



**United States Department of
Agriculture**



**Animal and Plant Health
Inspection Service**

Wildlife Services

Strategic Plan (2010 – 2014)

January 2010

WS Strategic Plan 2010-2014

I. Introduction

PURPOSE:

This plan was developed to inform and provide guidance to Wildlife Services (WS) employees on the Program's strategic goals for 2010-2014. It describes WS vision, mission, and guiding principles and will help WS remain focused on activities and goals that are critical to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) mission to protect the health and value of U.S. agriculture, natural, and other resources.

WS MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY:

In the United States, wildlife is a public resource held in trust and managed by State and Federal agencies. Government agencies, including WS, are required by law and regulation to conserve and manage wildlife resources while being responsive to the public desires, views, and attitudes. In so doing, agencies must respond to requests for resolution of damage and other problems caused by wildlife.

Wildlife may cause significant damage to agricultural crops and livestock, forests, pastures, property and infrastructure in urban and rural areas, and threatened and endangered species and their habitats. Wildlife also can threaten human health and safety through animal-borne diseases and hazards to aircraft. Prevention and management of wildlife conflicts is an essential and responsible part of wildlife management. Before wildlife damage management programs are undertaken, careful assessments will be made of the problem and all options for resolving or mitigating the problem will be considered. Actions considered and employed will be scientifically based, biologically sound, environmentally safe, and socially responsible.

WS VISION:

To improve the coexistence of people and wildlife.

WS recognizes that the field of wildlife damage management is in a period of change, and those working in this field must consider a wide range of public interests that can conflict with one another. These interests include wildlife conservation, biological diversity, the welfare of animals, and the use of wildlife for enjoyment, recreation, consumption, and to make a living.

WS develops wildlife damage management strategies that are scientifically based, biologically sound, environmentally safe, and socially responsible. WS also strives to reduce damage caused by wildlife to the lowest possible levels while at the same time reducing wildlife mortality.

WS MISSION:

To provide Federal leadership in managing conflicts with wildlife.

WS recognizes that wildlife is an important public resource greatly valued by the American people. By its very nature, however, wildlife is a highly dynamic and mobile resource that can cause damage to agriculture and property, pose risks to human health and safety, and negatively affect industrial and natural resources. WS conducts research and provides technical assistance and operational assistance programs to resolve problems that occur when human activity and wildlife conflict with one another.

VALUES:

The following list represents six values WS promotes among employees and exemplifies in its actions.

- Integrity: WS employees base their action on sound scientific and biological principles and strive to achieve the highest ethical and professional standards. In conducting their work they seek to minimize risks to humans, non-target wildlife species, and the environment.
- Dedicated to the Public: WS employees provide assistance on a regular basis and are dedicated to resolving wildlife damage conflict while taking into consideration the needs of resource owners, cooperators, and stakeholders, as well as the welfare of the animals involved.
- Mission-focused (performance-based): Because wildlife can pose significant threats to Americans, their property, and the nation's natural resources, WS employees must be responsive and highly effective in developing and implementing solutions to wildlife damage. The solutions also need to promote tolerance toward wildlife and assure that management actions are conducted in a responsible and professional manner.
- Safety-Conscious: By nature of the work, WS employees operate in a dangerous environment. WS is strongly committed to the safety of its employees and provides extensive policies, procedures, and training to ensure their safety.
- Collaborative/Accountability: Because wildlife is a public resource, WS recognizes the need for collaboration with other Federal and State agencies, public and private institutions, and private individuals to successfully resolve issues when wildlife comes into conflict with human interests.

- Innovative: WS seeks to further develop practical and effective, science-based strategies and techniques by encouraging creativity and ingenuity from all employees.

KEY CHALLENGES:

The following are some of the significant challenges facing the WS program today.

1. Limited Resources for Wildlife Damage Management and Research:

WS works on a cost-share basis with cooperators to protect resources. In many cases, cooperators pay 100% of the costs associated with wildlife damage management. Small farms and ranches depend on WS' expertise in reducing losses to predators and agricultural damage. The majority of WS activities are with small farms, ranches, and other private entities and funded through Cooperative Service Agreements (CSA's). WS' Federal appropriations include Congressional earmarks that are not part of CSA reimbursable programs. Increases in the number of activities that are not funded through Congressional earmarks require small agricultural producers to fund greater portions of the operational costs of wildlife damage management, and this is becoming increasingly more difficult to accomplish.

The scientific process is a multi-year endeavor. Because the Federal funding process is annually based and often unpredictable, maintaining stable, long-term funding to support research remains a challenge. Changing Agency priorities, mandates, and evolving security requirements often compete with limited available resources.

2. Increasing Suburban Growth and Detachment from Agriculture and Wildlife:

The number of farms in the United States has declined over the last 30 years, and the general population is increasingly removed from rural communities and agrarian practices. In fact, the last complete set of data collected by the *Census of Agriculture* shows that between 1974 and 2002, the total number of acres of farmland had dropped by approximately 78 million. This means that some portion of the acres that had previously provided habitat for wildlife was developed into urban or suburban neighborhoods or communities. As a result, fewer individuals have an understanding of the interface between wildlife and agriculture, much less the potential damage that wildlife can cause to farmers or other sectors of rural economies. This makes it increasingly difficult for the public to understand and appreciate the need for reducing wildlife damage related to agriculture production in rural environments.

3. Strengthening Communications with Stakeholders:

WS' stakeholders are diverse and range from the Program's direct consumers (e.g., livestock producers, airports administrators, State agencies) to animal advocacy groups that oppose lethal control in addition to various other methods. Between these two perspectives lies the majority of the American public who often have little, if any, knowledge of WS, but whose understanding and support are needed to accomplish the Program's mission. This central group is the target of critics of the WS program and

therefore is susceptible to misinformation. WS should emphasize increased communication with this group of stakeholders.

4. Increasing Wildlife Populations:

Populations of Canada geese, white-tailed deer, double-crested cormorants, coyotes, bears, mountain lions, wolves, beaver, and other wildlife species have increased significantly in many parts of the United States. The increases have been the result of land use changes, relocations by State wildlife agencies, and decreased hunting and trapping by the public, in addition to a variety of other reasons. These overabundant populations of animals in close proximity to humans often result in increased wildlife damage to property and increased human health and safety concerns.

5. Increased Role in “Emergencies” Lead to Erosion for WS

APHIS has significantly increased its involvement in a variety of national emergencies. For example, its increased role in the national emergency response structure, as the lead Federal agency for Emergency Support Function (ESF) 11 has enabled all APHIS programs to provide valuable expertise to agricultural emergencies. However, under the ESF-11, APHIS now plays a lead role in responding to a broader array of emergencies, including natural disasters, which the agency historically has not been involved in. WS will continue to be challenged in responding to regional and national emergencies while striving to respond to traditional requests for assistance.

6. Keeping Pace with Evolving Information Technology

Technological advances have had a positive impact on the wildlife damage management field, but the WS program faces challenges in identifying and implementing new technologies because of time and distance. However, the slow, deliberate (and often cumbersome) procurement process that Federal managers must use makes it difficult to keep up with technology. In many cases, the core work being performed by WS employees is in remote locations where connectivity issues make it difficult for the program to take advantage of some of these technologies, even if they were available and affordable to managers.

7. Workforce Diversity in the Wildlife Management Field:

The wildlife management profession and the WS’ workforce have traditionally been dominated by white males. WS must continue to identify creative and practical ways to find, recruit, and retain highly skilled individuals including women, minorities, and people with non-traditional wildlife biology backgrounds. WS must continue working hard to attract a diverse workforce that can provide technical help to customers, professionally communicate science-based wildlife damage management information, and provide creative and thoughtful solutions to a growing variety of wildlife damage management issues.

II. Key Partners

WS is specifically authorized to enter into cooperative programs with Government agencies, public and private institutions, organizations, and associations, and private

citizens to manage conflicts with wildlife. Memoranda of Understanding or other agreements between WS and other Federal agencies and appropriate State regulatory agencies define and clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of each agency for resolving wildlife conflicts.

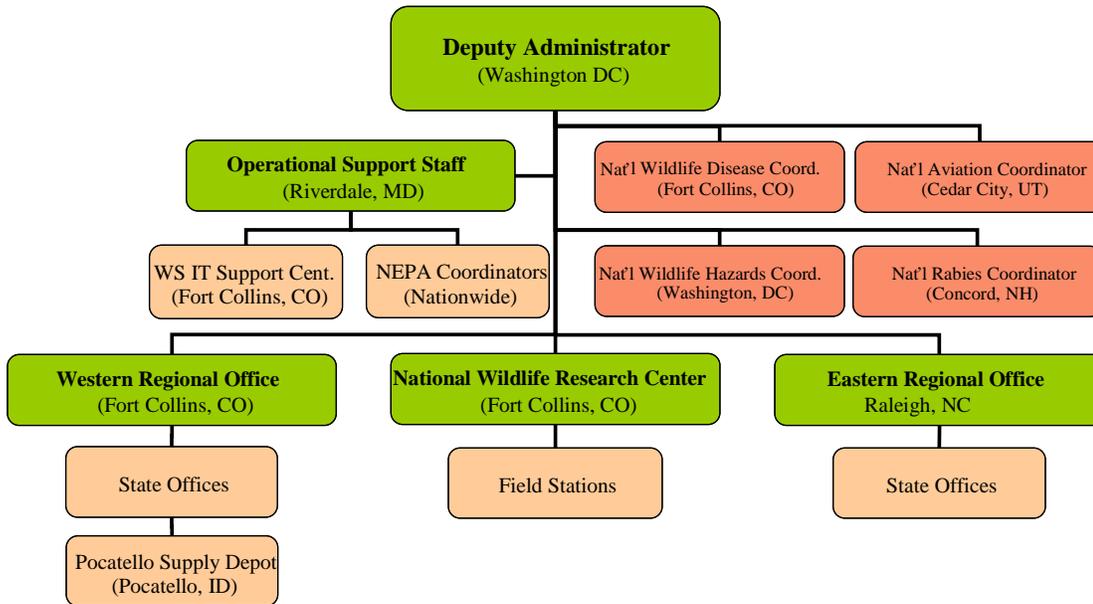
Collaborators, partners and stakeholders include the following:

- Other APHIS programs
- Federal agencies
- State agencies
- Tribal nations
- Local and foreign governments
- International and domestic non-government organizations
- Agricultural commodity organizations
- Industry
- Colleges and universities
- Individual and groups of research scientists
- Scientific and professional societies
- Environmental and animal activist organizations
- U.S. animal and public health laboratories
- Homeowners and neighborhood associations
- General public
- Animal activist groups

III. Organizational Chart



WILDLIFE SERVICES



WS employs over 1,900 biologists, scientists, technicians, IT professionals, and administrative personnel. The Office of the Deputy Administrator provides overall Program leadership and oversight. The Operational Support Staff provides technical and administrative support for the Deputy’s office and WS field programs. Field programs are directed from the Eastern Regional and Western Regional offices. The National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) is the research arm for WS and provides scientific information on conflicts between humans and wildlife as well as develops methods to mitigate or prevent damage.

IV. Linkage to the USDA Secretary’s Priorities and the APHIS Strategic Plan

The Secretary of Agriculture has put forth four priority goals for USDA and an overarching priority that emphasizes the multitude of ways that USDA programs impact people across the Nation in their daily lives. WS has an important role to play in supporting each of the Secretary’s priorities.

The Secretary's Overarching Goal: USDA's constituents understand and appreciate what the Agency can do for them *every day in every way*, because USDA employees are engaged, valued, and productively serving the people of America and the world.

WS employees have direct contact with the public every day and build partnerships with a variety of stakeholders to carry out the Agency's important work. WS routinely seeks to create positive work environments where employees feel valued and have the proper tools and developmental opportunities to perform their jobs effectively.

USDA Priority Goal 1: Rural communities create wealth so they are self-sustaining, repopulating, and economically thriving.

WS supports the viability of rural communities every day by protecting the health and value of American agricultural, natural, and other resources. For example, WS actions include mitigating pests and diseases to stimulate economic growth and protect and enhance agricultural and natural resources in many rural areas; and reducing economic losses to agricultural resources caused by wildlife.

USDA Priority Goal 2: National forest and private working lands enhance our water resources and are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change.

WS protects national forest and private working lands by detecting and combating invasive species on a daily basis. Together with other agencies, producers, and industry, WS conducts programs to prevent, control, and eliminate threats including reducing damage to timber resources caused by deer and black bears; and removing beaver dams that block waterways and flood standing timber.

USDA Priority Goal 3: USDA helps promote sustainable agricultural production and biotech exports as America works to increase food security.

WS' role through promoting research which supports economic and environmentally viable agriculture systems includes information transfer to private industry, and operational activities to protect genetically engineered crops from foraging wildlife.

USDA Priority Goal 4: America's children have access to safe, nutritious, and balanced meals.

WS helps keep safe, nutritious food accessible and affordable by preventing the entry and establishment of agricultural pests and diseases and minimizing production losses. WS' efforts also help create consumer confidence in the health of agricultural products.

In addition, APHIS has the following six Strategic goals. Four of these are aimed at specific program work and two are organizational priorities.

1. Safeguarding the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems domestically and in other countries;

2. Strengthening emergency response preparedness
3. Facilitating safe trade through international standard setting and effective management of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) issues
4. Enhancing the well-being of animals covered by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and the Horse Protection Act (HPA).
5. Valuing and Investing in APHIS Employees
6. Accomplishing the mission through effective and efficient program management

WS has important linkages to goals 1, 2, 5 and 6.

Links to Goal 1: Safeguarding Animal and Plant Health

While WS has historically protected a variety of agricultural, natural resources, and property, the past 5-7 years has seen a significant integration of WS activities with other APHIS programs. These programs are now recognizing the strong connection between wildlife health and the potential threats to agricultural trade, disease transmission to domestic herds and flocks, human health and safety, and the protection of habitats and native species. After an outbreak of High Path Avian Influenza, many APHIS programs became aware that diseases affecting domestic poultry also have the potential to affect wildlife. Managing the spread of disease with the goal of eradication requires considering the interface between wildlife and livestock. For example, the WS National Rabies Management Program (NRMP) is working to manage the spread and eventually eliminate terrestrial rabies in the United States. This program supports the “One Health Initiative,” a worldwide strategy recognizing that human and animal health are inextricably linked, and therefore promotes expanding interdisciplinary collaborations and communications. The NRMP has wildlife disease control implications for the protection of human and animal health nationally, continentally and globally.

Links to Goal 2: Emergency Response Preparedness

The establishment of a WS' National Wildlife Disease Surveillance and Emergency Response System (SERS) aligns with APHIS' goal to respond to a variety of emergency situations in a timely and effective manner. The emergency response portion of SERS is designed to implement disease management interventions or all hazards relief in a rapid response mode in reaction to a foreign disease incursion, epizootic of an endemic disease, or a natural disaster. Such a system requires dedicated personnel and equipment, training, and interagency communication and cooperation. WS' first responders provide a unique core of emergency response skills such as the use of firearms in urban areas (as needed in the 2004 Exotic Newcastle Disease outbreak), the use of specialized equipment such as airboats (as needed in our response during Hurricane Katrina), and the ability to implement an integrated urban wildlife damage management program in specialized environments like a high security crime scene (as occurred after 9/11 at the Fresh Kills Landfill in New York).

Links to Goal 5: Valuing and Investing in Employees

WS relies on the dedication of its employees and commitment to public service to provide an increasingly broad array of wildlife damage management services. WS managers provide their employees' training and development, and encourage

collaboration between operations and research. WS leadership has also developed a Programmatic Succession Plan and each Management Team member has agreed to oversee an area to ensure implementation of the plan.

In addition, WS prioritizes the safety of its employees. The 2008 Programmatic Safety Review of WS looked at nine key areas of work that were subject to safety concerns. In all of the areas, outside review panels found that WS had, and still maintains a strong commitment to the safety of its employees. WS leadership is currently implementing all recommendations made by these review groups to further strengthen the safety practices of WS employees.

Links to Goal 6: Effective and Efficient Program Management

WS works with cooperators to resolve wildlife conflicts in an effective and efficient manner. Operationally, WS received more than \$62 million in cooperative funding in Fiscal Year 2008. These cooperative funds provide clear evidence of the public's needs and requests for WS' professional approach to dealing with conflicts between wildlife and humans and the damage to various resources that sometimes occurs. WS also conducts Research Needs Assessments (RNA) to identify and prioritize national human-wildlife conflict issues requiring research attention. The RNA provides recommendations for the planning of new projects and focuses human and financial resources on the important priorities of the program and its customers. Furthermore, WS' financial and administrative support functions assure that managers have the information necessary to assess productivity, control costs, and guard against waste, fraud, and mismanagement.

V. Strategic Priorities:

WS has four strategic priorities that are the cornerstone of our management philosophy and program delivery to the American public:

- Deliver High Quality Service to Customers and Stakeholders
- Develop Effective Methods for Preventing or Reducing Wildlife Damage
- Value and Invest in WS Employees, and
- Inform and Communicate Regularly and Transparently with Customers, Stakeholders, and the General Public;

The WS Strategic Plan for 2010-2014 builds upon concepts and directions set forth in earlier strategic plans and reflects changes in both the organization of the WS program and in public attitudes and values related to natural resources.

What Will Not Change:

WS strives for the highest possible standards in providing service to the public. The public can continue to expect the following:

- accurate information and expert help to resolve or minimize wildlife conflicts;

- respect for people, property, and wildlife;
- respect for varying viewpoints on wildlife damage management;
- use of the most humane, selective, and effective control techniques possible;
- work to be conducted in a safe, effective, and environmentally sound manner;
- management decision based on sound science; and
- support of rural agricultural communities.

Goal 1:

<u>Providing Wildlife Services: Assess Our Ability to Deliver High Quality Service to New and Existing Customers and Stakeholders</u>
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Historically, outside WS, the view and relationship of wildlife to APHIS' primary role of protecting American agriculture has been limited. However, there has recently been a greater recognition of wildlife and the potential threats they create within APHIS' strategic planning.

WS will continue to provide high quality wildlife damage management and research services for all customers resulting in the protection of agriculture, wildlife and other natural resources, property, and human health and safety.

Where We Can Refocus:

- Improve WS' ability to respond to emergency work, including non-traditional agricultural or non-agricultural emergencies such as those described under ESF-11, without subverting resources from important traditional areas.
- Increase WS disease surveillance capacity for a broader range of emerging animal diseases.
- Expand feral swine damage management for agricultural, ecological and human health and safety purposes. WS will provide leadership in the areas of operational control, disease surveillance and monitoring, research to develop and improve methods and public education and outreach.
- Expand efforts to enhance public safety by providing timely and appropriate science-based assistance to the aviation community in preventing, investigating, monitoring, and reducing/eliminating wildlife hazards to meet the demand for safe air operations of the air transportation industry, Department of Defense, and the traveling public.
- Expand efforts to implement components of the cooperatively produced strategic planning documents, including the U.S. National Plan for Wildlife Rabies Management and the North American Rabies Management plan, which integrate U.S. rabies control plans with those in Canada and Mexico. These plans provide a framework to enhance coordination and collaboration to prevent further spread of key terrestrial

rabies variants and work towards continental elimination of rabies in carnivores.

- Improve management and provide leadership to industry and natural resource agencies for an effective, ecologically sound predation management program responsive to changes in the livestock industry, natural resource agencies, and societal values.

What Will Not Change:

- Our constituents, including farmers, ranchers, and other property owners and managers, will receive timely, professional assistance in resolving wildlife damage management problems.
- Program delivery and customer service are prioritized so that wildlife damage management programs are developed and delivered with excellence.
- WS will continue to recognize superior programmatic strategic planning through the annual presentation of a national WS Strategic Planning Award.

Goal 2:

<u>Methods Development: Develop Effective and Economical Methods for Managing Wildlife Damage for Some of our Most Pressing Wildlife Issues</u>
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Over the next five years, WS will strive to strengthen its research capacity through the following activities:

- Enhancing and strengthening expertise in wildlife disease and invasive species research;
- Encouraging and increasing flexibility among and between research programs to form teams and address new issues;
- Exploring new opportunities to secure multi-year funding for long-term research efforts.

What Will Not Change:

- A strong history of developing innovative and practical solutions to resolve human-wildlife conflicts. As a leader in wildlife research, we will continue to look ahead to identify and address new wildlife damage management issues.
- Utilization of the wildlife research needs assessment to identify and prioritize research needs.

Goal 3:

<u>Valuing and Investing in People: To Adequately Retain, Recruit and Develop Personnel at all Levels to Meet the Programs Demands</u>

WS is actively engaged in succession planning to better position and prepare for the challenges associated with retirements, other staff changes, and evolving workloads and focus areas. WS will continue to value and invest in its employees through the following activities and efforts:

- Develop and implement a WS mentoring program;
- Share information and decision-making and evaluation experiences appropriately with employees to create and foster leadership aspirations;
- Create opportunities for increased awareness of career pathways and the importance of communication, networking, and planned positioning;
- Enhance the quality of outreach at targeted universities, increasing faculty contacts, recruit at smaller colleges and universities, and develop a database of schools to utilize during recruitment and pre-announce vacancies.

What Will Not Change:

- WS success is largely dependent on the technical expertise of our personnel and this emphasis will continue.
- WS will recruit, develop, and retain highly skilled personnel who can respond with flexibility to the changing demands placed upon the program.
- Recognize employees for exemplary achievements and contributions.

Goal 4:

<u>Information and Communication: Improve Communication and Transparency with Employees, Customers, Stakeholders, and the General Public.</u>
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WS will strive to focus on improvements in communication, both internally and externally, to accomplish our mission and to build an understanding of the Federal role in wildlife damage management.

Where We Can Improve:

- Seek positive relationships within all segments of the public by defining common interests and goals.
- Increase focus of communication towards the American public who do not have an opinion of the program and may be targets of our critics' misinformation.
- Increase and optimize electronic media to improve the public's access and understanding of program information.

What Will Not Change:

- **Building Partnerships:** being active in developing and sharing information with Government agencies, public and private institutions, organizations and associations, and private citizens.
- **Open Communication:** being truthful and credible, professional, sharing appropriate information, attending public meetings, and being responsive to questions.
- The emphasis on internal information exchange and interactions between research and operational personnel.

Conclusion

The nature and complexity of wildlife-human conflicts is changing rapidly, as is the knowledge and attitudes of the American public towards these conflicts. This document provides a clearly articulated strategy for the WS program to continue to be leaders in the development and use of methods to protect agricultural and natural resources, human health and safety, and property from damage caused by wildlife.