

## Natural Deer Urine Attractants Illegal in Virginia

To Virginia's Deer Hunters,

As all of you hopefully know by now, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries adopted a new regulation effective this fall that made it illegal to possess or use deer scents and lures that contain natural deer urine or other bodily fluids while taking, attempting to take, attracting, or scouting wildlife in Virginia. The Department took this proactive action to help minimize the risk of introducing Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) into new areas in Virginia. CWD poses a real and significant risk to Virginia's deer herd. It could also have a devastating impact on deer hunting which generates over \$500 million dollars annually to the state's economy.

Over the past months, there have been several articles in Virginia newspapers or in the national outdoor press by persons questioning the need for, and the science behind, Virginia's CWD urine ban. Unfortunately, these writers have based their opinions on distortions of the facts and truth about CWD. The most basic fact that is omitted from these articles is that nearly all of the critics of the Virginia urine ban who have taken time to write have direct economic ties to the captive deer industry. To quote Upton Sinclair, a Pulitzer Prize winning novelist, *"It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on him not understanding it."* Let's take a look at a few of their CWD facts and science.

The first item the urine ban naysayers will mention is research that suggests CWD transmission by urine is a low risk. Low risk is not zero risk. What they fail to mention is the rest of the story. The infectious agents that cause CWD (prions) are shed by CWD-infected deer in urine, saliva, and feces and saliva and feces are reported to be higher risk than urine. Deer urine is collected from captive deer by housing these deer on grates or slatted floors, and any other fluids shed by these deer (saliva, feces, etc.) are also collected. Consequently, these deer urine products also contain both deer saliva and deer feces. Furthermore, research has clearly demonstrated that environmental contamination from CWD-infected materials (urine, saliva, and/or feces) will continue to transmit CWD for years. No CWD-infected animals even need to be present, only the environmental contamination from CWD-infected urine, saliva, and/or feces.

The second assertion the critics of the urine ban make is that the urine only comes from captive deer herds that have been continuously monitored for CWD for five consecutive years and are considered certified deer herds. This statement is false. Deer urine is not a regulated industry or product and there is no federal or state agency that can certify deer urine based products as CWD-free.

In fact, there is no CWD-free captive deer certification or monitoring program. The five-year CWD monitoring program the urine supporters frequently mention is a loose reference to a voluntary national US Department of Agriculture (USDA) CWD captive herd certification program that was initiated in 2012. Under this USDA program captive deer herds that have been monitored for at least five consecutive years are certified *"as low risk for CWD"*. This national CWD monitoring program is administered by individual states whose state CWD monitoring programs are USDA approved. Unfortunately, since 2012 CWD has been detected in at least four captive deer herds that were certified as low risk for CWD. A fifth CWD certified captive deer herd withdrew from their state/USDA CWD monitoring program and was found to be CWD positive several months later. When this fifth deer pen was depopulated 80% of the deer in it were CWD positive. The national USDA CWD herd certification program commonly cited as the captive deer industry's safety net is not mandatory and, more importantly, recent CWD events clearly show that it does not and cannot guarantee that captive deer herds are CWD-free.

Lastly, the most outlandish of the critics of the urine ban assertions is that the captive deer industry deer herds are less of a CWD risk than wild free-ranging deer. To date, CWD has been found in more than 140 captive deer herds in 16 states and two Canadian provinces.

Over the past twenty plus years, the Department's deer management staff has taken deer management positions and enacted regulations to be as proactive as possible with regards to trying to keep CWD out of Virginia. Our goal with the urine ban is to minimize the risk of introducing CWD into new areas in Virginia to protect the long-term health of the Virginia deer herd and to protect our wild free-ranging fair chase Virginia deer hunting heritage for the current and future generations.