

NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HEALTH INITIATIVE

Guiding Principles

The importance of maintaining healthy populations has long been recognized by fish and wildlife managers, and several disease issues are of growing concern to fish and wildlife, animal health, and public health professionals and the publics they serve. Significant diseases, such as plague, hemorrhagic disease, pasteurellosis, chronic wasting disease, botulism, West Nile virus, whirling disease, and others have been found in wild and farmed fish or wildlife populations in North America and can have a significant impact on resources. Reservoirs of economically important diseases like bovine brucellosis and bovine tuberculosis have inadvertently become established in native wildlife and threaten livestock industries in some areas. Foreign animal diseases, such as foot and mouth disease, which was eradicated decades ago, and highly pathogenic avian influenza, which never has been reported in North American wildlife, also are of concern. The intentional or accidental introduction of these diseases could significantly impact wildlife, domestic animal or human populations and would require a coordinated multi-agency response. In view of the increasing need for fish and wildlife managers to effectively address disease issues, a National Fish and Wildlife Health Initiative will be developed under the leadership of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) and in cooperation with appropriate governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. Although national in scope, the Health Initiative will not mandate programs at the state or local level.

The National Fish and Wildlife Health Initiative will:

- Support the IAFWA vision for healthy fish and wildlife resources throughout North America managed by effective, well-funded resource agencies supported by informed and involved citizens;
- Support the IAFWA mission to protect state authority and support provincial and territorial authority for wildlife conservation; promote sound and science-based resource management; and strengthen state, provincial, territorial, federal, and private cooperation in conserving fish and wildlife resources;
- Recognize that free-ranging fish and wildlife and recreational activities associated with these resources have fundamental aesthetic and economic value and contribute significantly to the quality of life and the economy on a local, state, and national basis;
- Recognize that as the front-line managers, state fish and wildlife agencies are responsible for managing diseases in free-ranging fish and wildlife, and they have in place much of the knowledge, personnel, equipment, and local public support to prevent, monitor, detect, and respond to disease issues;
- Foster development and maintenance of additional competencies, management tools, and training in fish and wildlife health management within state/provincial fish and wildlife agencies;

- Promote science-based management strategies for health issues that involve free-ranging fish and wildlife and recognize that some disease agents found in fish and wildlife are of significance to domestic animal and human health and vice versa;
- Recognize, articulate, and integrate the abilities and authorities of cooperating state, tribal, territorial, and federal agencies and other partners;
- Foster collaboration, coordination, and communication among fish and wildlife health jurisdictions, as well as with animal health and public health agencies at the state and national level;
- Recognize that animals and disease agents do not observe political boundaries necessitating interstate and international coordination of health management efforts;
- Recognize fish and wildlife health management as an essential component of any fish and wildlife conservation program and emphasize the importance and efficacy of prevention, as opposed to control or eradication efforts, as a strategy for managing diseases in free-ranging fish and wildlife; and
- Recognize the need to develop and disseminate science-based information to educate the public about the significance of diseases in fish and wildlife populations and the value of integrated prevention and management programs.

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