

Transcript TAHC Commission Meeting Audio 08

Testimony on Brucellosis begins at 18:57. Dr. Marty Zaluski's comments begin at 19:24

"Thanks so much Commissioner. I think Dr. Ellis and I got it all worked out. We have 3 wolves and 4 brucellosis positive elk in the van for them as well. Call it even steven and we're ready to roll. Having said that, I really appreciate it, it is truly an honor to come up here and visit with you and elaborate a little bit on what our program is, that way you can make the best informed decision. Dr. Ellis and I have visited on this topic on a number of occasions. I think we all agree there is an issue there, there's definitely a risk, I think we definitely disagree on what needs to be done about it by the state of Texas. I appreciate the ability to visit here. And certainly Dr. Ellis intent is honorable and it is exactly what I would be doing in the state of Montana, so I don't want in any way to impinge or erode that intent.

Montana takes brucellosis extremely seriously. Its really our number 1 issue. We don't have a southern border, we don't have feral hogs, unless the trade goes through, we don't have piroplasmosis. We are really a one horse town. Brucellosis is really our number one focus and we are able to focus all our resources on that, on that problem. We've hired key staff, we have a veterinarian who was hired specifically for brucellosis, for the brucellosis program, Dr. Eric Liska, who is here with me. We've also hired a compliance specialist who goes through all of the herds, points of looking at testing histories, find out whose tested, who hasn't in the last 12 months, trying to find out, make sure we don't have one of those untested herds. In the last year alone, in the last fiscal year, we have tested 42,000 out of 60,000 animals, that are in the surveillance area. So over 60% of the animals that are in our surveillance area have been tested, just in a 12 month period alone. When you look at the statistics, when you start crunching the numbers, the likelihood of doing all that testing and not finding the positives is extremely small.

So what I wanted to visit with you today about is, I wanted to talk just a little bit about what brucellosis in wildlife means to us, I kind of talk a little bit about the geography, explain what our regulations are, touch on what it means in Texas from my perspective, as far as what risk of Texas is, what the rule proposes to do and then I was going to propose some alternatives.

So really the DSA in the state of Montana is in southwest Montana. And it is designed to identify the cattle at risk from brucellosis positive elk. So we know that brucellosis positive elk are in southwest Montana, they can potentially expose cattle and so the key to identifying the cattle at risk is to identify where the brucellosis positive elk are. And in fact we have done a lot of work, we started with hunter elk surveillance kits and we've gotten sophisticated enough now if we look at the perimeter of our surveillance area, which is about 5% of Montana, in all, but it does cover the border of Yellowstone National Park and go outward. We have started with hunter test kits and at this point we look at the boundary, find out where we don't have tests and we have a capture, a live elk capture study, where they net gun elk from a helicopter, they test them for brucellosis and they put a collar on them for the next year. This is a leading study, its not been done anywhere else. And we can not only find whether elk in a particular area have brucellosis, but we also know where they go during the rest of the year. And the beauty of that is that hunter test kits harvest animals in the fall, during their summer range, but our study and our tracking system gives us information where the elk are during the risk periods, during the time they can abort and transmit brucellosis to cattle. So it really is a phenomenal project that we are really proud of and its a partnership with our Fish and

Game Commission.

Our DSA, as I mentioned, has a 5% of the state. It has about 192, give or take, ranches that are completely circumscribed or within the DSA and it has another 80 that are seasonal, they'll graze in the summer then they'll come out. So about 250 ranches or so. As I mentioned the risk is seasonal, the risk is not in the fall, but its in the spring, during calving and abortion time. So how do we address this risk? We all know that there's a risk and so how do we try to get it as minimal as possible for the benefit of our producers and the benefit of your producers? We have pretty rigorous testing requirements regulations. First of all we have an ID requirement, there needs to be a permanent identification on any sexually intact animal leaving our DSA. So if the worst case scenarios were to come true and a brucellosis positive animal were to come out of Montana, out of the DSA, you would know if its a local problem or if its an imported problem. Secondly, we require testing before movement and before change of ownership, so before sale.

So what you're looking at is if you have an animal that leaves the DSA it needs to be identified at a minimum, regardless of whether it is sold and then f it is sold it needs to be, or it needs to leave, it needs to be tested. Now, the testing requirements as far as age eligibility, this is important because, for cattle that are going on feed, or any of these other non breeding uses, the testing eligibility age is 12 months. So anything over 12 months has to be tested. But, for breeding animals is based on the USDA Review that you, that was mentioned earlier, we have dropped the age to birth. Basically, if you have a breeding animal, you must test her regardless of age, when she leaves the DSA, or when shes sold. So that's a very high bar for disease surveillance. Also, we have brand inspections, we have a strong county line brand inspection program that if you sell or you move animals out of the county, we have 600 brand inspectors that do these inspections. The brand inspection department, the brand enforcement is housed within the Department of Livestock. So along with Animal Health and Brand Inspection is the division we work...