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Missourians Share Opinions On Protecting Deer

The Missouri Conservation Commission recently approved proposed regulation changes to the Missouri Wildlife Code regarding the operations of hunting preserves and wildlife breeding facilities that hold white-tailed deer, mule deer, and their hybrids.

The proposed regulation changes will be published in the Missouri Register through the Secretary of State's Office at sos.mo.gov/adrules/moreg/moreg.asp for a 30-day public comment period beginning July 16.

Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Director Robert Ziehmer stressed that success in keeping Missouri deer healthy and abundant depends on an informed and involved public.

"Public input is an important part of how the Conservation Department makes decisions involving regulations," Ziehmer said. "We will consider all public comments before deciding whether the regulations will be adopted, amended, or withdrawn."

He encouraged all Missourians to share their comments on these regulations. "Get a comment card at MDC offices, nature centers, and numerous locations where hunting and fishing permits are sold, or simply go online to mdc.mo.gov/DeerHealth," the Director said.

The regulations are part of MDC's ongoing strategy to minimize the spread of fatal diseases in the state's deer population, such as Chronic Wasting Disease. This fatal disease affects members of the deer family, collectively called cervids.

Chronic Wasting Disease was first found in Missouri in captive-deer operations in Macon and Linn counties. It has also been found in numerous captive-deer operations in more than a dozen other states. It is always fatal to infected animals and has no cure. The disease is spread among deer herds mainly through direct contact. The movement of captive cervids within states and across state lines spreads the disease to new areas.

MDC's statewide proposed regulations include:

- Banning the importation of live white-tailed deer, mule deer, and their hybrids from other states;
- Improving fencing requirements for new and expanding captive-cervid facilities;
- Requiring all deer six months or older that die in captive-cervid facilities to be tested for Chronic Wasting Disease;
- Establishing better record-keeping requirements for captive-cervid operations; and
- Prohibiting any new captive-cervid facilities within 25 miles of where Chronic Wasting Disease has been confirmed.

Under the Missouri Constitution, MDC, which is governed by a citizen-led Conservation Commission, has the authority and responsibility to protect and manage Missouri wildlife, including deer.

"Conservation makes Missouri a great place to hunt and watch deer, and all white-tailed deer in Missouri are wildlife, regardless of which side of a fence they may be on," said Ziehmer.

According to MDC, a healthy and abundant deer population in the state is vital to half-a-million deer hunters, two-million wildlife watchers, tens-of-thousands of landowners who manage their properties for deer and deer hunting, and many conservation organizations. Deer hunting and watching also supports the state's vital Share the Harvest Program where hunters donate deer meat to Missourians in need, along with more than 12,000 Missouri jobs, and a billion-dollar annual economic benefit to Missouri and Missourians