

APHIS Makes Funding Available for Activities Related to the Control of Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is making \$1.5 million in contingency funds available for activities related to the control of viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS). Such control activities include confirmatory testing, surveillance and compliance, and education and outreach efforts. These activities will help to prevent the spread of VHS into aquaculture facilities.

VHS is a destructive pathogen that causes internal hemorrhaging and death in a wide range of fish species. Dead and diseased wild fish have been reported in the St. Lawrence River and in Lake Erie, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, Lake Ontario and Lake St. Clair. Outbreaks of VHS have also been reported in inland lakes in Michigan, New York and Wisconsin. The disease does not pose a risk to people, but it has been found to affect many different species of fish, including several commercially farm-raised species in the United States previously not known to be susceptible to the disease.

The contingency funding that APHIS is providing will be used for surveillance and compliance activities and other VHS-related efforts. These include: laboratory upgrades to USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories to support confirmatory testing; and an educational campaign that promotes bio-security efforts and addresses human-related activities which—though not easily regulated—could spread the disease.

Surveillance activities will be risk-based and focus on states in the Great Lakes watershed and those states in surrounding watersheds. APHIS will develop cooperative agreements with state departments of natural resources, state departments of agriculture, tribal agencies and other appropriate agencies for surveillance and compliance efforts. Surveillance data collected in the coming months will give APHIS more information on VHS to better target future surveillance and regulatory actions.

On Oct. 24, 2006, APHIS issued a Federal Order to immediately prohibit the importation of 37 susceptible species of live fish into the United States from Ontario and Quebec, Canada—the two provinces that have reported VHS outbreaks. The order also prohibited the interstate movement of the same fish species from eight states in the United States (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin) that have reported incidences of VHS in wild fish or that are at immediate risk of acquiring the disease because they share watershed areas with states in which the disease has been detected. APHIS amended the order on Nov. 14, 2006, to allow for movement and importation of susceptible fish species under conditions that mitigate the risk of spreading VHS; and on May 4, 2007, to allow for catch-and-release fishing activities. Restrictions under the Federal Order will continue until APHIS publishes an interim rule establishing appropriate VHS-related fish importation and interstate movement criteria.

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