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Bovine TB Program Enters Next Phase: Great Progress Means Scaled-Back Plans

INDIANAPOLIS (6 January 2017)—The ongoing bovine tuberculosis (bTB) surveillance in Franklin County is about to enter a new phase, as cattle herd testing winds down and wild white-tailed deer sampling scales back to a special permit program. Thanks to great support from area cattle farmers, deer hunters and landowners, state officials are optimistic about closing out this surveillance effort by the end of March.

Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH) and Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) plans to host two public meetings in Brookville to outline next steps in moving forward, as well as answer questions. Meeting information will be forthcoming.

After jointly assessing the current status of the initiative, BOAH and DNR are pleased to announce plans going forward into 2017:

Cattle Surveillance

The number of bTB-infected herds remains at two. Testing is nearly complete in the 10-mile radius circle in Franklin County and the Whitewater River corridor to the Ohio state line. BOAH has identified 375 herds (with more than 5600 head of cattle) in the surveillance zone. As the USDA-required 6-month window to complete testing comes to a close this month, fewer than 20 remain to be tested to meet USDA’s deadline—an accomplishment that seemed overwhelming in August.

BOAH is still working to trace and test cattle that have moved out the second infected herd. All neighboring farms within 3 miles have already tested negative as part of circle surveillance. Wildlife, including deer and raccoons, on the site must still be collected for testing.

BOAH will submit a bTB management plan to US Department of Agriculture in February. That plan, which is still under development, will address future surveillance for farms and wildlife near the three infected sites. This will likely include retesting of herds in the core surveillance area where positives have been found. Livestock owners in the core area will hear more from BOAH as plans are finalized.

White-tailed Deer Surveillance

Hunter-harvested white-tailed deer surveillance has been an overwhelming success. Outstanding cooperation from deer hunters resulted in the testing of nearly 2,000 whitetails, including a greater-than-expected number of animals older than 2 years of age. All tested negative for bovine tuberculosis.

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The excellent turnout of high-quality samples means DNR can cancel previous plans to use sharpshooters to cull deer throughout southern Fayette and Franklin counties. A scaled-back plan will help obtain the remaining, needed deer from specific areas.

The revised collection plan allows landowners to remove a limited number of deer under DNR-issued special disease control permits through March 31. Permits will be issued only to landowners within the core surveillance area established in the 3-mile circles around the bTB-affected sites. Permits will allow a limited, specified number of deer to be taken to prevent over-culling of the whitetail population in the area.

When mapped, the sampled hunter-harvested deer were generally taken throughout the entire three-county area. However, some gaps were evident in the core surveillance area, where additional animals are needed to verify that the disease is not prevalent in the highest-risk population. The disease control permits are designed to help fill in these gaps. To avoid over-culling, permits will allow taking of no more than 15-head of whitetails per square mile.

Special disease control permits will be available soon from the DNR.

Community Success Story

“When we diagnosed bovine TB in the first herd in April, we saw the 3-mile surveillance program as a challenge,” said Dr. Bret Marsh, Indiana State Veterinarian. “When we found the TB-positive whitetail that expanded the circle to 10 miles in August, this job seemed overwhelming.

“But the community truly came together to help our team make this happen. The cattle producers and private veterinarians stepped up when we told them we need all eligible cattle tested by year-end. And, with their help, we met that goal. We also identified more, non-registered herds, which we are working to finish in our January buffer period.”

Marsh extended his gratitude to the local officials and community partners who helped with logistics, from securing funds to providing staging space at the local fairgrounds. Beyond the BOAH team, who worked hundreds of hours in the surveillance zone, USDA teams were deployed to help, along with low-level offenders from Indiana Department of Correction.

DNR Director Cam Clark added praise for the deer-hunting community.

“The deer hunting community truly made this initiative a success,” Clark said. “Their willingness to answer the call by presenting their harvested deer for testing was astounding. This significant response eliminated the need to hire outside shooters to assist with collecting samples.

“I also want to thank all of the DNR staff who worked tirelessly to manage this program. I am very proud of their effort.”

About Bovine TB
Bovine tuberculosis is a chronic bacterial disease that affects primarily cattle, but can be transmitted to any warm-blooded animal. TB is difficult to diagnose through clinical signs alone. In the early stages of the disease, clinical signs are not visible. Later, signs may include: emaciation, lethargy, weakness, anorexia, low-grade fever and pneumonia with a chronic, moist cough. Lymph node enlargement may also be present. Cattle owners who notice these signs in their livestock should contact their private veterinarian.

More information about the disease and the investigation, as it develops, including email updates, is available on the BOAH website at: www.boah.in.gov.

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