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“Fire in the Sistine Chapel”: How Wisconsin Responded to Chronic Wasting Disease

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Abstract

The discovery of CWD in the Wisconsin deer herd in February 2002 was treated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as if it was a fire. Rapid action led to abandoning stakeholder concerns while human dimensions expertise and research was largely ignored and opportunities to learn from innovations were missed. After two years, neither the biological nor the social goals of the program have been achieved. Hunters killed fewer rather than more deer, deer densities in the eradication zone remained high, and efforts to end recreational feeding failed. Deer hunting license sales dropped by over 90,000. Revenues to the agency declined and other programs suffered as money was reallocated to fight CWD. Hunters were hardest hit, losing about 60 million in recreational benefits or a 20% decline in the annual surplus value of deer hunting in the state. This article examines the Wisconsin response to CWD to help better understand why the human and biological goals were not met.

Keywords:

chronic wasting disease

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stakeholders

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