

# Treeways

2021 - 5

## Chronic Wasting Disease in Deer – Feeding Deer

On November 7, 2020, the first positive case of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was confirmed in a male deer from Dakota County in the South Metro area. CWD is a neurological disease of deer and other related cervids like elk and moose. It has no cure and is 100% fatal. Male deer have so far been infected with CWD at a higher rate than females. **Sunfish Lake is currently in the South Metro Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance Area (701).** The Minnesota DNR is testing for chronic wasting disease in deer within Dakota county including several that were sampled from our City's deer management hunt. No Sunfish Lake deer tested positive for CWD this year.

Feeding deer tends to attract large numbers of deer together in one location repeatedly and that is a way that chronic wasting disease gets spread more quickly. **Dakota County** plus Hennepin, Ramsey, Washington, and Scott counties around us have **deer feeding and deer attractant bans in force currently.** Feeding means placement or distribution of grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and hay capable of attracting or enticing deer. Attractant means using other natural or manufactured products that are capable of attracting or enticing deer including salt, minerals, liquid food scents, or similar products.

Some folks think of the deer that come to their bird feeders as their pets. Some folks feed the deer all year when in fact the wild deer in our City do not need any extra help. Deer do really well here eating our young trees, shrubs, gardens, and the grasses from our lush lawns. Deer typically are found in edge type habitat – edge of the woodlands, edge of the meadow, near the shoreline of the lake. Sunfish Lake has nearly 200 properties with lawns, shrubs, gardens, meadows, woodlands, streets, and lakes. These landscape features create a lot of edge area making our City into ideal deer habitat. Feeding deer makes them less wild, allows them to increase population to landscape damaging levels, and those high populations limit new forest growth by their constant feeding on tree buds.

Deer feeding, while having noble intentions, creates problems for wild deer. It's not uncommon for wintering deer to eat themselves to death due to grain overload – a disease called enterotaxaemia. Supplemental feeding by providing corn, hay or other feeds tends to encourage deer to congregate together and dramatically increases the odds that an infected animal can transmit CWD, bovine tuberculosis, or brucellosis. Direct by nose-to-nose contact or indirect by saliva contaminated feed or inhaling infectious particles are common disease transmission methods.

OK, so we agree that feeding deer is not a good idea in Sunfish Lake. What about feeding the birds? Please continue feeding the birds. Bird feeders supply the same foods that birds would normally eat so that is not a problem. Also bird populations have had dramatic declines in recent years and helping them out with bird feeders helps plus their colors and activity brighten up our monochrome winter landscapes. If you have trouble keeping the deer out of your bird feeders, raise the feeders up to 6 feet above the ground or consider temporary fencing. One past resident layered used wine bottles under his bird feeders because the deer did not want to step on the bottles and that worked well too.

The bottom line is – **do not feed deer in our City.** It is illegal and the deer are doing just fine without the extra food. Especially with CWD in the County feeding deer may cause more harm than good.