Breadcrumb

1. Home
2. Print
3. Pdf
4. Node
5. Entity Print

APHIS Announces Plans To Modernize Chronic Wasting Disease Control in Farmed Cervids, Seeks Comment on Revised Herd Certification Program Standards

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is advancing a modernized, science-driven approach to chronic wasting disease (CWD) control in farmed cervids. This effort reflects extensive stakeholder feedback, recent scientific developments, and years of operational experience across States and Tribal partners. Our goal is a clearer, more effective, producer-focused program that strengthens biosecurity, reduces disease risk, and enhances long-term tools such as predictive genetics and improved diagnostics.

Modernizing CWD Control in Farmed Cervids

APHIS is taking a fresh, science-driven look at how we manage CWD in farmed cervids to ensure the national program is easier to navigate and more responsive to producer needs. This modernization includes updates to the proposed Herd Certification Program (HCP) Standards that reduce regulatory burden, reinforce biosecurity, and incorporate lessons learned from years of research and field operations. Among these proposed updates are shorter trace-out/trace-back

timelines, reduced quarantine periods, and clearer science-based criteria for herd release. As a result, fewer trace herds will need to be quarantined, and some may be eligible to be released from quarantine earlier—helping more producers qualify for interstate movement.

A key part of this modernization is shifting away from whole-herd depopulation as the default approach. Genetics-based herd plans and targeted removal of positive animals now provide a more sustainable path for long-term CWD management. As indemnity needs decrease over time, APHIS will reinvest savings into expanded research, including improved diagnostics and deeper studies on how genetics influence susceptibility.

Indemnity will continue for CWD-positive and -exposed animals, especially those required for genetic evaluations or other research. These animals provide the invaluable samples needed to refine and develop diagnostic tools, strengthen predictive genetics, and better understand CWD transmission dynamics.

Additionally, APHIS is planning to develop a modern national recordkeeping system to help producers and States efficiently track herd inventories, submissions, and certification status.

Through these updates, the modernized program will reduce disease risk, enhance biosecurity, improve consistency across States, sustain indemnity support, and expand access to long-term tools such as predictive genetics and advanced diagnostics.

Updated Herd Certification Program Standards

As part of this modernized approach, APHIS is releasing a revised version of the CWD Herd Certification Program (HCP) Standards for public review and comment. The HCP provides a consistent national approach for controlling CWD in farmed cervids and preventing interstate spread.

These revisions respond directly to operational and regulatory concerns raised by State partners and livestock industry stakeholders. The updated standards aim to improve clarity, strengthen herd health, reduce disease risk, streamline compliance, and further align the program with USDA’s producer-focused, science-based regulatory direction.

In developing these revisions, APHIS gathered extensive stakeholder input during multiple public meetings and comment sessions, as required under the 2021 CWD Research and Management Act. State and industry partners identified challenges related to traceback and quarantine duration, regulatory clarity, outbreak response timelines, and inconsistent implementation among States. The proposed updates resolve many of these issues while preserving the rigor of the national program.

Key Proposed Changes to Standards

- Shorter trace and quarantine periods for white-tailed and mule deer, while maintaining existing timelines for elk and other species based on incubation periods
- Updated indemnity prioritization to reduce transmission risk, support timely removal of high-risk animals, and encourage producer participation
- Science-based clarifications to address areas where requirements were previously ambiguous, improving national consistency in inspections, surveillance, and sample submission
- Predictive genetics guidance to help producers reduce herd susceptibility through selective breeding
- Greater consistency in national program administration and compliance

These revisions align the national CWD program with congressional direction, current science, producer needs, and practical realities at the State level. APHIS remains committed to balancing program integrity with clear, workable requirements in close partnership with State and Tribal governments.

The revised standards will be open for a 30-day public comment period starting on October 26, 2026. APHIS will review all feedback before finalizing and implementing the updated guidance. To view the documents or submit comments, go to www.regulations.gov and enter APHIS-2026-0563 in the search field.

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