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USDA Takes Action to Address Wildlife Rabies Outbreaks in Multiple States

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Press Release

Contact:

Tanya Espinosa

tanya.c.espinosa@usda.gov

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently approved the release of nearly \$19 million in emergency funding to address current wildlife rabies outbreaks in multiple States. This new infusion of funding will also allow USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to establish a sufficient stockpile of oral rabies

vaccination (ORV) baits for future use and address emerging rabies cases in several high-risk areas where the virus may be more likely to spread.

“Wildlife rabies poses significant risks to domestic animals, such as livestock and pets,” said Dr. Michael Watson, APHIS Administrator. “By reducing rabies in wildlife populations, we are safeguarding both human and animal health and decreasing the risk of disease spread, which would jeopardize the success APHIS has achieved since 1995 in managing rabies.”

The APHIS National Rabies Management Program (NRMP) controls and eliminates rabies virus in terrestrial carnivores such as raccoons, coyotes and foxes. APHIS has been able to support emergency responses in recent years using appropriated funding, but growing costs and the need to provide an increasing number of rabies responses has depleted available resources. This emergency funding is being redirected from unspent balances from previous animal and plant health emergencies.

The funding will be used to address current rabies outbreaks in Alabama, Maine and Vermont; establish a sufficient stockpile of ORV baits for future use; and manage rabies in six emerging areas within existing rabies management zones that have an elevated risk for rabies spread. The high-risk areas include: Watertown, N.Y.; Buffalo, N.Y.; Youngstown, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pa.; Birmingham, Ala.; and rural regions of eastern Vermont and western New Hampshire. This emergency transfer will prevent further spread of the rabies virus in wildlife by allowing APHIS to implement supplemental ORV operations that may include increasing bait density, expanding the area currently under management, and conducting additional ORV baiting actions.

APHIS’ longstanding efforts have prevented the spread of raccoon rabies by establishing an ORV zone from Maine to Ohio along the Canadian Border and from Ohio to Alabama. The NRMP also collaborates with the Texas Department of State Health Services to maintain an ORV zone along the border of Texas and Mexico to prevent the reemergence of canine rabies into the United States.

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