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# Effects of Wildlife Services on Predator Populations



*Mountain lion*

The Wildlife Services (WS) program, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), helps alleviate wildlife damage to agricultural, urban, and natural resources. WS also addresses wildlife threats to public health and safety and conducts activities to protect endangered and threatened species from predators.

## Predator Damage

WS believes that predators are necessary components of ecosystems and play an important part in the environment. However, in some situations, these animals prey on livestock, endangered species, and pets or pose a threat to human health and safety. The most significant predators of livestock are coyotes, foxes, bears, mountain lions, and bobcats. Coyotes are responsible for more damage than all other predators combined.

Each year, predators kill millions of dollars' worth of lambs, calves, and goats. Losses of pigs and poultry are also significant. Some predators, such as black bears, can also damage agricultural crops and timber stands. USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service documented a \$19.9 million loss of sheep and goats to predators in 1999, while losses to cattle producers in 2000 exceeded \$51.6 million.

In addition to agricultural damage, predators sometimes pose a threat to human health and safety. At the request of Federal and State agencies, WS relocates or removes black bears, mountain lions, and coyotes from campgrounds and other public areas where they pose a threat to human safety. WS' continuing goal in the area of human health and safety is to help educate the public on how to live with wildlife and avoid interactions with predators and wild animals that may be carrying rabies or other contagious diseases.

Predators can also threaten endangered species. In California, foxes have killed endangered least terns and light-footed clapper rails, and coyotes prey on the endangered San Joaquin kit fox. Arctic foxes in Alaska have killed endangered Aleutian Canada geese. Other threatened or endangered species affected by predators include Attwater's greater prairie chickens, blackfooted ferrets, and Perdido Key beach mice.



*Black bear*

### **Responsible Management of Predation**

The goal of the WS program is to manage the damage caused by wildlife, not to eradicate wildlife populations. Upon request, WS wildlife professionals implement or recommend effective management methods to alleviate or minimize predation. WS employees strive to remove only the predators that are causing the damage. To accomplish this goal, they direct control methods at only the specific animal or local wildlife population in the area where damage has occurred. The WS program operates in accordance with its programwide Environmental Impact Statement, local environmental assessments and

workplans, and Federal, State, and local laws and regulations, including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Estimates of predator populations by State fish and game officials indicate that the number of predators removed by WS is small compared with overall predator numbers. Lethal control efforts of WS professionals typically remove less than 5 percent of a species' overall population. In many situations, the number of animals removed amounts to less than 1 percent of their total population. This amount is considerably less than the number of animals taken by hunters and trappers annually. The USDA's extension service, APHIS' National Wildlife Research Center, and the Federal Government's General Accounting Office confirm that lethal controls used by WS do not unduly threaten the well-being of Statewide predator populations.

### **Additional Information**

You may obtain further information about the services of WS from any State APHIS, WS office. For the address and telephone number in your area, call the WS Operational Support Staff at (301) 734-7921. You can also find information on WS programs by visiting our Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws>.

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