



Animal and Plant  
Health Inspection  
Services

March 14, 2025

Wildlife Services

Dear USAHA Committee on Wildlife,

Office of the Deputy  
Administrator

USDA APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) would like to thank the USAHA Committee on Wildlife for approving two resolutions involving APHIS WS (*Resolution 21: Controlled Study to Evaluate Genetic Influence on Chronic Wasting Disease in White-Tailed Deer* and *Resolution 24: Increased Fiscal Year 2026 Funding for the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services National Rabies Management Program to Enhance Rabies Surveillance, Oral Rabies Vaccination Programs in Urban Landscapes and Request the Restocking of an Oral Rabies Bait/Vaccine Bank*) during its 128th Annual Meeting in Nashville.

*Resolution 21* requests additional research to determine the effectiveness of predictive genetics, and specifically genomically estimated breeding values (GEBV), as a control strategy for chronic wasting disease (CWD) in farmed cervids. This research may provide additional information on predictive genetics. APHIS WS has identified BSL-2 space for controlled studies at the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) in Fort Collins, CO and is currently exploring options for sourcing deer with GEBVs far enough below the cut off to study some of the parameters of interest defined in the Resolution.

Given that all deer are likely susceptible to CWD following sufficient exposure, experimental design will be critical to ensure that the research is adequate to better understand the effect of a low GEBV score on shedding, incubation period, tissue distribution/trafficking, and time to detection in RAMALT biopsies. Genomically estimated breeding values are based on thousands of loci across the genome, which means that deer with similar values can have different genetic profiles. Sample size will be a limitation for study interpretation, which will necessitate study replication and coordinate with the Agriculture Research Service (ARS).

Coordination among agencies with BSL-2 space (e.g., NWRC, ARS) will maximize efficiency and impact of controlled studies, while coordination with APHIS Veterinary Services (VS) will ensure that controlled studies are complementary to population studies within the farmed cervid industry that are currently underway. Through thoughtful coordination, we aim to conduct studies that will provide additional data to more thoroughly understand predictive genetics as a CWD control strategy, including information that will help inform regulatory animal health agencies and industry considering use of GEBV in CWD prevention and management programs in farmed deer.

Regarding *Resolution 24*, APHIS WS recognizes the need to enhance rabies surveillance, refine oral rabies vaccine programs in urban landscapes and further develop and augment the strategic oral rabies vaccine (ORV) bait bank to continue to meet national rabies management goals as outlined in the U.S. National Plan for Wildlife Rabies Management (2023-2027).

USAHA has a long history of supporting the APHIS WS National Rabies Management Program (NRMP). This partnership has been instrumental in raising awareness of the need to manage terrestrial rabies in targeted wildlife populations to protect human and animal health and reduce the economic costs of living with terrestrial rabies. USAHA resolutions similar in scope to the 2024 resolution have been critically important in facilitating coalition building around program sustainability, to enhance rabies surveillance in >20 states and to manage rabies in meso-carnivore populations at the landscape scale through the strategic application of ORV. Collaboration and coordination remain vital to efficient and effective implementation of rabies research and management in the United States. USAHA continues to demonstrate leadership in promoting cross sector collaboration and coordinated disease management, including rabies management, to safeguard agriculture, animal health and human health.

This year marks the 28th season that APHIS WS has been directly involved with cooperatively distributing ORV baits in the eastern United States targeting raccoon rabies and the 30th year working with the Texas Department of State Health Services targeting rabies in coyotes and gray foxes. These programs have led to the elimination of canine rabies in coyotes and the elimination of a unique gray fox rabies variant in Texas. Current rabies management strategies have been successful in preventing the westward spread of raccoon rabies and achieving local elimination in strategic areas of the eastern United States while contributing toward the long-term goal of eliminating this variant from the United States entirely.

As outlined in *Resolution 24*, there remains strong public and agency support for nationally coordinated programs to conduct enhanced rabies surveillance with DRIT and other diagnostic techniques; maintain and enhance ORV programs to control rabies; implement contingency actions to restore the integrity of the ORV zone as needed; and to conduct applied research to evaluate novel and US-licensed vaccines and related studies targeting skunks, mongoose, and vampire bats. APHIS WS acknowledges and supports USAHA's request to continue to develop and support a critically needed oral rabies vaccine bait bank to avoid supply chain interruptions and to have a vaccine stockpile available for rapid response to rabies cases that jeopardize long term management success.

Best Regards,

**JESSICA  
FANTINATO**

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APHIS Wildlife Services