

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2012

Texas



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Major Cooperators

- Texas AgriLife Extension, Texas A&M University System
- Texas Department of State Health Services
- Texas Wildlife Damage Management Association
- Texas Department of Agriculture
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Texas

Every day, the Wildlife Services (WS) program in Texas helps citizens, organizations, industries, and Government agencies resolve conflicts with wildlife to protect agriculture, other property, and natural resources, and to safeguard human health and safety. WS' professional wildlife biologists and specialists implement effective, selective, and responsible strategies that value wildlife, the environment, and the resources being protected. WS manages wildlife damage according to its public trust stewardship responsibilities as a Federal natural resource management program. WS supports the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, based on the principle that wildlife resources are owned collectively and held in trust by Government for the benefit of present and future generations.

Texas is a diverse mix of urban and suburban areas, agricultural lands, forest, and desert environments and is home to more than 22 million people. Texas has more farms (157,000) and farm acreage than any other State. At the same time, Texas has 24 cities with populations of 100,000 or more. This combination of wildlife, people, and their associated conflicts makes the WS-Texas program the largest wildlife damage management program in the United States. Each year the Agency provides service on more than 5,500 properties covering more than 18 million acres.

Applying Science and Expertise to Help the Public

WS frequently provides information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this technical assistance can be provided in person, by telephone or through the mail or internet. During 2012, WS delivered technical advice and recommendations to more than 1.6 million people.

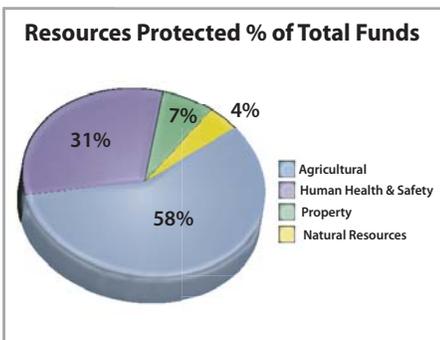
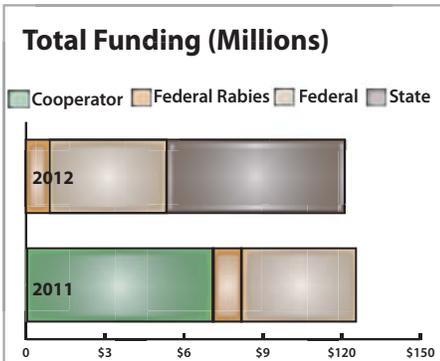
In most cases, landowners and resource managers use technical information to implement habitat management and other methods to reduce damage on their properties. For example, technical assistance is provided to assist landowners manage feral swine damage. During 2012 alone, WS personnel in Texas conducted more than 1,000 feral swine technical assistance events reaching more than 25,000 individuals and providing more than 20,000 feral swine leaflets and brochures.

WS also implements solutions on-site, through direct management assistance, when the wildlife-related problem is complex and cannot be safely or effectively resolved by others. WS' National Wildlife Research Center conducts scientific research and assessments to refine methods and develop new science-based solutions to wildlife challenges.

WS applies and recommends an integrated wildlife damage management approach that incorporates biological, economic, public, environmental and other information into decision making. WS implements a wide range of damage management activities. The following examples highlight WS' role in protecting resources in Texas.

Protecting Livestock from Predation—Despite producers' best efforts to protect their livestock, thousands of domesticated farm animals are killed by predators each year. The most recent reports by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) for cattle (2011) and sheep and goat (2010) indicate predation on more than 647 thousand head of livestock annually, resulting in combined losses of nearly \$138 million. Producers often turn to WS for assistance in reducing and preventing further predation. The integrated approach implemented by WS includes recommendations that are applied by the producers and, in many cases, operational wildlife management implemented by WS.

The cooperative WS program in Texas spends significant time assisting the sheep and goat industries to prevent predation by working with ranchers to increase non-lethal methods and by removing predators when necessary. With the largest sheep and goat inventory in the country, WS' efforts in Texas prevent significant losses.



United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Monitoring and Controlling Wildlife Diseases—WS works with Federal and State wildlife, health, and agriculture agencies to monitor and conduct surveillance for diseases in wildlife that could impact agriculture or human health. The program's Wildlife Disease Biologists act as WS' first responders through the National Wildlife Disease Program's Surveillance and Emergency Response System (SERS). Information obtained through disease surveillance in wildlife populations enables agencies to better prepare for and respond to outbreaks and emergencies.

WS-Texas assists its partners in surveillance for tuberculosis and brucellosis, and was instrumental in the detection of chronic wasting disease. WS-Texas also cooperates with the Texas Department of State Health Services in the monitoring of plague and tularemia. Approximately 18% of the WS program's national feral swine disease samples come from Texas.

Protecting People and Animals from Rabies—Rabies poses a serious threat to public and animal health. Although human deaths from rabies are rare, the estimated public health costs associated with rabies detection, prevention, and control nationally exceed \$300 million annually. WS coordinates cooperative oral rabies vaccination (ORV) programs in the United States with the goal of controlling and eventually eliminating certain rabies variants to protect human and animal health and reduce associated costs. This management program is one of the largest coordinated efforts to control a disease in wildlife populations ever undertaken in North America.

In 2012, following the elimination of the canine rabies variant from Texas, and after more than two years without a gray fox variant case, the Texas ORV program focused its efforts along the international border to prevent a resurgence within the State. Approximately 1 million coated sachets were distributed in a 25-mile wide maintenance zone along the Rio Grande River from the Gulf of Mexico to Presidio County.

Reducing the Negative Impacts of Feral Swine—Feral swine, an invasive species, are prolific breeders and thrive in rural, suburban, and urban habitats. By 2012, their populations had expanded to at least 38 States, numbering approximately 5 million animals. This expanding population and distribution is associated with property damage and negative effects on public health, domestic animal health, crop production, and natural resources. Currently, the total aggregate cost of damage is estimated to be \$1.5 billion annually, with at least \$800 million related to direct costs to agriculture.

Almost half of the feral swine in the United States are located in Texas. WS-Texas conducts the largest damage control program in the nation, and is a leader in developing methods for feral swine removal for the protection of crops, rangeland, and natural resources.

Protecting Multiple Resources from Beaver Damage—Beaver historically have been a valuable economic and natural resource. During the past 20 years their populations have increased throughout the United States due to lower demand for beaver products and subsequent decreases in recreational trapping. This growth has positive impacts, such as increased wetland habitat, as well as negative effects from dam building and tree cutting. Beaver dams back up water that floods and kills valuable timber and destroys or damages cropland, roadways, sewer and septic systems, and water treatment and electric utilities. Dams may also negatively affect fish populations by changing the movement and temperature of stream water. Beavers cut down trees that are valued for timber production and landscaping.

WS-Texas conducts beaver damage management to protect flood control structures, roads and bridges, and private property. Given the recent drought, beaver damage has been minimal, but beavers concentrate around road culverts and bridges and their bank dens can cause the complete failure of flood control dams. Beaver damage management is an important activity, especially in the eastern third of Texas.

Looking to the Future

WS continues to provide the citizens of Texas with safe, effective, and responsible management assistance for a variety of wildlife damage problems. The potential for human-wildlife conflicts likely will increase and WS' ability to respond will depend on the availability of personnel and resources, as well as legislative authorities to support these activities.

In Texas, WS is receiving increasing numbers of requests for assistance with problems associated with feral swine, coyotes in urban/suburban areas, wildlife diseases, blackbirds and starlings. WS-Texas is also providing leadership in the restoration of endangered species including the black-footed ferret and Kemp's ridley sea turtles.

WS strives to meet the demands for assistance within the constraints of its existing resources and capabilities so that all citizens have access to program services. Collaborative, partner-based approaches will be increasingly important among natural resource, agriculture, and health agencies to meet public needs.

Wildlife Services Funding in Texas

In addition to receiving Federally allocated funds, WS also receives funding from program beneficiaries such as agricultural producers, airports, individual citizens, businesses, organizations, and other Federal, State, and local Government agencies. See charts for sources of funding and resources protected.

In Texas, two-thirds of the funding for the cooperative program is provided by the State, counties or ranchers. Federal dollars comprise the minority of the funding to conduct WS programs in Texas.

Top 5 Major WS Assistance Activities in Texas

- Protecting livestock from predation
- Protecting bridges, roads, timber, crops, and natural resources from beaver damage
- Assessing and reducing wildlife hazards at airports
- Reducing impacts of invasive feral swine
- Protecting the public, domestic pets, and livestock from rabies

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Texas

- Developing tools/methods to reduce feral swine damage to agriculture and natural resources
- Quantifying and assessing the damage caused by starlings to confined animal feeding operations
- Evaluating the effectiveness of wildlife damage management to reduce predation damage to livestock
- Evaluating and monitoring wildlife for diseases
- Conducting research in support of Government registration of feral swine toxicants