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WILDLIFE SERVICES—LOUISIANA

Contact Information:

Dwight LeBlanc, Louisiana Wildlife Services State Director

P.O. Box 589, Port Allen, Louisiana 70767

Phone: (225) 389-0229 FAX: (225) 389-0228

Toll-Free Number: 1-866-4USDAWS 1-866-487-3297

E-mail: Dwight.LeBlanc@aphis.usda.gov

Web site: www.aphis.usda.gov/ws

USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Louisiana

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Louisiana Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting a variety of resources that face damage from wildlife. Birds destroy agricultural commodities including rice and other grain crops, as well as fruits and nuts such as strawberries and pecans. Birds prey upon crawfish and catfish. Beaver often cause significant damage to natural and man-made resources such as timber, crops, dams, roadways, bridges, and public utilities. Louisiana WS personnel assist in minimizing all of these types of damage. They also support safe aviation by working with airport managers to protect pilots, air passengers, and aircraft from dangerous aircraft collisions with wildlife. In addition, they assist State and Federal wildlife agencies to protect threatened and endangered species from loss of habitat and predation by other wildlife species.

Louisiana has a wide variety of ecological habitats, including large cities, small towns, and sparsely populated rural areas comprised of agricultural lands, prairies, upland forests, swamps, and marshes. The State population exceeds 4.3 million and is growing.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting resources from damage by the Louisiana black bear, a Federally-listed threatened species
- Protecting sprouting and headed rice from blackbird damage
- Protecting timber, crops, threatened and endangered species, highways, bridges, and property from beaver-caused damage
- Protecting public health and safety from wildlife-borne diseases such as rabies, West Nile virus, and histoplasmosis
- Assisting researchers to address wildlife damage issues related to beaver, blackbirds, nutria, fish- and shellfish-eating birds, and wildlife-borne diseases

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Louisiana:

- Managing bird damage to rice
- Defining the impact of various bird species to commercial aquaculture, and the role of these birds as disease and parasite reservoirs
- Documenting the significance of wildlife as vectors and reservoirs for zoonotic diseases such as rabies and West Nile virus
- Documenting the impact of nutria on coastal marsh loss and determining the best available control strategies
- Improving management practices for the recovery and restoration of the Louisiana black bear



Consequently, increased contact between humans and wildlife is inevitable. As wildlife habitat continues to shrink, wildlife are more likely to encroach on suburban and urban areas and cause damage to resources that are economically important to people.

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.

Protecting Sprouting Rice—Blackbirds, particularly red-winged blackbirds and brown-headed cowbirds, can cause severe damage to sprouting rice, especially in the vicinity of large winter roosts. Estimated losses of this resource range between \$5 million and \$10 million annually. Since the early 1990's, Louisiana WS has worked diligently to protect sprouting rice fields located near large winter roosts from blackbird damage. Based on direct responses from rice growers in Evangeline Parish, programs conducted in 1989 and 1990 saved growers an average of more than \$4,000 per farm or about \$2.8 million annually. Other surveys estimate that WS activities save rice farms more than \$5.8 million annually. Researchers

are currently investigating ways of increasing these savings by improving program methodologies.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species—WS protects threatened and endangered species from damage by other wildlife species. In Louisiana, WS works to protect the Louisiana pearlshell, a mussel found in the central part of the State, from damage by beaver. Since this work began in the late 1980's, the Louisiana pearlshell has experienced notable recovery, which resulted in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) downlisting the species from endangered to threatened.

WS also protects threatened and endangered species by providing immediate responses to problems they cause. For example, WS works with FWS and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to address complaints involving the Louisiana black bear, a threatened species. By quickly resolving black bear damage and nuisance problems, WS helps ensure the animal will continue to be enjoyed and admired by local communities. This work has been well received by the public and has resulted in WS being recognized by both the Secretary of Agriculture and the Black Bear Conservation Committee for its role in protecting the Louisiana black bear from extinction.

Protecting Property from Beaver Damage—In 1993 alone, losses of commercial timber to beaver in Louisiana exceeded \$13 million. Between 1998 and 2002, more than \$6.7 million in lost resources were reported in Louisiana as a result of beaver damage. Consequently, WS conducts numerous beaver management projects on private, State, and Federal properties to protect agriculture, public health and safety, general property, and natural resources from damage. Since 1999, Louisiana WS has protected more than \$10.7 million in valuable resources, including bottomland hardwood timber, highways, bridges, dams, drainage ditches, canals, and crops from beaver damage.

Aquaculture Assistance—Louisiana is the largest producer of farm-raised crawfish in the country and has a significant catfish industry. According to estimates, the industry spends more than \$17 million annually to control bird damage at aquaculture facilities. WS conducts research to determine the magnitude of damage and develops methods to minimize losses from birds that prey upon catfish and crawfish. The same research will provide additional information for developing strategies to manage birds that prey upon sport fish in Louisiana.

Louisiana WS routinely provides assistance to crawfish and catfish producers experiencing problems with birds, including cormorants, white pelicans, and numerous heron and egret species that feed on these commodities. WS personnel were instrumental in identifying white pelicans as the source of a trematode parasite that infects fingerling catfish and weakens their immune systems. Consequently, researchers are now looking for better methods of controlling this disease.

Looking to the Future

Increased bird damage to many valuable resources is becoming more difficult to keep under control. These bird species damage rice, other grain and fruit crops, airplanes and airport property; threaten air passenger safety; serve as potential disease vectors for West Nile virus and other diseases; and prey upon crawfish and other aquatic species. Beaver are also another source of growing wildlife damage in the State. Without the appropriate level of resources and professional management by WS, it will become more difficult to successfully resolve many wildlife conflicts and ensure equal access for all Louisiana citizens to program services.

Louisiana 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. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

