

# Chronic Wasting Disease: A Closer Look

Illinois' first case of CWD was identified in the fall of 2002. To date, we've tested more than 74,000 deer from throughout the state, and identified 408 CWD-positive animals. Most of these were found in our original four CWD counties: Winnebago, Boone, McHenry, and DeKalb. In spite of these low levels of disease, CWD remains a very real concern. Why?

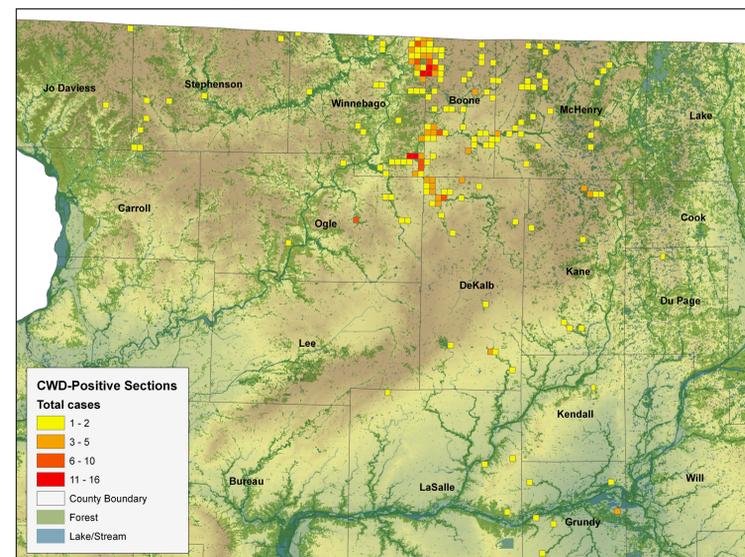
Hunters sometimes ask why we're so worried about CWD in Illinois, when Hemorrhagic Disease (HD) occasionally kills thousands of deer in a year—several times more than the number of cases of CWD identified during the past ten years. There's a simple explanation. Hemorrhagic Disease is an irruptive disease: it starts with very few



individuals affected, it builds to a peak in a short period of time, and it disappears from the deer population after the first hard frost. Even though the epidemic may be widespread and mortality may be high in certain local areas, it's usually difficult to document significant effects on deer populations at a larger scale, such as at the county level. HD effects are normally very patchy, and it may be several years between significant outbreaks, so it has little impact on county-level and long-term deer management efforts. Each time a Hemorrhagic Disease outbreak begins, it must start from scratch, and over time deer populations may build up a higher level of resistance to the disease.

Chronic Wasting Disease, on the other hand, does not go away on its own. Once established within a population, all scientific evidence indicates that without management CWD will continue to increase in intensity. Although outbreaks progress slowly in wild herds and infection rates may remain low for years, this is not an indicator of the potential impacts of this disease. The low level of CWD currently found in Illinois should not be misconstrued to mean that CWD is not serious—it's simply a result of the effectiveness of our disease management program. Allowing CWD to increase and spread (as it has in several other states) will have very serious and long-term negative consequences for Illinois' deer herd. Since CWD was discovered in 2002, we must consider the likelihood that deer populations and deer management in Illinois' affected area will never be the same again – at least until a cure is found. If we pretend that CWD is inconsequential, or that it will go away all by itself, we would not be accepting the reality of the situation. Conservation of natural resources is much more than providing abundant deer in the short term for the recreational enjoyment of hunters; it is about being responsible stewards of our deer resource with an eye for their long term benefit and sustainability. Sometimes this requires difficult decisions to be made, and this is certainly one of those times.

Distribution of CWD-positive deer in northern Illinois during 2002-2013



For additional information about CWD, please visit our website at <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/programs/CWD>.