

CWD BECOMING STATEWIDE ISSUE

First wild deer in Northeastern Minnesota tests positive

By John Meyers
Alexandria Echo Press

Grand Rapids wild deer found in the city of Grand Rapids has tested positive for chronic wasting disease, the always fatal neurological disease that's spreading across the U.S. and killing deer and elk along the way.

It's the first wild deer in Northeastern Minnesota to test positive for the disease, spurring the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to activate its CWD response plan for the area.

Kelly Straka, wildlife section manager for the DNR, said the DNR will attempt to test additional deer in the area to see how widespread the disease might be. That likely will include some targeted deer killing in and around where the deer was found.

The DNR also will conduct mandatory testing of deer that hunters shoot this fall in that area.

"We will be planning surveillance during the fall hunting season, definitely, but that's more than six months from now and we don't want to wait that long," Straka told the *Duluth News Tribune*. "The immediate response plan is to work with local officials to test some roadkill animals ... and work with the public and people in and around Grand Rapids to conduct some



Forum News Service file photo

A group of whitetails stand at attention near Barnum, Minn. A whitetail doe in Grand Rapids has become the first wild deer in Northeastern Minnesota to test positive for the always fatal Chronic Wasting Disease.

localized deer removals — a very targeted, small area around that infected positive that we had."

Itasca County already is in a deer feeding ban area and will be added to counties where deer attractants, including deer scents, are not allowed during hunting seasons.

Straka said it's too soon to say whether the finding means CWD is moving north in Minnesota or if there are other factors causing the disease to pop-up in isolated areas where it hadn't before been found.

"We don't know the answer to that," Straka said. "Am I surprised that we got a positive hit in a wild deer in Grand Rapids? Yes. But we don't know yet if that means more wild deer in the area

have CWD. We need to get more monitoring done to figure that out, and we're already discussing how we get a better look at the statewide picture of where CWD is on the landscape and where we should look for the disease."

Other steps the DNR could take to slow the spread include expanded fall deer hunting in the area, with longer seasons, additional permits for multiple deer per hunter, but only if additional wild deer in that area are confirmed to carry the disease, Straka said. Several of those steps have been used in southeastern Minnesota.

A Grand Rapids resident reported to the DNR in mid-February that an adult doe died in his backyard. DNR

staff collected the carcass and submitted a lymph node sample for CWD testing. The DNR received confirmation of the Grand Rapids CWD infection March 15. Results of a full necropsy showed the deer died from a collision with a vehicle, but tested positive for CWD.

An animal must be dead or killed and a tissue sample collected to test for CWD, although the University of Minnesota and other researchers are said to be close to developing a test that is accurate on live animals.

Since 2002, DNR has tested samples from 106,000 wild deer statewide and 153, fewer than 1%, tested positive for CWD. Most of those cases occurred in southeastern Minnesota. But in recent

years, wild deer near the Twin Cities and near Brainerd, along with infected deer at deer farms in several areas, indicate the disease is slowly spreading. It's unclear if that spread is being caused by humans moving infected deer — live deer between farms, carcasses, trophy heads — or if the disease is spreading from deer to deer in the wild, or both.

The DNR said it's updating its statewide CWD response plan to include new positive test reports, new research and new information. That new plan is likely to include multiple ways to make it easier for hunters to get the deer they shot sampled for CWD, including self-service mail-in testing and more drop-off stations for testing.

"The DNR has taken an aggressive approach to managing CWD in Minnesota," Sarah Strommen, DNR commissioner, said in a statement. "We will continue this strong approach as we address this latest finding and as we update our statewide CWD response plan. The health of Minnesota's wild deer herd remains a top priority for the DNR."

More than 1,800 samples from wild deer shot by hunters were tested in and near an infested Beltrami County deer farm last fall and CWD was not detected in any. The Grand Rapids deer was about 60 miles from that farm. To the west and south of Grand Rapids, near Brainerd, CWD surveillance has been ongoing in this area since 2017. Two wild deer have been tested positive for CWD among the 6,300 deer tested since surveillance began.

Try froggin' in 2022

Alexandria One of the most enjoyable fishing experiences I have each season is when I get a chance to throw hollow body frogs to heavy, shallow cover hoping big bass will "blow up" on and, ultimately, eat those frogs.

As a fishing guide, and for various reasons, we don't employ this pattern a lot. Nevertheless, in the right waters this pattern can offer the year's most explosive fishing action. If you haven't tried it, you probably should consider it in 2022 because it is flat out fun and very exciting!

The right froggin' waters include lakes with lots of shallow cover like lily pads, wild rice, and pencil reeds. These examples of shallow vegetation are prime frog waters, but astute anglers also throw frogs around manmade cover like docks and boat/



MIKE FRISCH
Fishing the Midwest TV

pontoon lifts as well.

Frog fishing requires stout baitcasting gear and braided line of at least 50-pound test. Lots of frog technique-specific rods have hit the market in recent years and anglers don't have to break the bank when acquiring a rod and accompanying reel.

One thing that will probably be required, however, is casting practice as long casts are beneficial in expansive shallow areas like lily pad fields, while accurate casts are in order around tighter cover like docks and boat lifts. Last summer, I paired a Lew's KVD dock skipping/frog rod with a matching KVD baitcasting reel and

spooled it with heavy Tour braided line. This setup did a great job and comes at an affordable price too.

My frog fishing starts by tying a KVD Sexy Frog to my line, heading to the shallows, and starting to cast. Long casts and a straight, steady retrieve will often lead to explosive bites from shallow largemouth bass. At times, however, using a slower "walk the dog" style retrieve will produce strikes too and is effective with shorter casts tighter to cover.

Regardless of the retrieve utilized, one key to success is to pause a bit before the hookset to be sure the fish has the bait before the hookset. Many novice froggers, and some experienced ones too, have a tendency to set too soon and pull the frog from the fish when the fish "blows up" on the lure but doesn't actually have it yet.



Contributed / Mike Frisch

Heavy, shallow cover and soft-bodied frogs are a winning combination when largemouth bass are the target.

Two-time fishing Hall of Famer and veteran frog fisherman Duane Peterson helped me with the above challenge several years ago on a fishing trip when we were making long casts to fish holding in reeds. Duane simply advised me to keep the rod tip high during the steady retrieves we were using. This simple adjustment forces an angler to lower the rod tip before setting

the hook, giving the fish the time needed to fully engulf the frog.

Duane also offered a useful hint regarding cover selection during that trip. He showed that while one form of cover, maybe a reed bank, may have a fish or two in it, the best spots are often areas where multiple forms of cover intersect. For example, we had some of our best action in spots where reeds had

other forms of weeds mixed in.

Choosing productive fishing spots is important and so is frog selection. Various productive frog colors are available, with more coming to the market each year.

It pays for anglers to experiment to let the fish show you the preferred color of the day. The Sexy Frog comes in many productive color patterns and has two other important components. First, it collapses easily on the bite. Second, it has a big, strong double hook. Both these features increase the odds for successful hook-ups.

If more hook-ups and more fishing fun sounds appealing, consider froggin' for bass.

As always, good luck on the water and remember to include a youngster in your next outdoors adventure.

Mike Frisch is a western Minnesota fishing guide and co-host of the popular *Fishing the Midwest TV* series. Visit www.fishingthemidwest.com or follow *Fishing the Midwest* on Facebook for more "fishy" stuff.

Complete spring scouting for a better 2022 deer season

Alexandria If I had to pinpoint one thing that started consistently leading to more mature buck encounters during archery season for me, it has to do with scouting.

I enjoy scouting almost as much as hunting itself. That's because I have watched how much it works.

Nothing leads to confidence in bow hunting like doing work in the spring, having a spot ready to go and then slipping in for the hunt months later while executing a plan.

Scouting is where we put together the puzzle for the following season, and spring is my favorite time of year to scout.

A lot of factors go into that. The previous year's rut sign like rubs



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and scrapes (when the snow is off the ground), along with the best trail systems, jump off the landscape at this time of year.

I find it's easier to identify areas of good bedding, whether that's seeing worn-down beds once the snow is gone or even identifying the thickest areas of cover on a property. Everything can look like a jungle if you wait until the summer months.

Most people do a lot of their hunting during the rut. You will be

able to better identify things like pinch points and trail intersections in proximity to those bedding areas that make for the best rut spots.

When I do a scouting trip in the spring, I'm looking to identify bedding, then figure out a way to set up off of that bedding location, either within it or near it. I don't want to go back in there until it's time to hunt the following fall.

I recently produced three videos that break down three specific spots I identified on a recent scouting trip in Minnesota on March 17, 2022.

The first video looks at an overlooked spot that shows a huge amount of sign, indicating deer are using it in spite of

human activity in close proximity. The second video looks at a specific setup using river access that has a huge amount of rut sign from 2021. A third video shows exactly why I chose the tree I did to set up within 100 yards of an island in a river system that is some of the best bedding on this property.

To watch these scouting videos, visit the Northland Outdoors section of the *Echo Press* website at www.echopress.com/sports/northland-outdoors and click on the story *Eric Morken video: Complete spring-scouting breakdown for a better 2022 whitetail season*.

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Eric Morken / Alexandria Echo Press

This big rub made by a good buck in Minnesota was found in a prime bedding location during a scouting trip on March 17. Scouting in the spring before the green-up of summer can help hunters more clearly see how deer are using the landscape on the properties they hunt.