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**Advocating for a Healthy Herd to Ensure a Healthy Hunt**  
*By Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point)*

Hunting is a way of life and a proud tradition in Wisconsin, and the health and vitality of our state's deer herd are paramount. With the gun deer season just around the corner, hunters are reminded to do their part to stop the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) by getting their deer tested. The spread of CWD is a real concern for our state's deer herd. In fact, the DNR classifies CWD as endemic to southern Wisconsin, and 60 of Wisconsin's 72 counties are CWD-affected. In addition to the precautions each hunter can take individually, meaningful state action is needed to preserve the deer herd that our state's sporting heritage and billion-dollar hunting industry rely on.

CWD is an always fatal, contagious neurological disease of deer, elk, and moose caused by an abnormal protein called a prion that can cause brain degeneration in infected animals and can lead to extreme weight loss, abnormal behavior, and loss of bodily functions. The first cases of CWD in Wisconsin were detected in 2002, and since then, over 8,300 deer have tested positive for the disease.

We've heard for years from the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, the Natural Resources Board, and other organizations across the state about the importance of testing for CWD, properly disposing of deer carcasses, investing in research, and educating hunters about the threat of CWD.

That's why I reintroduced the "Healthy Herd, Healthy Hunt" legislative package to help bolster the work the DNR is doing with \$1,000,000 annually for CWD testing, management, and research, as well as funding to expand deer carcass dumpsters and sampling kiosks.

With the DNR projected to collect a total of 21,000 samples across Wisconsin this year, the best way to maximize CWD testing and ensure that sporting groups don't need to foot the entire cost of sampling kiosks is to provide funding for cost-sharing through the Adopt-a-Kiosk program. This bill provides \$200,000 to the DNR for CWD testing kiosks, allowing them to continue expanding the program. Another bill in the package provides \$2 million for more carcass dumpsters around the state, helping mitigate the risk of further spread. Because CWD prions are highly resilient and can stay in the soil for a long time, it is important to properly dispose of deer carcasses. The bill also provides \$100,000 for the DNR to offer educational materials to hunters about carcass disposal and its role in preventing the spread of CWD.

Pete Theisen, an avid hunter, Chairperson of the Portage County Deer Advisory Council, and my own Learn to Hunt mentor, shared with me, "You can have a sickly-looking deer test positive, or you can have the healthiest-looking deer in the world test positive for CWD. The worst thing I could imagine would be to accidentally give CWD-contaminated venison to a loved one and to have them get sick as a result. I appreciate this work to highlight the importance of getting your deer tested and making sure that's accessible to everyone, no matter where they are in the state."

Pete is absolutely right – we can all make a difference by getting our deer tested. While CWD testing has increased since the disease's first detection in Wisconsin, we can and should continue building on this by expanding testing efforts, greater access to carcass dumpsters, and more expansive CWD research. The responsible investments contained within the "Healthy Herd, Healthy Hunt" package will help us carry on one of our state's proudest traditions: a healthy and productive gun deer hunt. Best wishes for a safe and successful hunt!

*Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) represents Portage County in the Wisconsin State Assembly.*