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an, Times, serif" size="3">**CWD threat justifies ban on deer baiting**

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Any relaxation of last year's statewide ban on baiting and feeding deer poses an unacceptable risk to Wisconsin's campaign to control chronic wasting disease.

That's why state legislators should drop their threat to force regulators to scale back the ban. Instead, the state Natural Resources Board should renew the prohibition in its entirety, and legislators should accept that decision.

Based on the research conducted so far, scientists believe CWD can be spread by deer-to-deer contact. When hunters attract deer with bait and property owners feed deer for pleasure, they solicit deer-to-deer contact. Consequently, experts from around the country recommend a ban on baiting and feeding as an element of CWD policy.

States from Georgia to Rhode Island have imposed bans on baiting and feeding to keep CWD from crossing their borders. Minnesota bans baiting, and the hunters association there has taken a position against feeding. A baiting and feeding ban is part of Michigan's CWD policy: A ban will take effect there if CWD is discovered within 50 miles of the state's borders.

So what sense does it make for Wisconsin, which already has CWD within its borders, to defy its own DNR experts and break with the practice of other states? None.

It's a matter of risk. A ban on baiting and feeding would limit hunters and property owners. It would also deprive feed mills and stores of sales. But the risk those inconveniences pose pales in comparison to the risk presented by CWD. The disease is fatal to deer and, although there is no evidence it can infect humans, concern about the disease is damaging Wisconsin's \$1-billion-a-year hunting industry and its game farms.

There is much that is unknown about CWD, and opponents commonly cite the unknowns to argue against the ban on baiting and feeding. But while it's important to learn more, it's also important to use the research we have to halt the disease or slow it down. That research supports a ban on baiting and feeding.

The state Department of Natural Resources has proposed a ban to take effect Sept. 1. The ban would follow a temporary prohibition that was in effect during the 2002 hunting season.

Legislators, however, have threatened to reject the ban, which is proposed as a DNR rule that would require legislative committee approval. Lawmakers have suggested a compromise that might involve permitting baiting outside the zone west of Madison where chronic wasting has been found and permitting feeding in the northern part of the state, plus ending the ban altogether next June. The Natural Resources Board has until Friday to respond.

The board should adopt a statewide ban. Lawmakers should approve it.

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