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WILDLIFE SERVICES—FLORIDA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Florida

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on Florida Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. WS' professional wildlife biologists respond to these requests with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks at airports and military air bases, schools, and along roadways. The program protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases; guards many natural resources, such as fisheries and timber, from wildlife depredation; protects humans and agriculture from invasive vertebrate species; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific projects conducted by Florida WS include: protecting endangered piping plovers, leatherback sea turtles, and green

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting endangered and threatened plant and animal species from predation
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Managing damage caused by vultures, feral hogs, beavers, and coyotes
- Controlling invasive species such as the African pouch rat, Burmese pythons and Monitor lizards
- Protecting aquaculture from bird depredation

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Florida:

- Improving surveillance and monitoring techniques
- Managing wildlife transmission of rabies
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Improving management techniques for reducing bird predation to aquaculture
- Identifying and refining methods to control predators of endangered and threatened species

sea turtles from predation; conducting sampling and monitoring for Avian Influenza, West Nile virus and rabies; eradicating invasive Gambian giant pouch rats; and managing damage caused by feral hogs, beavers, pigeons, vultures, and other wildlife.

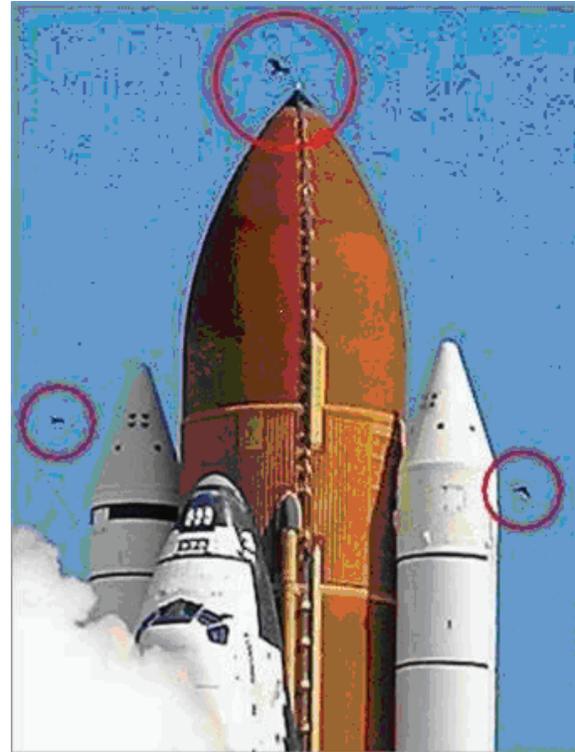
Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance* to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology. WS has cooperated with WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to publish 38 scientific articles in peer reviewed journals.

Aquaculture Assistance—Florida, home to the largest tropical fish industry in the world, has a relatively large and growing foodfish (i.e. catfish, tilapia and shrimp) and baitfish industry. WS has two biologists in Florida trained in protecting fish crops from bird and mammal predators who provide direct assistance and technical assistance to fish farmers.

Protecting Agricultural Crops—WS assists farmers to protect their crops from wildlife through technical assistance and recommendations for permits to remove birds and predating mammals.

Protecting Livestock—Ranchers are assisted with controlling coyotes and black vultures that are predating on livestock. One full-time professional trapper works to control Columbia County coyotes to protect calves. Additionally, ranchers are given hands-on advice and assisted with



obtaining permits to control black vultures that are killing newborn calves.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports

—With more than 100 airports, Florida is second only to California in reported wildlife collisions with aircraft. The latest Federal Aviation Administration report showed 4,447 bird strikes at Florida airports from 1990 to 2005.

WS is recognized nationally and internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS' NWRC conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports and develops management tools to reduce these hazards. Applying this scientific expertise, WS provided direct assistance to 10 Florida airports and technical assistance to 26 airports in fiscal year (FY) 2005. Technical assistance included assisting with wildlife hazard assessments and management plans, and training airport personnel to reduce the risk of wildlife/aircraft collisions. Direct assistance included remov-

ing wildlife habitat from airfields and directly controlling wildlife that threaten aircraft.

Protecting Human Health and Safety from Rabies

WS, in collaboration with the State and county agencies, distributed 650,000 oral rabies vaccination baits throughout a designated area in seven counties to vaccinate raccoons against rabies.

Protecting Health and Safety in the Workplace

WS has removed large concentrations of birds, mainly pigeons and vultures, from roosting areas in power plants, transmission towers and railway yards where their feces and filth were creating hazardous working conditions for workers.

Protecting 47 Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species

WS protects T&E species from wildlife predation and damage. In Florida 47 T&E species are protected, including five sea turtles species, eight species of endangered rodents, and six bird species.

Protecting Natural Areas from Destruction by Feral and Wild Hogs

Feral hogs damage dwindling ecosystems important to the State. WS conducted a wild pig management program in Savannas State Park that saved a documented \$4 million in possible damage. For ecosystem protection, WS also conducts feral hog damage control at five additional State parks, on Eglin Air Force Base and other locations.

Protecting Florida from Invasive Species

WS eliminated a wild population of black-tailed jackrabbits at Miami International Airport. The jackrabbits, not native to Florida, had escaped from a cargo shipment and became established at the airfield. At the airport's request, WS removed 187 rabbits. Subsequently, no rabbits have been reported and it is assumed that all were eradicated.

WS has provided advice to the National Park Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and different counties and municipalities to control the invasive Burmese

python and Monitor lizard, and is currently working on eliminating a population of Gambian pouch rats from Grassy Key.

Addressing Residential and Industrial Property Damage Caused by Black and Turkey Vultures

Black and turkey vultures cause extensive damage to homes, watercraft, and other equipment by chewing and ripping up roof shingles, caulking, boat and seat covers and cushions, insulation and other soft, pliable material. WS' NWRC and WS in Florida have developed ways for Floridians to protect their property from vulture damage including use of vulture effigies. Similarly, vulture effigies developed by WS' NWRC field station in Gainesville are being used extensively to deter vultures from transmission towers.

Protecting Multiple Resources from Feral Hog Damage

Protecting T&E species, natural wetlands, public and private property, and humans and livestock from diseases through feral hog damage management is a major consideration for Florida WS. When introduced to the area by arriving European settlers, the feral hogs were considered an important part of the food resources.

In recent years, however, feral hog numbers and damage have increased dramatically. Feral hogs have no significant natural predators, and hog hunting does not keep the population in check. This invasive, or non-native, species is now found nearly throughout the State, and estimates indicate their numbers continue to rise. While this population escalation resulted in some benefits derived from recreational hunting, the detrimental impacts from feral hog activities have also increased. From 2000 to 2006, WS received requests for direct assistance with feral hog damage problems from Palm Beach County, the Florida DEP (Seven State Parks), St. John's River and Northwest Florida Water Management Districts, and Eglin AFB. Typical requests involved damage to sensitive wetlands, forest resources and croplands, destruction of T&E plants, erosion and siltation of streams and ponds, and the threat of disease transmission to humans and other animals.

To address some of these problems, funded programs were established to hire five WS professionals to trap and remove feral hogs. The program is run by WS through cooperative service agreements with Palm Beach County, the Florida DEP, St. John's River and Northwest Florida Water Management District's, and Eglin AFB.

Looking to the Future

In Florida public safety is a concern for wildlife managers, particularly at airports. Additional attention must be given to this very specialized area of work.

Cormorants and other water birds are a constant threat to aquaculture producers in Florida. Additional resources are needed to meet the expanding need to help resolve these problems.

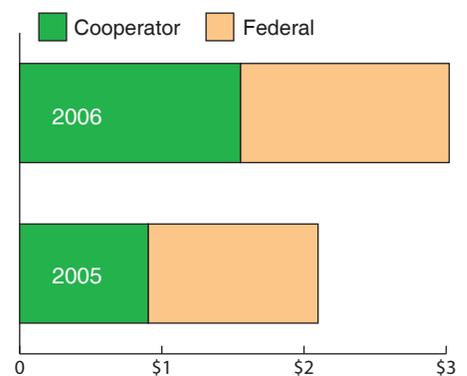
Escalating feral hog populations are becoming more of an issue. As development reduces natural areas, there is an increased need to protect remaining areas from feral hog damage.

The State also has a need to manage the transmission and spread of raccoon rabies. Florida WS is currently participating in our National effort to prevent the westward spread of raccoon rabies, and, hopefully, to eliminate rabies from the United States.

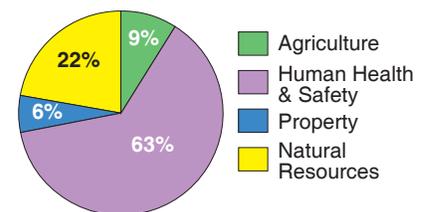
Florida Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and Local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. These cooperators have a role in wildlife damage management, because in most cases they need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or conflicts.

Total Funding (Millions)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



USDA is an equal employment provider and employer.

Major Cooperators:

- Eglin Air Force Base
- Homestead Air Reserve Base
- Tyndal Air Force Base
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Florida Department of Natural Resources
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- St. John's River Water Management District
- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- Columbia County
- Palm Beach County