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WILDLIFE SERVICES—MISSISSIPPI

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Mississippi

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on Mississippi 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 and specialists respond to these requests with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Mississippi is a diverse ecological mix of urban and suburban settings as well as agricultural and forested environments that serve as home to more than 2.8 million people.

Accordingly, WS works to reduce wildlife threats to human safety and property by managing wildlife-related damage such as flooding to roads, crops, and timber; depredation to the aquaculture industry; and the potential spread of disease.

WS helps protect the safety of the flying public



at numerous airport facilities around the state by addressing hazardous situations wildlife may cause to aircraft.

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' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) continually conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife and conflicts and to develop management tools. Mississippi hosts an NWRC Field Station focused on aquaculture and wild bird conflicts.

Aquaculture Assistance—Fish-eating birds cause an estimated \$5 million in losses annually to the Mississippi aquaculture industry. It is estimated that this loss would be two to three times higher if WS was not active in using nonlethal harassment methods to reduce predation. Two bird species, the double-crested cormorant and the American white

pelican, account for most damage to the aquaculture industry in Mississippi. Populations of both species have increased over the last decade.

WS conducts aerial surveys of cormorant roosts in the Mississippi Delta every two weeks, from October through April. Areas of heavy cormorant concentrations are noted and aquaculture producers near these locations are notified, so they can plan appropriate harassment activities. WS specialists also educate producers about nonlethal harassment methods to disperse other species of fish-eating birds, and when necessary, help producers obtain depredation permits. WS has also begun to survey American white pelicans from the ground and the air, in order to help producers plan ahead for harassment activities.

WS has begun implementation of the new aquaculture depredation and natural resources depredation orders, which allows the agency to lethally control cormorants in winter roost sites and nontraditional nesting areas. This effort has been successfully implemented with the assistance of numerous cooperators across the state.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with airplanes cost the U.S. civil aviation industry more than \$550 million annually in the United States. Mississippi contains major airports (both civil and military) on the coast and

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting property and public health and safety from beaver damage
- Managing fish-eating bird damage to the aquaculture industry
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Teaching college and continuing education courses on wildlife damage management
- Responding to private property complaints involving resident Canada geese, bats, vultures and other species

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Mississippi:

- Managing bird predation to the aquaculture industry
- Establishing methods to monitor beaver populations
- Establishing the state's feral hog population
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Wildlife disease issues

inland, which must manage a variety of potential wildlife hazards. Mississippi WS currently fields two full time employees protecting both civil and military installations within Mississippi. WS also provides technical assistance to numerous airports within the state each year.

Human Health and Safety Issues—WS Mississippi provides assistance to a variety of groups and individuals on health and safety issues concerning wildlife. The most widespread request received is bats dwelling in residences and businesses. Other species involve vultures roosting on homes and towers; resident Canada geese interfering with people’s ability to enjoy recreational areas, such as parks and reservoirs; blackbird roosts within city limits; and pigeons defecating on buildings and other properties. All of these species can harbor a variety of diseases and fecal material can create hazardous conditions for people to conduct normal activities. WS also conducts rabies and avian influenza surveillance in wildlife.

Protecting Endangered Mississippi Sandhill Crane—The Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge’s sole mission is to perpetuate and protect the federally endangered Mississippi Sandhill Crane. Cranes were disappearing from the refuge due to predation from coyotes, feral dogs, bobcats and raccoons. WS Mississippi entered into an agreement with the refuge to assist with predation problems in order to protect the cranes. Since WS became involved, successful crane reproduction has increased as has survival of adult birds.

Protecting Multiple Resources from Beaver Damage—Protecting transportation, agriculture, forestry and property through beaver damage management is a major consideration for WS in Mississippi. Historically, beaver were a valuable natural resource and an extremely important part of the economy. In recent years, however, little demand for beaver products has resulted in decreased trapping and subsequent increased beaver numbers. Beaver now occupy nearly all

watersheds in the State. While this population escalation has resulted in some benefits derived from beaver activities, such as increased wetland habitat, reduced downstream sedimentation, and improved water quality, the detrimental impacts from beaver activities have also increased.

Typical requests for assistance involve damage to roadways and bridges, agriculture and forest resources, damage to personal property and landscaping, and flooding of municipal sewer and water treatment facilities. To address some of these problems, the Beaver Control Assistance Program (BCAP) was established. The BCAP assists the Department of Transportation (DOT), city and county governments, soil and water conservation districts, private landholders, and others with beaver problems. The program is run by WS through a cooperative service agreement with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, Mississippi Forestry Commission, Mississippi Department of Transportation, Mississippi Association of Supervisors, Mississippi Extension Service, Delta Council and Mississippi Farm Bureau. Funding comes from state, county, federal, and private sources. Beaver damage costs the citizens of Mississippi several million dollars a year. WS prevents several million more dollars in damages from occurring through its operational beaver control program.

WS routinely uses explosives to remove beaver dams that are flooding property. WS personnel are trained and certified in the safe and effective use of explosives prior to conducting any explosives work.

Looking to the Future

In Mississippi, public safety concerns wildlife managers, particularly at airports. Additional

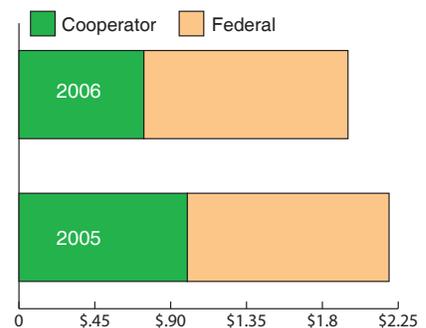
attention must be given to this very specialized area of work.

The State also needs to manage the transmission and spread of raccoon rabies. Mississippi 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.

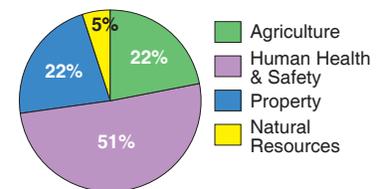
Mississippi Wildlife Services Funding

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

Total Funding (Millions)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



Major Cooperators

- Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce
- Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks
- Mississippi Department of Transportation
- Mississippi Forestry Commission
- Delta Council
- Mississippi Farm Bureau
- Mississippi Association of Supervisors
- Mississippi State University
- Mississippi State Department of Health
- Mississippi Airport Association
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Park Service

NWRC Research Station in Mississippi

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The NWRC Starkville, MS field station primarily studies both captive and free-ranging birds to determine the local and regional population status of fish-eating birds, the extent of the damage they cause, and effective control methods. The tremendous growth of aquaculture over the past quarter-century has been an important development in American agriculture and the field station seeks alternative strategies that can be integrated into a comprehensive management plan for cost-effective reductions in damage to the industry caused by fish-eating birds. Located in Mississippi, research is conducted throughout the Eastern United States.

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