

United States Senate

May 10, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 201510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 201510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

As you work to produce the Senate's 2018 Farm Bill, I strongly encourage you to include language to address the threat of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). This serious illness has now spread to 23 states, and poses a serious threat to wildlife, the outdoor recreation economy, and potentially, human health and safety.

Researchers are still working to better understand CWD, but from what we know already, CWD poses a serious threat to wildlife populations across the nation. CWD is a uniformly fatal prion-based illness that effects deer, elk, and moose. The disease is spread through contact with infected bodily fluids, but animals may also become infected through indirect exposure to prions in water, soil, or food. The spread of the disease can be rapid, devastating to effected wildlife populations, and can be almost impossible to eradicate given the prion's ability to survive lengthy periods in the environment. It is critically important for additional research be done into this troubling disease, and for state and tribal wildlife agencies attempting to contain and manage CWD outbreaks to receive additional support.

The impacts of CWD are potentially crippling to our outdoor economy. While the progression of the disease within an infected herd can vary, populations can drop as rapidly as 21 percent annually. In Colorado, infected mule deer herds have been reduced by nearly half. Maintaining stable wildlife populations is critical not only for conservation purposes, but also to support a thriving outdoor recreation sector. Hunters pursuing mule deer, elk, moose, white-tailed deer, and other cervids play a critical role in supporting Montana's \$7.1 billion outdoor recreation economy, and in the larger outdoor recreation economy across the nation. In addition to its fatal effects on wildlife populations, recent studies have suggested that the prion may be communicable to primates, potentially posing a threat to human health and safety.

Given the clear and present threat posed by CWD, I would encourage the Committee to expand upon the work already done by the Cervid Health Program, and include additional language in the 2018 Farm Bill to support research into this troubling disease, including support for facilities close to current outbreaks to conduct testing, and support for states and tribes to contain outbreaks. To that end, I would encourage inclusion of language similar to my Chronic Wasting Disease Support for States Act (S. 2252) in the 2018 Farm Bill.

I appreciate your leadership on this critical legislation for the nation's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. I look forward to working with you to better understand and curb the spread of CWD.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Tester", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Tester