



**Public Health**  
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Miranda Wecker, Chair  
Fish and Wildlife Commission  
600 Capitol Way North  
Olympia, WA 98501-1091

**RE: Severe hoof deformities in Southwest Washington elk**

Dear Chair Wecker,

The Clark County Board of Health has heard testimony from citizens concerned about “elk hoof rot” in Southwest Washington. Although there is no evidence at this time that the condition poses a health threat to hunters or consumers, there is much confusion about the condition, enough so that it would help to have a clear, consistent message about the health risks (or lack thereof) associated with handling, butchering and consuming affected animals.

I understand that the Department of Fish and Wildlife and others have not yet identified the etiology of this condition. I also understand that DFW has produced some common sense guidelines related to the safety of hunting, butchering and consuming elk and other game animals. However, given the heightened concern about a condition that is rapidly increasing in prevalence, I believe we need to be a bit more proactive. Specifically, it would be helpful if the Fish and Wildlife Commission directed staff to do the following.

- Continue to support research into the etiology of this condition
- Notify local health jurisdictions when new information becomes available
- Provide a forum/hearing for hunters to express their concerns
- Work with the State Board of Health and the Department of Health to create a clear public message about any potential threat or lack of threat to human health from this condition
- Develop clear and concise messages to hunters regarding safe disposal of animals found with this condition
- Develop clear and concise messages to butchers and consumers regarding butchering and consumption of elk with this condition

Thanks in advance for addressing our concerns.

Sincerely,

Alan Melnick, MD, MPH, CPH  
Health Officer