

# WYOMING GAME AND FISH NEWS

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For Immediate Release  
August 31, 2001

## **WHITE-TAILED DEER SUCCUMB TO DISEASE NEAR LOVELL**

**Lovell**—Epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD), an insect-borne, infectious and noncontagious disease of wild ruminants is killing white-tailed deer on the Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area and along the lower Bighorn River east of Lovell.

Several dead white-tailed deer were found on the area in mid-August and reported to Game and Fish personnel. According to Cody wildlife management coordinator John Emmerich, blood samples were collected and sent to Wyoming's State Veterinary Laboratory in Laramie where EHD was verified. The G&F does not plan to collect more blood samples from these areas since the diagnosis has been confirmed.

"Conditions have been ideal for an outbreak of the disease," says Wyoming Game and Fish Veterinarian Walt Cook. Cook explains that during this warm summer, white-tailed deer have been concentrated around water sources in the lowland environment of the "no-see-um" gnats. The gnats spread the virus when biting the animals.

When first infected the white-tailed deer looks healthy and normal. As the disease progresses the animal begins to look weak and ill. The virus can cause spontaneous hemorrhaging in muscles and organs five to 10 days after an animal is infected. Lungs become fluid-filled and the deer often foams at the mouth. The deer may develop sores on the mouth and tongue area. In many cases, death occurs soon after these symptoms occur.

Infected deer often seek out water sources. Sick or dead deer are often reported to the Department after being observed in or near ponds, creeks or rivers. In other cases, deer may die in open fields.

### **Information and Education Services**

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Emmerich expects white-tailed deer mortalities to continue until several days after our first hard frost. Emmerich explains, "A hard frost will kill the 'no-see-um' gnats which carry the disease. Mortalities will continue for a while because deer infected prior to the frost may succumb to the virus."

Some deer populations in Wyoming have endured EHD outbreaks for generations. A related disease called 'blue tongue' disease may infect antelope. Mule deer and bighorn sheep occasionally get these diseases, but are generally insulated from the infection because they rarely inhabit the environment of the gnats.

With archery deer season scheduled to begin September 1, some hunters may be concerned about health risks. Cook assures hunters they do not have to worry about getting the disease from their deer or antelope. "There is no human health concern from the hemorrhagic diseases; humans can't get it and neither can most other wildlife," said Cook.

Deer hunters may find that white-tailed deer numbers in these areas are down considerably this fall. Hunters with general licenses may want to consider hunting other areas.

Epizootic hemorrhagic disease was first recognized as a specific disease of white-tailed deer in the mid 1950's when die-offs occurred in New Jersey and Michigan. Scattered EHD white-tailed deer deaths have recently been reported near Story and Bighorn Wyoming, west of Sheridan in the Rapid and Wolf Creek drainages, and north of Sheridan along the Tongue River.

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