

# Hunters, Landowners and Wildlife Enthusiasts Must Speak up to Protect Texas' Wild Deer Herd

By Jenny Sanders

The threat of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is real. Appropriate and timely actions must be taken to protect our wild deer herds, hunting markets and rural economies.

Yet, the Texas Deer Association (TDA) continues to downplay this disease and avoid prudent accountability for its presence and potential spread through unnatural movement of captive-raised deer around the state. TDA and its members have lambasted, vilified and degraded Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) personnel who have worked night and day to protect ALL of our interests since the June detection of CWD in a Medina County deer breeding facility. Despite deer breeders' claims, TPWD's actions have been guided by science, caution, and utmost concern for wildlife.

took another step toward minimizing this disease and revealing their disregard for wildlife, by filing a lawsuit against TPWD. In spite of active participation by multiple deer breeding trade associations—including TDA—in the construction and approval of the CWD management plan and the Aug. 19 emergency order, breeders are now opposed to the agreed-upon increased mandatory testing and restrictions on breeder deer movement.

These breeders are also claiming ownership of the deer in their pens and challenging the centuries-old Public Trust Doctrine, which establishes a trustee relationship of state government to manage wildlife for present and future generations. Private ownership of wildlife would take us back to the days of English Kings and does not fit with today's

American values that all citizens, regardless economic status, have ownership interest in wildlife and a responsibility to invest in conservation. This model, coupled with the abundance of private land in Texas has resulted in a unique public-private partnership that has facilitated effective management of wildlife for decades, and should not be abandoned to appease a narrow stakeholder group that views wildlife simply as a commodity to be exploited for personal gain.

Although deer breeders would have the public believe they are responsible for the success of hunting in Texas, the reality is that they represent a measly .5 percent of Texas landowners, .1 percent of Texas hunters and the deer in their pens account for just 2.5 percent of the state's wild population. With PAC funds that rival the trial lawyers and the realtors, a propensity to claim economic impacts that are

little more than a figment of their imagination, and a business model based largely on canned shooting; deer breeders and the trade associations that represent them are the antithesis of the real stewards and sportsmen responsible for healthy wildlife populations and hunting economies in Texas. Despite all of this, their shrill political megaphone continues to shut down the interests of Texans and Texas wildlife.

Meanwhile, TPWD is forced to refocus its time and funding from the important work of managing and conserving wildlife for all Texans, to dealing with the antics and tantrums thrown by this narrow interest group. CWD is the latest in a laundry list of concerns regarding deer breeding practices, and this lawsuit represents the latest evidence of deer breeders' unwillingness to be accountable for their actions.

in response to CWD and support continued sensible regulatory protocols. If you value wildlife, please attend the TPWD Commission meeting on Nov. 5 at 9 a.m. at their headquarters in Austin where deer breeders will likely pressure the agency to redact emergency rules for CWD and seek privatization of deer.

Deer breeders should not be allowed to dominate the response. TDA does not speak for mainstream hunters and landowners. It is time for the silent majority of hunters, landowners and wildlife enthusiasts to speak up to protect Texas' wildlife and ensure testing continues on both captive and wild deer, the emergency rule remains in place, and liberations of captive-raised deer never again occur on low-fenced land. Keep Texas Wildlife WILD!

Jenny Sanders is the executive director of Texans for Saving Our Hunting Heritage.

We stand by TPWD's decisions

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