



Animal and Plant
Health Inspection
Service

September 21, 2015

Office of the
Administrator

Dear Stakeholders:

1400 Independence
Avenue SW
Washington, DC
20250

Late last week, USDA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) released the results of an in-depth [audit](#) of our Wildlife Services (WS) Predator Damage Management Program. OIG initiated the audit in 2014 in response to requests from the public, animal rights groups and several members of Congress.

We welcomed the audit as a thorough and objective review of the vital service and support that WS provides to our Nation's farmers and ranchers. WS opened its doors, its records, and its administrative systems to OIG, giving auditors complete access to its program. During the review, OIG accompanied 40 WS specialists in the field and visited five states and 12 district sites. They witnessed aerial operations and field work, and spoke with more than 100 program leaders and researchers, State fish and wildlife officials, and property owners.

I want to draw your attention to a few of the audit's important findings.

OIG found WS to be in compliance with all applicable Federal and State laws, and did not identify any problems with our wildlife damage management activities. As the producers who depend on us already know, WS provides vital assistance—both non-lethal and lethal—to protect livestock and natural resources from predation by coyotes, wolves, birds and other predators. This assistance is especially critical during lambing and calving season when losses can be extreme without WS' support. Annually, predators account for the loss of more than 500,000 head of livestock valued at \$138 million. Most often those needing help are small producers who are least able to absorb the losses.

In addition to looking at WS' predator management program, OIG evaluated our accountability for hazardous materials and equipment as well as our cooperative agreement process and again affirmed our approach is sound. WS enters into cooperative agreements at the request of local and Federal governments as well as private parties, such as ranchers, who are experiencing problems caused by wildlife. While WS receives appropriated funds, it cost shares expenses for most wildlife management activities, and most cooperators pay for some portion of the services we provide. The OIG audit attests to cooperators' willingness to provide \$80 million in FY 2013 cooperative funds as evidence of the public's need for WS' services.

As with any audit, OIG did identify areas where we can improve, and we are already in the process of addressing those recommendations, which were focused on recordkeeping and data entry. For example, WS has already issued directives and implemented procedures to enhance the accuracy of data entered into its Management Information System (MIS). WS field employees use MIS to document all of their activities specific to wildlife damage management activities

so accuracy is paramount. OIG also found WS needs to more regularly update and renew—at least every 5 years—work initiation documents with cooperators to reflect such things as changes in the scope of the agreement, land ownership and property borders. Again, we have already instituted policy changes to address these recommendations.

Over the years, through detailed audits and sound recommendations, OIG has built a trusted reputation within USDA and beyond. Their reports have led to many positive reforms, including here at APHIS. I am thankful for OIG's thorough and objective review of WS and we will use the feedback in the audit as we continue working to provide the highest level of expertise and assistance to resolve wildlife conflicts with the goal of allowing people and wildlife to coexist.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin Shea".

Kevin Shea
APHIS Administrator