A Safe and Healthy Hunt

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Sen. Jeff Smith (D – Brunswick) and Rep. Katrina Shankland (D – Stevens Point) write a about the precautions Wisconsinites must take to prevent the spread of both COVID-19 and Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) this hunting season.

BRUNSWICK, WI - As we approach another gun deer hunting season in Wisconsin, hunters are getting ready – sighting-in their rifles, remembering a sharp knife, and preparing their gear. Of course, anyone set to hunt should always be prepared, even for Wisconsin's unpredictable weather.

Hunting truly instills our attention to planning for the unexpected. This year, we know being prepared is more important than ever. Unlike years past, hunters must take additional precautions to prevent the spread of both COVID-19 and Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). While we eagerly await gun deer season to begin, it's important to know the steps we can take to preserve Wisconsin's hunting heritage and keep our communities and loved ones safe.

Although CWD isn't talked about much in between hunting seasons, it's still out there and poses a real threat to our deer herd. CWD is a highly contagious disease affecting hoofed

animals, including whitetail deer. CWD is caused by abnormal proteins called prions, which lead to brain damage and attack the central nervous system.

CWD testing and the proper disposal of deer carcasses are the most effective actions to slow the spread of CWD. This session, we introduced the Healthy Herd, Healthy Hunt legislative package to advance research and prevention strategies to mitigate the spread of CWD. One bill would invest $1 million annually over a two-year period for CWD testing, management, and research. Another bill would allocate $200,000 to fund CWD testing kiosks and expand the Adopt-a-Kiosk program to make it easier for hunters to have their deer tested.



Along with testing efforts, it's critical that hunters are able to dispose of deer carcasses properly, since prions from a deer carcass can survive in the soil for years. These prions can uptake in plants, which then act as a carrier of CWD, transmitting it to deer that eat these plants. The third bill in the legislative package would provide $2 million for carcass dumpster sites where hunters can dispose of their carcasses safely and prevent further spread of CWD. This bill would also improve CWD education efforts for hunters.

Whitetail deer hunting is a proud tradition that has been passed on from generation to generation. Hunting is an important aspect of Wisconsin culture, connecting us to each other and our ancestors. Importantly, hunting also contributes significantly to our economy while encouraging tourists worldwide to visit our great state.

In Buffalo County, deer hunting has become a prime economic driver because of the world-record deer that have been harvested there. Across our state, the nine-day gun deer season has a total economic impact of over $1 billion to our state's economy, and it's also a healthy and cost-effective way for families to fill up their freezers.



Outdoor recreation has been pivotal to maintaining our physical and mental health during this pandemic. Hunting is a great way to enjoy the outdoors while observing the recommended public health precautions: keep your hunting party to members of your own household, hunt

within your local community to limit travel when possible, and avoid large gatherings. While following all the usual hunting safety precautions this season, remember to wear a mask, stay at least six feet apart from people outside of your household, and wash your hands frequently. Also, to avoid in-person deer registration, you can register your deer online or by phone.

If your hunt is successful, please have your deer tested and dispose of your carcass properly to prevent the spread of CWD. Due to COVID-19, in-person CWD sampling is canceled, but you can visit one of the hundreds of self-service sampling kiosks to have your deer tested. Kiosk locations can be found on the DNR website . Test results are expected to take approximately two to three weeks from the time the deer head or tissue sample is received due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Together, we can keep Wisconsin's hunting tradition going strong for future generations. Follow public health guidance to stop the spread of COVID-19. Test your deer for CWD and properly dispose of your deer carcass. All these actions add up to help us stay healthy and preserve our rich hunting heritage.

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