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DISEASE OUTBREAK HITS PRONGHORN AND WHITE-TAILED DEER

CODY— Hemorrhagic disease (HD), an insect borne, infectious and noncontagious disease of wild ruminants was diagnosed as the cause of many white-tailed deer deaths in the Big Horn Basin six years ago—the disease may be back.



Landowners, hunters, and Wyoming Game and Fish Department personnel in the Greybull and Lovell areas have reported seeing several sick, dying, and/or dead pronghorn and white-tailed deer. Three pronghorn were collected and transported last week to the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory in Laramie for necropsy. The results revealed that the animals had the classic lesions associated with hemorrhagic disease. Cynthia Tate, assistant wildlife veterinarian for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, performed the necropsies.

Although at the present time, the outward symptoms observed of sick pronghorn and the early necropsy results point toward an outbreak of HD, it takes approximately two weeks to isolate the virus. "I am pursuing other avenues for confirming the diagnosis, but for now, its safe to say that the pronghorns sent down are highly suspect cases of hemorrhagic disease," Tate said.

Summer conditions have been ideal for an outbreak of the disease according to Tate.

"Temperatures in the Big Horn Basin were very hot, which results in pronghorn and white-tailed deer concentrating around water sources in the lowland environment of the 'no-see-um' gnats. The gnats then spread the virus when biting the animals," Tate said.

When first infected, an animal looks healthy and normal. As the disease progresses the animal begins to look weak and ill. The virus can cause spontaneous hemorrhaging (bleeding) in muscles and organs five to 10 days after an animal is infected. Lungs become fluid-filled and the animal may foam at the mouth. Often an infected pronghorn or deer will develop sores on the mouth and tongue area. In many cases, death occurs soon after these symptoms occur.

The impact the disease will have on pronghorn and white-tailed deer in the Lovell and Greybull areas will not be known for some time. "In 2001, hemorrhagic disease reduced the white-tailed deer population along the Shoshone, Bighorn, and Greybull Rivers significantly," said Cody region wildlife coordinator Kevin Hurley. "There is really nothing we can do but wait and see," Hurley added.

Hurley expects the mortalities to continue until several days after our first hard frost. "A hard frost will kill the no-see-um gnats which carry the disease. Mortalities will continue for a short period because animals infected prior to the frost may succumb to the virus," he said.

With pronghorn and archery deer seasons underway, some hunters may be concerned about health risks. Tate assures hunters that they do not have to worry about getting the disease from their pronghorn or deer. "As always, *obviously* sick animals are not suitable for human consumption due to rapid deterioration of the meat and other issues, but an apparently healthy animal harvested during an HD outbreak is no problem. Humans can't get hemorrhagic disease and neither can most other wildlife," said Tate.

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