

DMU 359

Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance Area

Area Description

Deer Management Unit (DMU) 359 is in the Southern Lower Peninsula Region (SLP). It currently consists of 6 Townships in Mecosta County (Mecosta, Austin, Morton, Aetna, Deerfield, and Hinton) and 3 Townships in Montcalm County (Reynolds, Winfield, and Cato) and makes up the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Surveillance Area (Figure 1). DMU 359 is almost entirely privately owned, but around 2.3% (4,900 acres) of the DMU is public land (mostly Manistee National Forest land) that offers some hunting opportunity for those that don't have access to private land for deer hunting.

Topography in the DMU varies from rolling hills to relatively flat with soils that are generally well-suited to row crop agriculture. The landscape is highly fragmented due to the predominance of agriculture. Aside from public lands which are predominantly forested, habitat providing cover for deer (e.g., woodlots, shrub/brush, and wetland) is often isolated and exists in relatively small patches (Figure 1).

Management Guidance

DMU 359 was formed as part of the State's response to CWD being found in 2 deer in a privately owned deer farm in southwestern Mecosta County. In DMU 359 mandatory deer check will be in place, so any hunter that harvests a deer in the DMU is required to submit the head for CWD testing. In 2017, additional deer check stations will be open throughout the hunting seasons in the DMU.

While maintaining quality hunting opportunities is a part of deer management in this DMU, the surveillance for CWD are of highest priority. Several regulations are in place for hunters in DMU 359 to help provide samples to determine if the disease is present in the wild deer herd. These regulations include opening the early and late antlerless seasons, mandatory testing of hunter harvested deer, and providing ample number of antlerless licenses. If CWD is not detected after the sampling of approximately 2,800 deer through various collection methods (hunter harvest, roadkill collection, etc), DMU will likely revert back to be included within DMU 354.

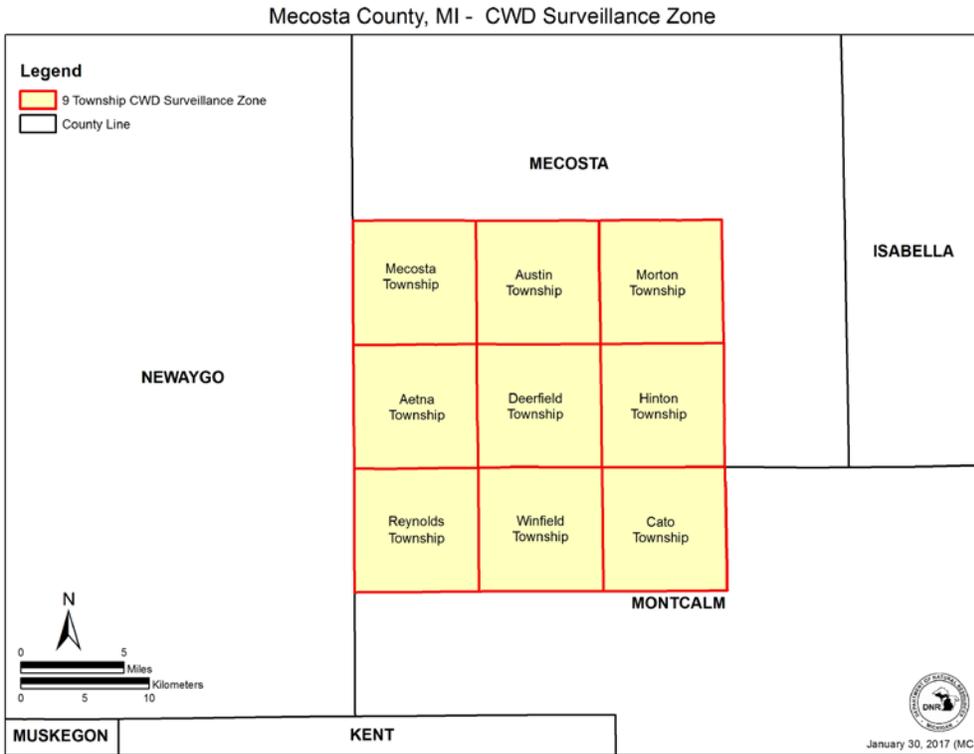


Figure 1: Map of DMU 359.

Population Assessment Factors

DMU 359 was created in 2017. Since this is a new DMU which consists of portions of Mecosta and Montcalm counties, population and impact data specific to DMU 359 are not available. Data from several sources including deer harvest data from check stations and an annual hunter survey, deer-vehicle collision data from the Michigan State Police, and deer-related information collected by regional wildlife biologists (e.g., hunter observations, number of Crop Damage Permits, spotlight surveys, habitat assessments, etc.) will be used to inform deer management decisions in DMU 359 as they become available. In general, the DMU has a relatively abundant deer population with good deer hunting opportunities, considerable crop damage and frequent car-deer collisions.

Deer Management Recommendations

Mandatory deer check for hunter harvested deer will be implemented in DMU 359 as it will help provide sufficient data to determine if CWD is present in the local free ranging deer herd. Additional regulations that make it easier for hunters to harvest deer are also being implemented and include the availability of 200 public land licenses and 8,000 private land licenses and allowance of Disease Control Permits. If CWD is detected in free ranging deer through this surveillance effort, additional changes pertaining to management of the disease are likely to be incorporated.