

Deer

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actions to reduce harvest. The agency is also encouraging hunters to visit early with landowners to determine local impacts and opportunities.

“The deer die-offs reported have been local in nature for many areas and not evenly distributed across each county,” Vonk said in the release. “Because the impact of EHD can vary, it is essential that hunters check with their local landowner on the status of the deer herd on properties they hunt.”

The GF&P is still actively monitoring the deer herd throughout the state, Vonk said.

“We are grateful for the cooperation we have received from landowners and hunters,” he said. “We have a common goal of doing what is best for our deer herd, and we will continue to evaluate additional reports and take further proactive measures if necessary.”

Hunters have been given the option of turning in their deer licenses if they feel it is in their best interest to cancel their hunting plans. The license and as-

sociated tags must be returned to the GF&P licensing office before the start of that respective season. If applicable, GF&P will reinstate hunter preference points for the first drawing.

“Reports of dead deer are coming from across the state, and in some instances landowners are telling traditionally hosted hunters that opportunities will be limited,” Vonk said. “With that in mind, GF&P is notifying deer hunters that they can voluntarily return a deer license for any season prior to the start of that respective season and receive a full refund.”

This year’s East River deer season runs from Nov. 17 to Dec. 2. The archery deer season runs from Sept. 22 to Jan. 15, and the archery antlerless deer season runs from Jan. 1-15, 2013.

Hunters desiring a refund for a deer license should send their license, including all associated tags, to: GF&P Licensing Office; 20641 SD Highway 1806; Fort Pierre, SD 57532.

In Yankton County, Schelhaas has received reports of dead deer mostly in the James River corridor and in the Turkey Creek area around Volin and Irene.

“The deer seem to be found by water,” he said. “We saw that (at the

start of the outbreak), and we’re still seeing it.”

Many deer exhibit no clinical signs and appear perfectly healthy, according to a GF&P news release. Other deer may have symptoms such as respiratory distress, fever and swelling of the tongue.

With highly virulent strains of the virus, deer can be dead within 1-3 days. In an attempt to combat the high fever, affected deer are often found in low-lying areas or near rivers, ponds and other waters.

Schelhaas still encourages the public to report dead deer on their property or elsewhere. He fears the actual number of dead deer may be much higher than what is reported.

“A lot of farmers might notice something, but they are busy harvesting their crops and will bring it up later,” he said. “Or we may have someone who notices a deer but isn’t interested in hunting or reporting it.”

Then, there are the dead deer who remain undetected altogether, the game warden said.

“Nobody knows what the magic number is,” he said. “What percentage of (diseased) deer are we finding?”

The southeast region of South Dakota has been hit particularly hard, Schelhaas said.

“Other counties are similar, if not worse than us,” he said. “Bon Homme is a comparable county (to Yankton) in size and acreage, but it’s a little bit different geographically. Bon Homme County has far more reported deer than I have.”

Hutchinson County has been considered one of the hardest hit counties for EHD and bluetongue, receiving a great deal of statewide attention, Schelhaas said.

The number of Hutchinson County’s deer lost to this year’s disease represents a large percentage of its deer population, the game warden said. Last year, Hutchinson County harvested 650 deer with its hunting seasons, he said.

The degree of EHD intensity varies within each county, Schelhaas said.

“Even within Yankton County, some landowners are out looking weekly and not finding anything. Then there are lots of deer in other parts of the county,” he said. “We do have trail cameras which have been utilized in helping locate dead deer.”

Schelhaas remains hopeful the EHD and bluetongue outbreak ends in the near future. The diseases have taken their toll, but he remains confident the deer population will rebound fairly soon.

“It might take a year or two (to restore their numbers). We might need to cut

back on the tag numbers and restrict some hunting. We need to back off for a few years,” he said. “But deer are resilient. With the help of sportsmen, and getting everybody involved, we can get back (the deer) numbers.”

“We’re asking people to use common sense in protecting what we all have for deer.”

To report sick or dead deer, contact the GF&P office in Pierre at (605) 773-5913 or a conservation officer.

In southeast South Dakota, contact Schelhaas at (605) 668-2987 or contact one of the following game wardens: Brian Humphrey, Hutchinson and Turner counties, at (605) 387-5603; Jeff Martin, Charles Mix and Douglas counties, at (605) 337-2488; Todd Crownover, Bon Homme County, at (605) 589-4208; and Tony Stokely, Clay and southern Union counties, at (605) 677-6950.

For more information on the EHD virus, visit online at <http://gfp.sd.gov/wildlife/diseases/epizootic-hemorrhagic-disease.aspx>.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf



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