



Reinforcing Canada's Frontline of Defence Against Wildlife Disease

Canada is ill prepared to effectively deal with existing and emerging domestic wildlife diseases and threats to wildlife health. The COVID-19 crisis is a devastating example of the risks we take as a society when we fail to actively prevent the emergence and spread of wildlife disease. The Green Budget Coalition recommends that the federal government fund the Pan-Canadian Approach to Wildlife Health.⁸⁹ Funding this program will result in strong, shared leadership to protect and promote wildlife health, prevent and control wildlife disease, and ensure food safety for Canadians that rely on wildlife for part of their diet.

Implementation of a national wildlife health program would allow Canada to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) Protect and conserve native fauna from harm due to emerging pathogens and sustain ecological and economic services provided by wildlife;
- 2) Provide assurances to Canadians that depend upon healthy wildlife for sustenance and livelihood;
- 3) Enable Canada to meet its national and international obligations for disease surveillance in relation to public health, agriculture and trade; and
- 4) Reduce surprises from emerging disease threats, particularly those anticipated with climate change, globalization, and erosion of ecological integrity.

A strengthened domestic approach to wildlife health would help position Canada on the international stage as a leader in surveillance, monitoring, and control of wildlife disease and the transfer of disease from wildlife to humans.

Background:

The COVID-19 crisis has brought into sharp focus the need for countries to take wildlife health issues seriously for reasons of both human health and wildlife conservation. In the last decade we have observed several wildlife health issues arise globally and in Canada that have led to dramatic declines of wildlife including white-nose syndrome in bats, chytrid fungus in salamanders, and chronic wasting disease in cervids. Wildlife disease is also a significant threat to human health in Canada with diseases such as West Nile virus, Lyme disease, rabies, and avian flu, as well as parasites such as trichinella, posing an ongoing threat to Canadians. The current approach to addressing wildlife health issues in Canada is under-resourced and reactive. Consequently, problems are rarely addressed in their early stages when prevention and response options are greatest. Canada's ongoing control efforts and research to address existing wildlife health threats is not sufficient to improve outcomes. Demands for wildlife health services and expertise are growing beyond current capacity because of the needs for assurances for trading partners, the need to ensure a safe and sustainable traditional food source for Indigenous Peoples and other Canadians who rely on wildlife for sustenance and livelihoods, and the increase in emerging diseases that threaten public health, wildlife conservation and agriculture with direct implications for biodiversity protection and the economy. Currently, Canada is not equipped to keep up with these emerging wildlife health threats.

Unlike public health and livestock health, which are the mandates of specific government agencies with direct budget allocations, wildlife health falls across multiple agencies at several levels of government. Accordingly, federal funding will need

⁸⁹ A Pan-Canadian Approach to Wildlife Health, June 2018. http://www.cwhc-rclf.ca/docs/technical_reports/EN_PanCanadian%20Approach%20to%20Wildlife%20Health%20Final.pdf

to be a combination of federal department support, provincial and Indigenous government capacity support, and support for non-government networks, organizations, and institutions. Furthermore, the program needs to have a strong focus on filling gaps and building capacity in northern Canada and providing improved services to Indigenous and non-Indigenous hunters and fishers.

Recommended Investment:

\$110 million over five years [ECCC, HC]

- **\$45 million** for the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative, to build the professional capacity within Canada, coordinate monitoring and surveillance, and provide access to diagnostic, data management and synthesis of information that is accessible across the country.
- **\$30 million** for application-based program funding that will be open to all partners on an annual basis. This would include a Northern Wildlife Health Program.
- **\$22.5 million** to build government capacity to implement wildlife health programs.
- **\$12.5 million** for governance, targeted Indigenous hunter communication tools, professional exchange programs, research fellowships, and State of Wildlife Health reports.

CONTACTS

David Browne – davidb@cwf-fcf.org
Cameron Mack – cmack@whc.org



Photo: Linnea Sandbæk