

# INTRODUCTION

## ***National Wildlife Research Center—Mission and Location***

The mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) Wildlife Services (WS) program is to provide Federal leadership in managing problems caused by wildlife. The National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) functions as the research arm of WS by providing scientific information on the development of socially acceptable methods for wildlife damage management. As part of WS' strategic plan to improve the coexistence of people and wildlife, it has identified four goals: (1) developing methods, (2) providing wildlife services, (3) valuing and investing in people, and (4) enhancing information and communication. WS is dedicated to helping

meet the wildlife damage-management needs of the United States by building on the Center's strengths in these four key areas. This report documents the highlights of NWRC-funded research in fiscal year (FY) 2001 and is structured around these program goals.

The headquarters of the NWRC is located on the 43-acre Foothills Research Campus of Colorado State University (CSU) in Fort Collins, CO. During 2001, NWRC made significant progress toward building out its Master Plan on that site. Construction was initiated on an outdoor animal research complex and associated research support

structures. APHIS also completed the bidding process for construction of an office, lab, and a food storage/preparation addition to the Center's existing indoor animal research facility. Planning was initiated on additional facilities in which to conduct invasive species and wildlife disease research. Upon completion of the Center's master plan over the next several years, NWRC and its U.S. regionally based field stations will truly be the only wildlife research complex of its kind in the world devoted exclusively to providing new, science-based solutions to the complex issues of wildlife damage and associated human health and safety problems.

## ***Survey of Research Needs of the WS Program***

NWRC is committed to conducting research that addresses the needs of the WS program and its cooperators and stakeholders. As a result, in 1989 and 1996 APHIS' WS surveyed all WS State Directors to assess the national research needs of the WS program. Each survey resulted in a list of research needs, and management determined their relative priorities to the WS program. These 1989 and 1996 surveys, along with congressional directives and input from the WS Deputy Administrator, have guided NWRC's allocation of resources to specific research projects that address the WS program's priority research needs.

In Spring 2001, the WS management team requested that WS research needs and their relative priorities be updated. The objective was to determine the spectrum of wildlife damage problems faced by the WS program and its customers that needed to be better addressed through additional scientific



information, new damage-management methods, or improvement in existing methods. The NWRC Assistant Director led a team consisting of an Assistant Director from both WS Western and Eastern Regional Offices to assess WS program needs.

In April 2001, the WS Deputy Administrator asked WS State Directors and NWRC scientists to identify their three most important research needs. Members of the National Wildlife Service Advisory Committee to the Secretary of Agriculture (NWSAC) also were

asked for their input. By July, the NWRC Director had received a list of 103 different research needs. To obtain a shorter list that reflected relative priorities of the program, each team member, with input from his/her respective office, identified the top three to five research needs within the areas of bird and mammal research. Prioritization criteria considered (1) the rank order of needs as submitted by the WS State Directors; (2) the extent of research effort over past years versus the need for future information, techniques, and solutions; (3) the availability of exiting information and techniques that may simply need refinement versus the need for new techniques; (4) the value and magnitude of the resources affected; (5) the WS national, regional, or State importance; and (6) the actual perceived importance to customers.

Table 1 lists the priority research needs (in no particular order) in the areas of bird and mammal research. Priority needs of bird

research relate to understanding and finding solutions to resolve bird problems to/in crops (e.g., blackbirds), aquaculture (e.g., cormorants), airports, urban-suburban situations (e.g., crows, geese, gulls), and livestock (e.g., vultures). Priority needs of mammal-related research relate to understanding and finding solutions to resolve mammal damage to timber (e.g., ungulates), riverine habitats (e.g., beaver), agriculture (e.g., rodents), and livestock and native wildlife (e.g., predators). In addition, WS determined that research was needed on wildlife disease transmission relative to human health and safety and livestock production, and wildlife population monitoring relative to economic issues, management effectiveness, and environmental mandates.

The bird and mammal research needs identified in table 1 are considered to be the highest priority needs of the WS program and also reflect the needs of many of WS customers. These priority research needs, in addition to congressional and other directives, guide the NWRC Director in implementing new research projects as current projects are completed, specific objectives within current projects are achieved, and additional resources become available.