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Press Release

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Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Virus Identified in Alaska

(ANCHORAGE, AK) —The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has confirmed Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N2 in Alaska, following a routine surveillance project of waterfowl in the state. Wild bird samples were collected by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game during a live bird banding at a waterfowl refuge in Fairbanks, and the positive samples were collected from a mallard duck. The USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory informed the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Office of the State Veterinarian (OSV) of the preliminary test results and the HPAI confirmation.

Avian influenza virus has not been identified in domestic birds in Alaska to date. However, wild waterfowl are known carriers of the low pathogenic avian influenza virus and are commonly targeted for surveillance. Low pathogen strains have been found in waterfowl in Alaska in the past. The genetic analysis of the virus most recently confirmed shows that the virus is a mixture of Eurasian and North American viruses and is 99% similar to the HPAI virus found in Washington State in the winter of 2014 and the outbreak in the Midwest in 2015.

Since the initial outbreak of HPAI in Asia and Europe in 2005, the Office of the State Veterinarian has established surveillance testing for backyard poultry farms and at agricultural fairs and has also conducted outreach efforts to emphasize the need for protecting both humans and animals against avian influenza and other diseases. Alaska State Veterinarian Dr. Robert Gerlach notes, "This finding of HPAI in wild birds underscores the need for poultry owners to review their flock plans and take steps to reduce the risk of introducing avian influenza to their birds." Tactics for flock owners to prevent pathogens from entering their flock include monitoring birds, reporting illnesses, and keeping birds safe from exposure.

The OSV will continue poultry surveillance testing at the state's agricultural fairs and will be working with partners to investigate any reports of sick birds. The wild bird surveillance scheduled for Alaska will be expanded in an attempt to determine other areas of the state that may have affected waterfowl. Since wild birds from Alaska

migrate south into all major flyways across North America, the USDA will inform Canadian and Mexican authorities and increase surveillance efforts in the lower 48 states.

For hunters harvesting waterfowl, precautions consistent with the normal recommended procedures for the safe handling and cleaning of game should always be followed. Keeping your hands and tools clean with soap and water or other cleaners and cook all birds to an internal temperature of 165°F before eating. Although dogs can get a canine influenza (dog flu), there is no evidence that dogs are able to catch strains of avian influenza.

To access DEC's fact sheet and Q&A on avian influenza, visit:
<http://tinyurl.com/dec-hpai-factsheet>.

For more information on the Office of the State Veterinarian, visit:
<http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/vet/index.htm>.

For more information on biosecurity for birds, visit:
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian-influenza-disease/birdbiosecurity>.

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