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Janice Mueller
State Auditor

DATE: March 22, 2006

TO: Senator Carol A. Roessler and
Representative Suzanne Jeskewitz, Co-chairpersons
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

FROM: Janice Mueller *Janice Mueller*
State Auditor

SUBJECT: Proposed Audit of Chronic Wasting Disease—Background Information

At your request, we have gathered some background information the Joint Legislative Audit Committee may find useful in considering a request from Senator Schultz and Representative Freese to audit Wisconsin's efforts to combat chronic wasting disease (CWD). CWD is a fatal neurological disease that affects members of the deer family, including white-tailed deer and elk. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the lead agency for coordinating the development of state policy on CWD-related efforts and for managing the disease in the wild deer population. DNR works cooperatively with the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, the University of Wisconsin Diagnostic Veterinary Laboratory, and the Department of Health and Family Services, which play important roles in addressing the spread of CWD among captive animals, identifying infected animals through laboratory examination, and monitoring the potential effects of CWD on humans.

CWD was first confirmed in Wisconsin in February 2002. In March 2002, DNR established a disease surveillance plan to identify and combat the spread of CWD. Since that time, DNR and other state agencies have worked to prevent the spread of CWD among both wild and captive animals. Information on total CWD expenditures is not centrally maintained. However, in October 2003 we released a report on CWD that found \$14.7 million had been spent on combating CWD in Wisconsin through fiscal year 2002-03. Of this amount, \$12.6 million was spent by DNR.

Several concerns have been raised about the State's efforts to combat CWD. First, some have questioned the effectiveness of the State's policy because the disease continues to spread in spite of the increasing amount invested in prevention. Second, questions have been raised about the extent to which CWD efforts are funded with fees paid by hunters and anglers and whether CWD control efforts have come at the expense of other fish and wildlife programs.

An audit of the State's CWD efforts could:

- analyze overall program goals and accomplishments;
- review trends in program expenditures, including administrative costs, staffing costs, and supplies and services;
- assess trends in the number of staff devoted to CWD and the effect disease eradication efforts have had on other fish and wildlife projects;
- compare Wisconsin's approach to addressing CWD with those of states with similar problems; and
- determine whether DNR and other agencies have developed appropriate plans and budgets for dealing with CWD in the future.

If you have any additional questions regarding this request, please contact me.

JM/PS/bm

cc: Senator Robert Cowles
Senator Scott Fitzgerald
Senator Mark Miller
Senator Julie Lassa

Representative Samantha Kerkman
Representative Dean Kaufert
Representative David Travis
Representative David Cullen

Senator Dale Schultz

Representative Stephen Freese

Scott Hassett, Secretary
Department of Natural Resources

Helene Nelson, Secretary
Department of Health and Family Services

Rod Nilsestuen, Secretary
Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Kevin Reilly, President
University of Wisconsin System