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EPIZOOTIC HEMORRHAGIC DISEASE

CLAIMING SOME DEER IN NORTHEAST WYOMING

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sheridan—Epizootic hemorrhagic disease is claiming white-tailed deer near Sheridan this summer.

A dead white-tailed deer was found near Sheridan in late July and reported to Game and Fish personnel. Sheridan Wildlife Biologist Tim Thomas examined the carcass and determined the cause of death pointed to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD). Thomas collected and sent blood samples to the state lab in Laramie where EHD was verified.

“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 G&F after being observed in or near ponds, creeks or rivers. In other cases deer may

die in open fields. Since it appears to be an unnatural death, people report it as a suspected poaching.

The G&F expects white-tailed deer mortalities to continue until several days after a hard frost. Cooks 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."

The last major outbreak of the disease near Sheridan, Wyoming was in 1998. "Since a large portion of the current deer population was not around then, they weren't exposed and haven't had a chance to build up natural immunity," Cook says.

Deer populations in northeastern 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," Cook says. "Humans can't get it and neither can most other wildlife."

Scattered EHD white-tailed deer deaths have been reported from the Story and Bighorn areas, west of Sheridan in the Rapid and Wolf Creek drainages, and north of Sheridan along the Tongue River. The G&F does not plan to collect more blood samples from these areas since the diagnosis has been confirmed.

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