

Comment on Study of Human Behavior and Attitudes Linked to Human-Deer Transmission of SARS-CoV-2

Docket No. APHIS-2024-0052

I am writing to provide feedback on the proposed information collection regarding the "Study of Human Behavior and Attitudes Linked to Human-Deer Transmission of SARS-CoV-2" as outlined in Docket No. APHIS-2024-0052. I am uncomfortable with this proposed information collection in its current form because I think it could be viewed, inaccurately, as a waste of taxpayer resources.

Wildlife-to-human spillover of zoonotic diseases is a significant public health risk. Such spillovers can lead to new virus variants or other public health crises, making it imperative to understand and mitigate these threats. Research has shown efficient transmission of the virus among deer and its broad tissue tropism, emphasizing the need for robust methodologies and clearly stated outcomes. The University of Minnesota project aims to explore the ecological context and human behaviors contributing to SARS-CoV-2 infection dynamics in white-tailed deer, highlighting the importance of comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches to managing dangerous zoonotic diseases. Researchers at the University of Minnesota have expertise in the study of Chronic Wasting Disease, a prion disease in deer and related animals, and are examining potential spillover of this condition into humans. Presumably, this experience will provide insight into the SCV2 spillover problem.

While I appreciate APHIS's efforts in addressing zoonotic disease transmission and the potential importance of this initiative, it is crucial to ensure taxpayer funds are used wisely and that the public value is clear and explicitly stated. In an environment of significant financial challenges, federal resources must be allocated to projects that are critically needed and clearly justified to achieve taxpayer value. Without clear justification, this endeavor risks being seen as government waste, similar to past federally funded projects that faced criticism.

Understanding how SARS-CoV-2 may spillover between humans and wildlife, such as white-tailed deer, is a significant concern. Studies have shown the virus can be efficiently transmitted among deer and has broad tissue tropism. These findings highlight the need to understand human-deer interactions to mitigate the risk of new variants from wildlife reservoirs.

However, the notice lacks clear articulation of the specific benefits of this study, including who will benefit and how. This information is vital to justify the expenditure and demonstrate the study's value to the public. The notice should clearly explain the financial implications and expected advantages to ensure transparency and justification of the funding. Without this clarity,

the study risks being perceived as government waste, similar to past federally funded projects criticized for inefficiency.

This initiative could be misinterpreted or intentionally misconstrued by critics, especially those opposed to scientific practices and research. These critics often claim that studies related to climate change, vaccine safety, GMOs, animal research, or COVID-19 are unnecessary and a waste of resources. Effective communication is crucial to prevent it from being seen as a misuse of taxpayer money. The notice should clearly explain the study's goals, methodologies, and anticipated outcomes. Additionally, educating the public and stakeholders about the importance of this research is essential to reduce the risk of misinterpretation. Clear and accessible communication of the study's aspects will help ensure transparency and minimize misunderstandings.

In summary, while the study may provide valuable insights into human-deer transmission of SARS-CoV-2, it is crucial that the notice addresses these key issues to ensure transparency, efficiency, and public trust. Without a clear demonstration of the study's necessity and responsible use of funds, it risks criticism and being perceived as a questionable use of taxpayer money, undermining useful scientific investigation.

Thank you for considering my comments.

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