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The Wildlife Services Program

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The Wildlife Services Program



WS helps protect sheep from predators.

The Wildlife Services (WS) program responds to requests by the public and agencies in need of help in dealing with wildlife damage. A Federal service program that shares costs with cooperators, WS is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). WS has the authority to assist in solving problems that are created when wildlife causes damage to agricultural property, or natural resources. WS also assists with wildlife problems involving threats to human health and safety and threatened or endangered species.

WS considers the well-being of the public and wildlife at all times. WS acts as a protective buffer, guarding not only resources, but also wildlife and the environment when conflicts between humans and wildlife occur. When formulating control strategies, WS specialists consider protected or endangered animals, environmental impacts, the cost effectiveness of control methods, and social and legal concerns. Control strategies may include the application of one or more techniques, and consideration is first given to nonlethal methods.

WS professionals provide biologically sound, effective, and accountable solutions to wildlife problems. In all instances, WS programs are conducted to ensure no lasting negative impact on wildlife popu-

lations. WS professionals strive to educate the public and producers about the importance of using responsible strategies for living with wildlife.

Economic Losses to Wildlife

More than half of U.S. farmers experience economic loss from animal damage. In 1999, sheep and goat producers lost an estimated \$19.9 million due to predation. In 2000, cattle producers' losses to predators were worth \$51.6 million. That year, coyotes alone caused \$9.6 million in sheep losses and \$31.7 million in cattle losses nationwide.

Additionally, beavers in the Southeastern United States cause an estimated \$100 million in damage each year to public and private property, while Mississippi catfish farmers lose nearly \$6 million worth of fingerlings to fish-eating birds. During 1 year in Pennsylvania, white-tailed deer caused crop losses totalling \$30 million. Overall bird populations cause an estimated annual loss to U.S. agriculture of \$100 million. In total, the annual dollar loss to agriculture in the United States from wildlife exceeds \$500 million.

The Role of WS

Many people who suffer damage caused by wildlife do not have the ability to deal with the problem and become frustrated. Their actions, although well intentioned, may cause unnecessary harm to wildlife and the environment. Placing the responsibility for managing the damage caused by wild animals in the hands of professional wildlife biologists—like those employed by WS—ensures that responses to damage will be biologically sound and economically efficient.

Most of WS' efforts are conducted on private land in response to specific requests for assistance. WS also provides assistance in resolving some wildlife damage problems on Federal- and State-managed lands. WS programs and activities conform with all Federal, State, and local laws and regulations and are designed and conducted to safeguard the environment, nontarget wildlife populations, and public safety. After developing agreements with governmental and private-sector cooperators, WS provides help to prevent or reduce wildlife damage through two approaches: technical assistance and direct control.

Technical Assistance

WS professionals often provide advice, recommendations, information, or materials for use in managing wildlife damage problems and helping threat-

ened and endangered species to thrive. WS employees also help identify the wildlife species responsible for specific damage and determine the extent of the damage. WS' recommendations may involve habitat modification, cultural practices to reduce the likelihood of wildlife damage, behavior modification, relocation, or ways to reduce specific wildlife populations to control the amount of damage they cause.

Direct Control

Some problems caused by wildlife are too complex or difficult for any one individual, group, or agency to solve. For example, dealing with thousands of birds roosting in an urban neighborhood is beyond the capabilities of most individuals. Likewise, capturing coyotes, bears, mountain lions, or other large animals preying on livestock or threatening human safety usually requires specialized equipment and skills. In these instances, WS professionals help solve the problem. Direct control is usually provided when the resource owner's efforts, such as habitat modification, have proven ineffective or resolution of the problem is beyond the resource owner's ability to deal with the problem.

Resources and Other Areas Protected by WS

WS helps to reduce damage caused by wildlife to:

- crops and livestock,
 - natural resources,
 - public and private property, and
 - public health and safety.
- WS helps resolve issues related to:
- bird hazards to aircraft;
 - starling and blackbird contamination at feedlots;
 - bird damage to aquaculture;
 - urban starling and blackbird roosts;
 - nuisance Canada geese;
 - predation of waterfowl and livestock;
 - beaver flooding roads and damaging timber;
 - deer damaging orchards, crops, and ornamental landscaping;
 - bear destroying timber and beehives;
 - wildlife-borne diseases, such as rabies and plague; and
 - wildlife threats to endangered species.

Techniques Used by WS

WS professionals recommend and use an integrated wildlife-damage-management approach to reduce wildlife damage. This approach employs methods to prevent damage from occurring and to stop damage once it begins. All techniques used meet strict guidelines for safety, selectivity, and effectiveness. These methods may involve changing management practices, modifying habitat, dispersing



WS helps the endangered least tern survive

animals, or removing wildlife. A combination of these approaches is generally used. WS' National Wildlife Research Center improves the techniques available to WS and develops new methods for reducing animal damage.

The following techniques may be used to resolve nuisance bird problems:

- frightening devices,
- dispersal techniques,
- structural or habitat modifications to eliminate nesting and roost sites,
- capture and relocation, or
- selective removal.

Deer damage to orchards, vineyards, or ornamental vegetation may be resolved by:

- taste repellents on plants,
- electric fences, or
- frightening devices.

Predator depredation on livestock may be resolved by:

- changing livestock husbandry techniques,
- electric fences,
- the Electronic Guard,
- guarding dogs, or
- selective predator removal.

Additional Information

You may obtain more information about 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 visit the WS Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws>.

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