

# USDA APHIS Tribal Nations Wild Cervid Chronic Wasting Disease Opportunities 2021 Cooperative Agreements

## 2021 Project Executive Summaries

December 2021

## Project Summaries for the USDA APHIS Tribal Nations Wild Cervid Chronic Wasting Disease Opportunities 2021 Cooperative Agreements

USDA APHIS WS is awarding \$300,000 through Cooperative Agreements to seven Federally recognized Native American Tribal governments to combat Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) on Tribal lands across ten different states. These projects will allow recipients to further develop and implement CWD management, response, and research activities in wild cervids, including surveillance and testing. The Executive Summaries provided by the cooperators are below.

### Fully Funded

#### **Developing CWD Sampling Capacity and a Tribal Management Plan for the S’Klallam Tribes, Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe (McCollum, P.)**

The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe (PGST) has wildlife co-management responsibilities across thousands of square miles and manages natural resources with the goal of preserving wildlife and habitats for future generations. There has been no systematic testing for CWD in Washington since 2012 and only limited testing of symptomatic individuals. Additionally, neither our Tribe nor any of our co-managers have a CWD management plan in place. We intend to jointly solve the issues of a lack of CWD testing capacity and a lack of tribal planning for CWD management. PGST will use this funding to outfit 12 staff members from PGST and Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe (JST) to begin taking CWD samples across the ceded area from as many hunter-killed and road-killed cervids as possible, and we will write a CWD management plan for the Tribe.

Our short-term goal in applying to this grant is to acquire sampling gear, train personnel to take and submit samples, develop educational materials for Tribal members, and to develop a CWD management plan. The sampling efforts will be led by two biologists and the natural resources law enforcement staff from PGST and the neighboring JST. By training so many staff members, all of whom work outdoors and actively work with wildlife and interact with hunters, our sampling area will be over 1,000 square miles. By equipping, training, and keeping our staff up to date on taking CWD samples, we will have sampling capabilities for years to come. This testing is also critical to determining if CWD is present now and for catching cases early when it arrives. The CWD management plan will be developed in conjunction with educational materials for Tribal members and staff and written with Tribal input. The educational materials and management plan will outline methods of slowing/stopping the spread of CWD that individuals can help with. The management plan will also include an emergency response plan for handling the first local cases of CWD and a long-term plan to guide human practices and wildlife management if/when CWD becomes locally established.

The long-term goal of applying to this grant is to ensure that our CWD management plan is a living document that is periodically revisited and updated to reflect the needs of PGST and our co-managers and includes the best available science on CWD management, plus local, state, and national conditions. We will send our management plan to our fellow co-managers, in hopes that they will develop similar and cohesive management plans.

**Michigan Tribal CWD Management, Bay Mills Indian Community (Sanchez, G.)**

This project has an overlying goal of creating a recognized program between Michigan's federally recognized tribes and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MI DNR) to manage CWD across the state. Data will be collected from a wide area across Michigan and provided to tribal citizens, tribal Biology departments and the MI DNR. This project proposes a novel program to facilitate coordination between tribal biology programs and the MI DNR. Though coordination does exist, it is not with this level of focus specifically on CWD within Michigan. A new role of Tribal CWD Coordinator will be created to manage this program and coordinate communication between tribes and between tribes and the MI DNR, organize collection of samples from harvested deer, create targeted outreach and education on CWD for tribal hunters, and create tribal CWD response plans.

Testing for CWD is currently taking place across the state of Michigan but has been greatly limited in recent years due to a lack of funding. This project aims to support both Tribal governments and the MI DNR to ensure that state-wide testing is available to tribal hunters to control and prevent the further spread of CWD. This will aid in improved management of CWD within the state of Michigan by increasing overall testing and improving coordination between the state and tribes. In the 2020/21 hunting season, testing was made available to Michigan Tribal hunters through a grant obtained by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. This grant aims to continue this testing and expand the reach and purpose of this program to include coordination with the MI DNR.

The target population for this project are citizens of federally recognized tribes within the state of Michigan, but this project will positively impact all citizens across the state. This project will make testing available to tribal hunters and help disease surveillance of wild deer herds on tribal lands.

**Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance in Wild Deer on the Leech Lake Reservation, MN, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe – Division of Resource Management (Roerick, T.)**

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO) is an indigenous nation located in north-central Minnesota. Through a series of treaties LLBO ceded title to some of the lands, but never relinquished management authority of resources and retained the rights to hunt, fish, and gather on those lands. Maintaining the health and integrity of our natural resources is of utmost importance to LLBO. As diseases like CWD threaten our resources we must act quickly. The recent detection of a positive CWD farmed cervid near the Leech Lake Reservation boundary has initiated a Reservation-wide CWD surveillance effort. CWD has never been found here before so it is important to determine if the disease has infected the wild deer population and ensure swift action is taken if it has. This project will provide CWD testing to all tribally harvested deer and distribute CWD outreach and educational materials to tribal members.

**CWD Surveillance on Navajo Nation, Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife (Fort, J.)**

Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife (NNDFW) has been challenged by several financial barriers to conducting adequate surveillance for CWD. Lack of funding has limited NNDFW's capacity to perform adequate CWD testing, hire dedicated personnel to operate check stations, and monitor movement of Navajo wild cervid herds adjacent to regions with documented CWD endemic areas (Utah, Ute Mountain Reservation, Colorado, and New Mexico). This study would provide NNDFW the capacity to intensify their surveillance efforts with the goal of early detection of CWD on Navajo

lands. Intensified efforts will be concentrated within a designated 'CWD Study Area' that encompasses a 20-mile buffer around Utah and Colorado-Navajo borders in the Four Corners region. Efforts within the study area will employ a novel testing method, fecal pellet analysis using Protein Misfolding Cyclic Amplification (PMCA), to supplement ELISA results from samples taken at check stations. NNDFW will also deploy GPS collars on mule deer within the study area to monitor seasonal movement into bordering CWD endemic areas. Deliverables will include increasing the number of annually submitted samples from the typical ~100-105 to ~220 samples in 2022. If CWD is detected, NNDFW will create a CWD endemic area and implement the first steps in the Navajo CWD Response Plan. Deliverables also include a report summarizing the findings from this study to be shared with adjacent wildlife agencies. This project will directly benefit 1) NNDFW, by improving their CWD surveillance program, 2) surrounding wildlife agencies by filling in data gaps for disease prevalence and wild cervid movement and promoting the development of cooperative regional population management objectives and strategies in the Four Corners region, and 3) Navajo stakeholders (i.e., hunters, medicine men, etc.) whose livelihoods depend on early detection and eradication of CWD if present on the Nation.

**Chronic Wasting Disease Awareness, Monitoring, and Surveillance, Oneida Nation – Oneida Conservation Department (Webster, S.)**

The project and funding will contribute to the ongoing efforts to educate and monitor for CWD on the Oneida Nation lands, by assisting with proper disposal of deer carcasses, providing information to Sportsmen/Members/Community, and conduct sampling to bridge the gap between the Oneida Nation and outside agencies. These efforts are made to increase awareness of this disease and reduce where carcasses are found or left on the landscape. By conducting sample testing from Oneida Sportsmen harvests, it will allow for additional results that may otherwise not be made available. The Disease knows no boundaries and every effort/possibility should be made to combat the overall spread.

**Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance on Fort Belknap, Fort Belknap Indian Community (Vosburgh, T.)**

The Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department (Department) was established in 1992. The Department manages wildlife on Tribal trust lands across both Blaine and Phillips Counties on behalf of the Aaniiih and Nakoda Nation. It is also responsible for administering hunting and fishing on Tribal lands and for enforcing the FBIC Title X- Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code.

The Mission of the Department is to restore and sustain wildlife and biodiverse habitats on Fort Belknap Tribal lands through stewardship informed by science and traditional ecological knowledge. In light of this Mission, the Department has just completed a final draft 5-year (Fiscal Year 2022-Fiscal Year 2026) Conservation Plan. The Department identified a limited number of species and habitats, including deer (white-tailed and mule) and elk, that represent or benefit the preservation of important ecosystem services or conservation of many other species or habitats that the Department will focus the majority of its efforts on.

Reasons for selection of deer and elk in the Conservation Plan related to social, economic, and cultural well-being of the Aaniiih and Nakoda People include:

- Sources of hunting license revenue for the department, and jobs for hunting guides.
- Important source of food.

- Recreational and scientific values.
- Wildlife viewing/aesthetic values.

Reasons for selection of deer and elk in the Conservation Plan related to restoring or sustaining wildlife and biodiverse habitats include:

- Mule deer populations have declined in recent decades (probably for a variety of reasons).
- Impacted and vulnerable from disease and viruses like Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease/blue tongue and Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).
- Deer and elk's ecological role as prey species.

Incorporating disease management for deer and elk into the Department's Conservation Plan emphasizes the importance of these species to the Fort Belknap Indian Community. Now that CWD has been confirmed adjacent to the Reservation it is critical that the Department begins addressing the issue. Within the Conservation Plan are time sensitive activities to address the spread of CWD on the reservation including:

- Every year conduct CWD surveillance and report results to the public.
- The Department's staff will be prepared to conduct CWD surveillance on the Reservation beginning September, 2021.
- The Department will inform hunters and the public about the current status of the disease on Fort Belknap and prepare to prevent the spread of CWD into the future.

#### Partially Funded

**Seneca Nation CWD Education, Awareness, and Monitoring Program, Seneca Nation Conservation-Fish and Wildlife Department (SNCFWD), (Titus, S.)**

The Seneca Nation Conservation-Fish and Wildlife Department (SNCFWD) is requesting assistance from the USDA APHIS FY21 Tribal Nations Wild Cervid CWD Opportunities to establish the Seneca Nation CWD Education, Awareness, and Monitoring Program. Our goal for the proposed program is to minimize the potential threat of CWD spreading onto the Seneca Nation's Allegany Territory. SNCFWD intends to achieve this goal through public awareness and educational outreach, sample collection and analysis, development of an Action Plan, and monitoring efforts in remote areas of our territory that border known regions where CWD has been detected. The target audience that will directly benefit from the program is men, women, and children who frequently participate in outdoor activities (hunting, hiking, etc.) residing within the Seneca Nation, the South Western New York Region, and North Western Pennsylvania Region. With the CWD educational outreach efforts that will be conducted throughout the implementation of the program, this target audience will possess the knowledge and ability to properly identify potential cases of CWD and report back to our department.

The establishment of this program will play a crucial role in monitoring and minimizing the spread of CWD throughout our geographic region. The state of Pennsylvania, which is located to the south of our territory, has been combatting CWD since 2012. Since 2012, the SNCFWD has observed the spread of CWD in Pennsylvania in both captive and wild deer populations, which has breached 722 cases in 24 counties and continues to climb closer to our territorial boundaries. With the addition of Warren County to Pennsylvania's "CWD Management Areas" last year, it brought this disease within 20 miles of the Seneca Nation's Allegany Territory. With the assistance of the USDA APHIS, the SNCFWD will gain the resources required to properly deal with the spread of CWD in our region.

The SNCFWD will launch a first of its kind media and educational blitz. We intend to invest in advertisements with local and regional media outlets in an effort to inform our target audience and general public about CWD, what it is, how it is spread and management efforts. We will also create a web page dedicated to our CWD program, this will include education materials and provide users with the ability to report suspected cases and their locations. SNCFWD staff will monitor and respond to those reports. The webpage will also work in conjunction with a dedicated telephone hotline that will offer the same materials and capabilities as the webpage. All information gathered will be tracked and analyzed by the Seneca Nation GIS Department. All reports, sampling data, report locations, sampling locations and analysis will be tracked and monitored and made available upon request to other agencies. Additionally, SNCFWD staff are New York State (NYS) certified rifle and bow hunting instructors, and it is their intent to include CWD awareness and education in their classes. The SNCFWD also plans on holding classes and to invite local and regional CWD experts to our territory to hold informational seminars.

SNCFWD staff has been previously trained on the proper standards in removing samples to be tested from deer for CWD. The Department was trained back in 2009 by the Native American Fish and Wildlife Association in dissection, and most recently by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation in 2019. To add to that training, the Department will be receiving guidance, training, and oversight from USDA, APHIS Retired & Veterinary Technology Department Faculty, Medaille College, Buffalo, NY. Medaille College Faculty will be providing refresher trainings for the department on proper standards and protocols for the removal, storage, shipping, and custody of sample materials to ensure the samples being provided for analysis are of good quality and properly handled. The Seneca Nation has also received commitment from Cornell University to assist in the mentorship and collaboration with outside entities of the sampling, sampling analysis, in addition to drafting of the proposed Action Plan.

With CWD spreading closer to our territory each year, the SNCFWD will begin working on a CWD Action Plan, to have procedures in place in the event that the disease is detected within the Seneca Nation. This Action Plan will lay out protocols and create law within the Seneca Nation for its members and community to follow in our efforts to control, slow the spread of and/or eradication of the disease. The CWD Action Plan will outline standards and SOP for; Management Areas, Enhanced Surveillance, Containment Zones, Established Areas, Regulations on Movement, Regulations on Feeding, Regulations on Attractants, Increased Harvest, Targeted Removal, Surveillance and Communication. Our intent is to have this Action Plan presented to Tribal Council to be approved as an official enforceable document. The Action Plan will put the Seneca Nation in a position to be more proactive than reactive in the event that CWD does spread to our lands.

Due to the number of confirmed CWD cases in Pennsylvania, and the steady expansion of CWD within that state, the SNCFWD finds it immensely important that we focus much of our monitoring and sampling efforts on our southern border. The area that is most vulnerable consists of a vast area of uninhabited forest lands. Our territorial borders consist of Tribal Forest, State Park and National Forest lands that are wild and inaccessible by most means. This area in total encompasses in excess of 594,175 acres, with no real distinguishable boundaries between the three stakeholders' properties/ boundaries. It is the SNCFWD intent to actively patrol these areas. The means that we intend to be more vigilant in those areas are by physical patrols, trail camera and UAV. Our sampling efforts to be submitted for analysis will be taken from road kill, deceased deer with no apparent cause, and random targeting near our southern boundary with the State of Pennsylvania. Cornell University will be analyzing our submitted samples.