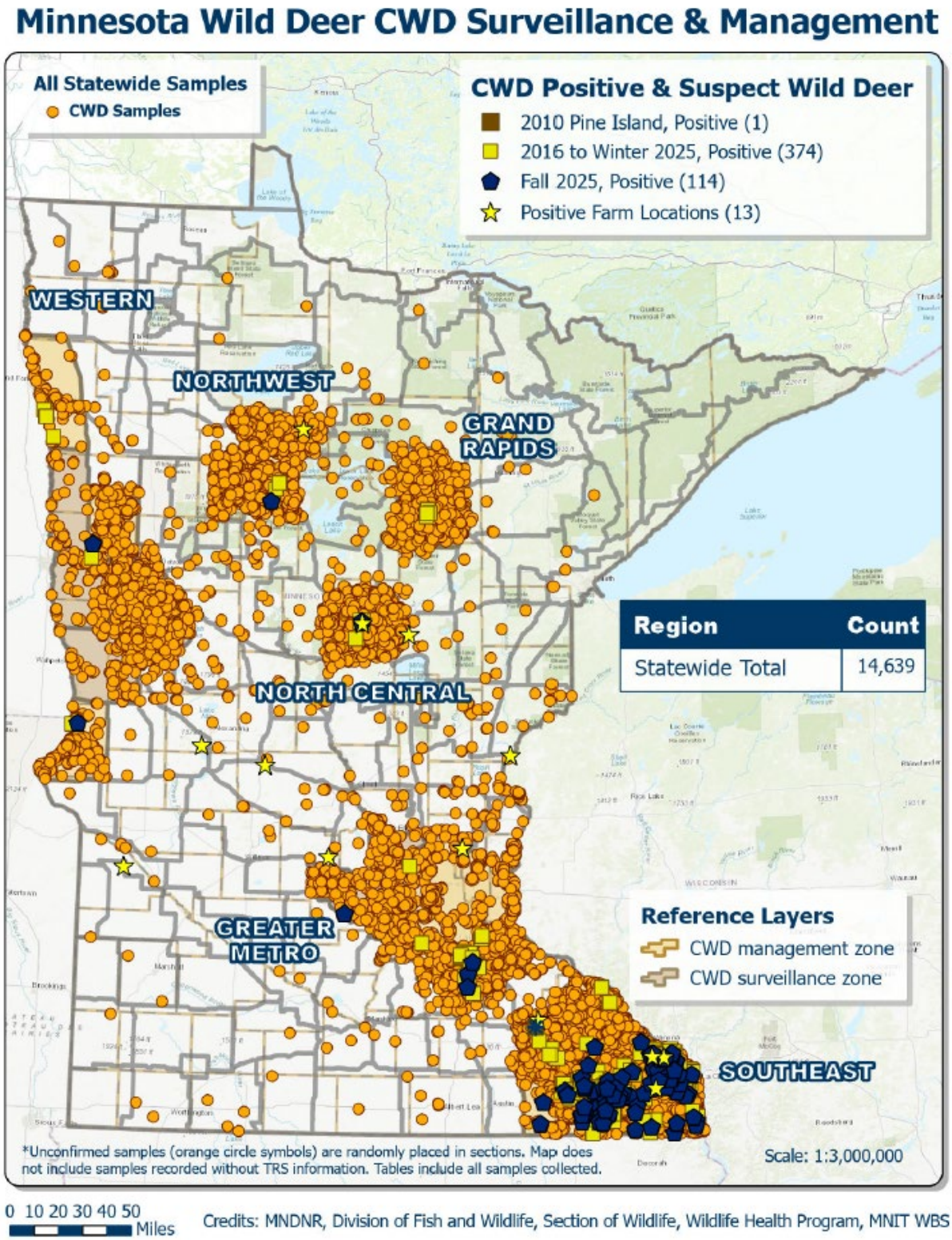


Table 3. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) samples collected in Minnesota from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.

Designation	Deer Permit Area	Sample Acquisition	Number of deer sampled	Positive Results
Surveillance Zone (Greater Metro)	229, 285, 338	Hunter Harvested	446	1
Surveillance Zone (Western)	239, 262, 269, 270	Hunter Harvested	1,193	0
Management Zone (Grand Rapids)	679	Hunter Harvested	557	0
Management Zone (Northwest)	684	Hunter Harvested	989	1
Management Zone (North Central)	604	Hunter Harvested	881	0
Management Zone (Western)	661, 666, 671	Hunter Harvested	460	2
Management Zone (Greater Metro)	601, 605	Hunter Harvested	595	2
Management Zone (Southeast)	642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 655	Hunter Harvested	2,981	116
Opportunistic	Statewide	Voluntary Submission	6,071	0
Opportunistic/Other	Statewide	Includes: Reported sick, found dead, shooting permit, vehicle killed	466	2
	TOTAL		**14,639**	**124**