

Disease and pathogens are natural in wild animal populations. The mechanisms for disease transmission and the severity of diseases within wildlife populations are moderated by many factors; we recognize biodiversity loss, habitat fragmentation, and climate change as factors that increase disease prevalence and increase novel or introduced diseases. Beyond these indirect sources of increased disease in the environment, more direct interference with wildlife like trading live wildlife, holding wild animals captive, and feeding wild animals, also contribute. The management of wildlife disease is a complex realm of public policy, such as wildlife disease has the ability to impact people, our pets, and the ecosystems on which we all depend on. Like many other aspects of general environmental regulation, policies attempting to manage wildlife disease must be enforceable and should include support for sufficient monitoring.



While the early detection of diseases in wildlife populations is key to their timely management, not all diseases in nature warrant active management. Wildlife disease becomes a concern when there is the potential for uncontrolled outbreak, outbreak across large geographic areas, or effects at the population level. This is especially true regarding threatened or endangered species, species of concern, or outbreaks in sensitive or important habitats. Of particular concern are diseases like West-Nile virus that affect Greater Sage-grouse. And brucellosis that affects wild bison and domestic cattle. Other diseases like chronic wasting disease, sylvatic plague, or white-nose syndrome, that can affect common and threatened species. Wildlife diseases can become a concern as well because they ignore geographic boundaries and can affect our most important conservation landscapes, like National Wildlife Refuges, Waterfowl Production Areas, National Parks, large swaths of public land, and important private holdings. In the case of brucellosis, some in the public fear transmission between wild bison and domestic cattle, creating a significant barrier to wildlife conservation.

### **The policy of Montana Audubon regarding Wildlife Disease is to:**

- Educate the public and decision makers about the impact disease can have on wildlife populations, food webs, domestic livestock, and our human communities;
- Educate the public and decision makers about the connection between increasing wildlife disease, climate change, and introduced species,
- Encourage appropriate funding to monitor diseases, disease outbreaks, and emerging pathogens, while recognizing the difficulty in accessing free roaming wildlife;
- Encourage research that seeks to understand the transmission, epidemiology, and ecology of wildlife diseases and how they affect biological hosts;
- Discourage concentrated wildlife feeding operations or wildlife feeding that may contribute to the spread of disease;
- Encourage the appropriate use and management of bird feeding practices that reduce potential for disease;
- Educate the public about wildlife diseases that impact our native wildlife and ecosystems and what we can do about them.