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Inspection  
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## WILDLIFE SERVICES—WEST VIRGINIA

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### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in West Virginia

Every day residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on West Virginia 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.

West Virginia enjoys a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands and extensive forests, with the Appalachian Mountains dominating the eastern portion of the State. This ecological and geographic diversity creates habitats for a remarkably wide range of wildlife species. With more than 1.8 million residents, human interactions with wildlife are common. WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks at airports, schools, and along roadways. The program also protects people, pets, and livestock from



wildlife-borne diseases; guards many natural resources, such as fisheries and timber, from wildlife depredation; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific projects conducted by West Virginia WS include: protecting livestock from predation; conducting sampling and monitoring for rabies; and managing damage caused by deer, beaver, resident Canada geese, pigeons, starlings, vultures, and other wildlife.

ment methods when other methods fail.

**Protecting Livestock**—Many factors cause economic losses to livestock producers, but predators, especially coyotes, cause significant losses attacking sheep, cattle, and goats. A West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Service survey of the 1994-1995 seasons showed 4,630 lambs and ewes lost to coyote predation. The survey also found that 51 percent of West Virginia shepherds who left the sheep business did so because of sheep losses to predators. A 1999 National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) survey of livestock producers nationwide reported coyotes were the leading predator of sheep and lambs, accounting for 62 percent of all predator losses. On a percentage basis, sheep numbers are currently declining at a higher rate than any other time in West Virginia's agricultural history. NASS also reports that in West Virginia, between the years 2000 and 2005, calf losses to predators nearly doubled.

WS provides technical assistance to prevent livestock predation throughout West Virginia. A State per-head livestock tax supports services throughout the State. WS provides an integrated predation management program for coyote predation on livestock through a cooperative service agreement with the State's Department of Agriculture. Currently one-third of West Virginia's counties, primarily in the eastern region, participate actively. Since

#### Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Protecting livestock from coyote and vulture depredation
- Protecting public health from wildlife borne diseases
- Protecting public health, livestock, and wildlife from raccoon strain rabies
- Protecting human health associated with large flocks of roosting blackbirds in urban and suburban environments and at industrial structures

#### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to West Virginia:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing wildlife transmission of rabies
- Reducing blackbird damage at livestock feedlots
- Managing urban and agricultural damage caused by deer
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and 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.

**Aquaculture Assistance**—West Virginia WS provides the growing aquaculture industry and State-run hatcheries with techniques and methods to reduce fish-eating bird damage. Cooperators are provided with instructions on bird harassment, techniques to exclude birds from fish-rearing facilities, and damage manage-

begun in 1996, WS' program has helped reduce livestock loss from predators by 90%. More recently, it helped trim livestock loss by 94%.

**Protecting Humans, Livestock, and Wildlife**—Rabies poses a serious threat to livestock, wildlife, pets, and public health. Virtually unknown prior to the 1950's, raccoon rabies appeared in West Virginia in 1977 and expanded throughout the east. More than 90 percent of reported rabies cases involve wild animals. More than half of all rabies cases reported in major U.S. metropolitan areas involve raccoons. Human rabies deaths are rare, but the estimated public health costs associated with rabies detection, prevention, and control have risen, exceeding \$300 million annually.

In cooperation with selected eastern states and Canada, West Virginia WS annually distributes between 1,000,000 and 1,500,000 oral rabies vaccination baits to immunize raccoons against rabies. The program's goal is to stop the westward movement of the raccoon strain of the disease. Distribution of baits in West Virginia will reduce the risk of raccoon rabies entering the Midwestern United States where it would increasingly threaten livestock, human populations, and other animals, significantly raising control costs. One measure of success for the oral vaccination program in West Virginia occurred in 2006 when the bait zone was moved five miles eastward. The continued oral rabies vaccine distribution will not only reduce the incidence of rabies, but ultimately eliminate raccoon rabies in West Virginia, as well as in the entire eastern United States.

**Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports**—WS assists West Virginia airports whenever wildlife becomes a hazard to aircraft and passenger safety. Nearly 77 percent of West Virginia is forested and every West Virginia airport is either bordered by or very near

forested land, which provides wildlife habitat. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) data indicates West Virginia has one of the highest rates involving aircraft collisions with deer.

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS' National Wildlife Research Center, conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports and develops management tools to reduce these hazards.

Applying this scientific expertise, WS provides direct assistance to West Virginia airports, including removing animals from areas surrounding runways. WS also provides technical assistance by conducting initial wildlife hazard consultations, conducting year-long wildlife hazard assessments, developing wildlife hazard management plans, and training airport personnel to reduce the risk of wildlife-aircraft collisions.

**Protecting Health and Safety in the Workplace**—West Virginia WS provides workplace safety through roosting bird control at industrial sites. Winter roosting birds contaminate work surfaces with droppings, which creates unsanitary conditions for workers and corrodes equipment causing breakdowns and worker injury. WS uses harassment and chemicals to disperse and reduce populations of blackbirds and pigeons that create these unhealthy conditions.

**Addressing Residential Property Damage Caused by Roosting Black Vultures**—West Virginia WS is responding to ever-increasing requests from property owners experiencing problems caused by roosting black vultures. Once established, these roosts of several hundred vultures can create a health and sanitation problem caused by their droppings, which can damage and kill trees where vultures roost. Vultures can damage roofing materials of adjacent homes and structures as they prepare to leave the roosting area. WS assists property owners with instructions on how to harass and disperse the vultures. In some cases, WS will directly assist in moving the vultures.

## Looking to the Future

WS resolves a diverse range of wildlife conflicts, and the demand for services continues to grow in West Virginia. Wildlife diseases, such as rabies, are posing greater threats to humans, livestock, and pets. Lack of sport

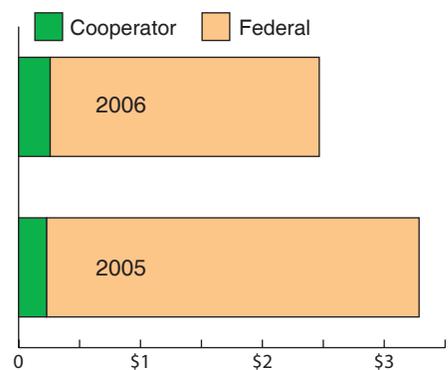
trapping, due to a decline in the fur market, contributes to the increasing beaver and predator populations and the corresponding increase in wildlife damage caused by these species. Finally, introduced species, such as feral hogs, are a rapidly growing wildlife management problem.

Due to increased service requests, WS currently prioritizes assistance based on the most serious risks. Health and safety requests receive the highest priority, although property-damage calls generate 49 percent of all assistance requests. Too often recommendations must be based on telephone interviews rather than preferable on-site visits. WS is challenged to develop resources that will allow for more systematic and thorough evaluations of wildlife conflicts and responses.

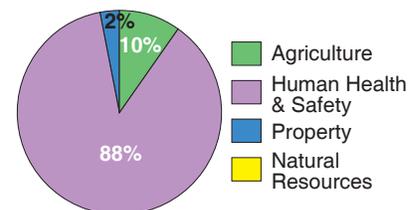
## West Virginia Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS receives financial support 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 and/or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

**Total Funding (Millions)**



**Resources Protected % of Total Funds**



USDA is an equal employment provider and employer.

### Major Cooperators

- West Virginia Department of Agriculture
- West Virginia Department Health & Human Resources
- West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
- West Virginia University
- USDA Agricultural Research Service
- USDA Forest Service
- U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Department of Energy