

Serving the American Public

WS conducts several national programs:

- The National Rabies Management Program implements a coordinated program to contain, and eventually manage, rabies in wildlife. In collaboration with its partners, the program distributes oral rabies vaccine and conducts enhanced surveillance in 25 States. The program focuses on specific virus strains in raccoons, coyotes, gray foxes, and feral dogs and works with international partners through the North American Rabies Management Plan.
- The National Wildlife Disease Program safeguards agricultural trade by conducting surveillance in all 50 States with its partners. The program is APHIS' first line of defense against wildlife diseases that are transmissible to humans and livestock. Its emergency response wildlife biologists can mobilize and be onsite within 48 hours of a wildlife disease event.
- The Airport Wildlife Hazards Program provides leadership throughout the country to minimize strikes and protect public safety. Working with civil and military aviation since 1990, the program's cornerstones are habitat modification, active dispersal of wildlife, personnel training, and research.
- Other activities focus on specific wildlife damage concerns including feral swine, blackbirds, and specific invasive species.

Responsible Lethal Approach

Not all damage problems can be resolved using nonlethal techniques. Livestock losses to predators often continue despite the use of nonlethal tools. Other situations may require lethal control: management of invasive species, protection of endangered species, and response to overabundant or poorly located wildlife. Allowing trained wildlife professionals to conduct lethal control reduces the possibility that individuals will try to resolve damage independently, which can have environmentally harmful results.

When considering lethal management, WS evaluates potential tools for humaneness, effectiveness, and human safety. It also assesses the ability of these techniques to target specific individual animals or species. Typically, lethal means are used either along with nonlethal methods or after such options have been considered or tried.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office documented that WS' predator management efforts neither threaten predator populations nor significantly impact nontarget species. A 2009 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency review reached the same conclusion.

When lethally removing game species, WS often provides the animals as a charitable food resource. In FY 2009, the program donated more than 91 tons of wild game.



(above) WS biologists certified in the safe and effective use of explosives remove beaver dams to protect property, including transportation infrastructure.

More Information and Assistance

- Toll-free: (866) 4USDA-WS or (866) 487-3297
- www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage
- Director, WS Operational Support Staff, USDA-APHIS, 4700 River Road, Unit 87, Riverdale, MD 20737-1234

Cover Photos: Disease biologists on an emergency response dust prairie dog holes with insecticide for protection of black-footed ferrets in South Dakota, while staff carry out a trap-vaccinate-release in New York City during a rabies outbreak in raccoons. A WS biologist prepares to relocate a snowy owl away from an international airport in the Midwest.

Photo Credits: On cover, upper photo by Dr. J. Caudell; owl relocation by Alan K. Shumacher. All remaining images are by APHIS photographer R. Anson Eaglin or from the APHIS photo collection.



WS Wildlife Services

Protecting People | Protecting Agriculture | Protecting Wildlife

Creating a Balance Between People and Wildlife Damage

The Wildlife Services Mission



Allowing trained wildlife professionals to conduct management activities reduces the possibility that other individuals will resolve damage with environmentally harmful results.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.
Revised December 2010 • Program Aid No. 1523

USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Wildlife Services (WS)—a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)—provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife interactions that threaten public health and safety and agricultural, property, and natural resources.

WS works in every State to administer a program of integrated wildlife damage management. The program operates through a user fee system in response to local requests.



National APHIS Wildlife Services programs include airport hazards management, disease surveillance, rabies management, research, and State-based operations.

WS’ goals and objectives have evolved significantly since its establishment in 1895 as part of USDA. Initially, the program focused on rodent management and predator control for livestock protection. Although the program’s overall mission and legal authority have not changed, its range of activities has increased due to changing social needs.

From 1939 until 1985, WS was part of the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service, returning to USDA in 1985. It is part of APHIS, the agency with the mission of protecting the health and value of U.S. agriculture, natural, and other resources. WS remains committed to the principle that wildlife is a publicly owned resource, held in trust and carefully managed by State and Federal agencies.

The program’s philosophy has evolved along with societal values and perspectives, reflecting changes in the wildlife management profession as a whole. WS seeks a balance among various priorities, including wildlife and environmental conservation, human health

and safety, financial considerations, and social factors. WS’ managers and biologists emphasize resolving conflicts and managing damage—not eradicating or suppressing wildlife populations.

Driven by increasingly diverse requests for assistance, WS has expanded its operations and research to include the protection of public health and safety, disease surveillance, threatened and endangered species conservation, emergency response, and other programs. WS also plays a vital role in eliminating the negative environmental effects of invasive species.

The program’s mission is to provide Federal leadership, among many partners, to address wildlife-related problems in a science-based manner. Its primary statutory authorities are found in two Congressional actions: the Act of March 2, 1931 (46 Stat. 1468; 7 U.S.C. 426-426b), as amended, and the Act of December 22, 1987 (101 Stat. 1329-331, 7 U.S.C. 426c).

WS emphasizes resolving conflicts and managing damage—not eradicating wildlife populations.



(left) An oiled wood duck retrieved by a WS biologist during an all-hazards emergency response was transferred to cooperating agencies for rehabilitation.



(right) WS personnel assist at an aquaculture facility, just one of the diverse agricultural resources they protect.

Public Input

Since 1986, the National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC) has convened to discuss program direction. NWSAC advises the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture concerning needed policies, program issues, and research. The Committee serves as a public forum, enabling those affected by WS to have a voice in its policies. It is comprised of individuals from agricultural, environmental, conservation, academic, animal welfare, and related interest groups.

In decisionmaking, WS adheres to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to evaluate alternative actions and the potential impact of programs and activities at regional, State, and local levels. The program integrates current scientific information and various social considerations (such as aesthetics and religious views concerning wildlife) into its decisionmaking. The NEPA process helps protect the public interest by ensuring that WS’ actions do not jeopardize native wildlife populations or the ecosystems on which they depend. NEPA documents are accessible on APHIS’ Web site.

WS works with the APHIS Freedom of Information Act office to respond to requests. The program publishes commonly requested information on APHIS’ Web site in program data reports, which include details about management efforts and protected resources.

Direction and Cooperation

Policy directives, also on APHIS’ Web site, guide daily work. APHIS personnel meet the public’s requests by relying on science-based decisionmaking, building connections with professional and academic communities, and cooperating closely with other government agencies and organizations. Conflicting public values are considered during decisionmaking.

WS implements activities through national operations, research programs, and State offices. Most WS State Directors are certified by The Wildlife Society, an international scientific association of professional wildlife biologists. Program employees, skilled in practical wildlife management techniques, are educated in the scientific disciplines of wildlife biology and wildlife damage management.

WS’ State offices collaborate with State and Federal agencies, land-grant universities, and others to implement program delivery. WS is the recognized lead Federal agency for addressing wildlife strike hazards at airports and wildlife damage on public lands.

“Prevention or control of wildlife damage, which often includes removal of the animals responsible for the damage, is an essential and responsible part of wildlife management.”

The Wildlife Society

Program Policy and Approach

The science of wildlife management developed significantly during the 20th century. Damage management is one of the fastest evolving disciplines within the wildlife management profession. WS employs an integrated wildlife damage management (IWDM) approach. This approach relies on a variety of methods and techniques—including both nonlethal and lethal approaches—to resolve conflicts. A range of management approaches and alternatives must be evaluated before selecting a course of action.

The IWDM approach incorporates all practical methods of prevention and control to minimize wildlife damage. As a leader in the research and development of new and effective wildlife damage management techniques, WS has investigated nonlethal methods since the 1950s. Since 1993, the program’s National Wildlife Research Center has spent approximately 75 percent of its annual research budget on the development of nonlethal tools and techniques.

Nonlethal methods include vaccines, repellents, contraceptives, visual or auditory devices, livestock guarding animals, predator-proof fencing, and practices such as shed lambing, herding, and night penning. WS personnel frequently recommend nonlethal methods, which are often implemented by those who have requested assistance. For example, cattle and sheep ranchers reportedly invest more than \$193 million annually in nonlethal methods of livestock protection.

WS responds to more than 200,000 human-wildlife conflicts annually. The public resolves many conflicts using WS’ recommended science-based, legal, and humane methods. In fiscal year (FY) 2009, WS personnel used nonlethal methods to resolve conflicts involving 27.6 million animals—more than 87 percent of those encountered during the year.

To foster this approach, WS has established a resource management specialist position, which works with producers and others to promote a variety of nonlethal methods. Special attention is given to the use of guarding animals and other nonlethal means to reduce livestock predation.