



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Wildlife Resources

Matthew J. Strickler
Secretary of Natural Resources

Ryan J. Brown
Executive Director

May 4, 2021

Dear Scientific Collection Permittee:

Spring is finally here and I am sure many of you are preparing to get back into the field soon. I hope this letter finds you doing well as the Commonwealth continues to try and navigate a safe course through this public health crisis. The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) has been able to continue its mission to conserve and protect Virginia's wildlife resources in spite of the challenges we have faced over the last year. As such, we have remained very busy keeping up with a variety of different emerging diseases of wildlife, including COVID-19, *Echinococcus multilocularis*, and rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus serotype 2 (RHDV2). The DWR continues to support your research endeavors by developing new Scientific Collection Permit conditions aimed at minimizing the risk of disease transmission between wildlife and humans (and vice versa) and minimizing the risk of disease spread as animals are handled and potentially transported from place to place.

Research investigating COVID-19 and potential effects on wildlife species has been on-going over the last 12 months. While some species, such as big brown bats, have shown limited susceptibility to COVID-19, other species, such as white-tailed deer, domestic cats, tigers, and mink have been confirmed to be highly susceptible. The susceptibility of other wildlife species to COVID-19 is largely unknown at this time. Within the last four months, *E. multilocularis*, a tapeworm of canines that is capable of infecting humans, has been detected in wild foxes from Clarke and Loudoun counties. This is the first time that *E. multilocularis* has been detected in Virginia wildlife. Lastly, we remain vigilant in regards to RHDV2. The nearest RHDV2 confirmation in domestic rabbits occurred in December in Florida and the closest known detection in wild rabbits occurred in eastern Colorado. Taking into account this new disease landscape, new permit conditions have been developed for a variety of species and are described below. These new permit conditions are effective immediately and will remain in effect until further notice.

Key definitions:

Disinfection consists of the removal of organic debris with soap and water, rinsing, drying, spraying with or submerging in a 10% bleach solution (1/2 cup 6% or 8.25% household bleach in 1 gallon of water) for at least 10 minutes, a second rinse, and drying before use.

Disposal of carcasses is defined as burial (at least two feet), incineration, or landfill (after double-bagging) for animals not euthanized with sodium pentobarbital. Animals euthanized with sodium pentobarbital must be incinerated.

E. multi zone is delineated as the area that includes the counties in which *Echinococcus multilocularis* has been found and a buffer around these counties, including Clarke*, Fairfax, Fauquier, Frederick, Loudoun*, Prince William, and Warren counties. * Counties where *E. multilocularis* has been detected.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is defined as consisting of (at minimum) disposable or reusable gloves that can be decontaminated and a mask (e.g., surgical or homemade cloth mask) or respirator (e.g., N95 mask with no vents).

Standard COVID response protocol consists of discontinuation of direct and indirect contact between mammalian wildlife and staff that tests positive for COVID-19 or has been exposed to another person who tests positive for the virus until their self-quarantine or isolation period has ended.

All Mammals – COVID-19 transmission risk reduction

1. PPE is required for all direct (e.g., handling, capture, etc.) and indirect contact (e.g., when entering an active bat roost site, etc.).
2. Standard COVID response protocol shall be followed.

Additional permit conditions for specific mammal species are listed below.

Bats - COVID-19 transmission risk reduction

1. Please refer to the DWR supplemental permit conditions for bat handling.

Cottontails – RHDV2 risk reduction

1. Live-trapped cottontails shall only be transported within and released in the same county as capture.
2. Disinfection of equipment (box traps, carriers, etc.) between uses is required.
3. Appropriate disposal of carcasses is required.
4. If interacting with domestic rabbits after handling wild cottontails (and vice versa), a shower and change of clothes between interactions is strongly recommended.

Grey Foxes, Red Foxes, Coyotes, Voles, and Mice Originating from the E. multi zone – *E. multilocularis* risk reduction

1. Transport of live animals out of the E. multi zone is prohibited.
2. Disinfection of equipment (traps, carriers, etc.) between uses is required.
3. Appropriate disposal of carcasses is required.

For the purposes of reducing potential COVID-19 transmission from humans to wildlife, please continue to adhere to the guidance provided below.

- Wash your hands often and thoroughly for at least 30 seconds using soap/water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Touch the mask/ventilator only when wearing clean gloves. Discard the mask immediately if it becomes visibly soiled.
- Wear disposable gloves or decontaminate gloves after use with an alcohol-based solution containing at least 70% alcohol, bleach solution, or EPA-registered disinfectant.

The DWR encourages all Scientific Collection Permittees/anyone working with or handling wildlife to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine. While the vaccine has been proven to decrease the risk of illness or hospitalization as a result of COVID-19 infection, it has not yet been proven to eliminate infection and shedding of the virus by an asymptomatic carrier. As such, in order to minimize the chance of viral transmission from humans to wildlife, your vaccination status shall not affect adherence to PPE guidelines. Your actions matter and your diligence in reducing the risk of viral transmission to wildlife is greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation during these challenging times. Up-to-date information on permit conditions, a copy of this letter, and the supplemental bat handling permit conditions can be found at <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/information-for-dwr-permittees/>. Please contact Megan Kirchgessner at Megan.Kirchgessner@dwr.virginia.gov if you have questions or concerns and continue to keep yourself and your family safe while exercising measures to protect humans and wildlife during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



Ryan J. Brown
Executive Director