

# Wildlife Services

Protecting People  
Protecting Agriculture  
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2012

# Florida



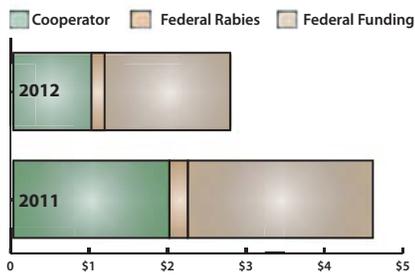
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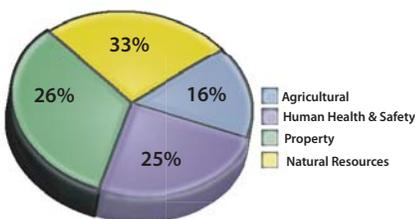
## Major Cooperators

- U.S. Air Force
- U.S. Navy
- American Tower
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- Southwest Florida Water Management District
- Columbia County
- Sea Turtle Conservancy
- Seminole Electric
- NASA

## Total Funding (Millions)



## Resources Protected % of Total Funds



## USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Florida

Every day, the Wildlife Services (WS) program in Florida 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.

Specific projects conducted by WS-Florida include protecting endangered piping plovers and sea turtles, sampling and monitoring for wildlife diseases, leading efforts to eliminate invasive vertebrates, and managing damage caused by feral hogs, beavers, vultures, and other wildlife.

## 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 by telephone, 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.

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.

**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 nearly 647 thousand head of livestock annually, resulting in combined losses of more than \$138 million.

One full-time wildlife specialist provides management in Columbia County to protect calves and lambs from coyotes. Florida ranchers receive hands-on advice and assistance with obtaining permits to control black vultures killing newborn calves.

**Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports**—Wildlife strikes cause more than 760,000 hours of aircraft down time and cost the nation's civil aviation industry approximately \$700 million annually. American military aircraft sustain losses exceeding \$10 million annually. WS collaborates closely with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Department of Defense, and other Government agencies.

With more than 100 airports, Florida ranks second in reported wildlife collisions. The latest FAA report indicated 8,747 bird strikes from 1990 to 2012. Applying scientific expertise, WS-Florida provided direct assistance to 20 airports and military air bases and technical assistance to 11 other airports in 2012.

**Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species and Other Natural Resources**—WS contributes to the conservation of species listed as threatened and endangered (T&E)



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

through partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), State wildlife agencies, organizations, and landowners. In 2012, programs-Florida protected 41 T&E species including four sea turtle species and 20 plant species.

**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.

WS-Florida monitors for wildlife diseases that may pose threats to humans, wildlife, domestic pets, and livestock. WS-Florida collects over 1,500 wildlife disease samples yearly including avian influenza, baylisascaris procyonis, classical swine fever, foot and mouth disease, hepatitis, leptospirosis, Newcastle disease, swine influenza, swine brucellosis, toxoplasmosis, and tularemia. Cooperating agencies include Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Departments of Health and Agriculture, USDA/APHIS Veterinary Services, and the Centers for Disease Control.

**Protecting Florida from Invasive Species including Feral Swine**—Invasive species may prey upon, displace, or otherwise harm native species. Some also alter ecosystems, transport disease, interfere with crop production, or cause illnesses in animals and humans. Executive Order 13112 establishes Federal leadership responsibilities regarding invasive species. WS-Florida conducts invasive species management in partnership with Federal and State agencies.

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 five 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. .

Feral swine numbers and damage also increased dramatically in Florida. Feral swine have limited natural predators. From 2000 to 2012, WS received requests for direct assistance from multiple counties, homeowner associations, State parks, water management districts, and military bases. These typically involved damage to sensitive wetlands, forests, croplands, T&E species, erosion and siltation of streams and ponds, and threats of disease transmission.

To address these problems, cooperatively funded programs were established with eight WS professionals to trap and remove feral swine.

**Protecting Aquaculture and Natural Resources from Fish-eating Birds**—The U.S. aquaculture industry is valued at more than \$613 million per year in processed product sales. Wildlife depredation, especially by fish-eating birds, can significantly impact production. WS provides recommendations and direct management assistance to aquaculture producers to reduce losses to fish-eating birds, while supporting migratory bird conservation.

Florida, home to the world's largest tropical fish industry, has large foodfish and baitfish industries. Two WS biologists and two technicians, trained in protecting aquaculture from predators, provide technical and direct assistance to fish farmers.

**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 due to lower demand for beaver products and subsequent decreases in recreational trapping. This growth has positive effects, such as increased wetland habitat, as well as negative impacts 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, water treatment and electric utilities. Dams may also negatively impact fish populations by changing the movement and temperature of stream water.

Florida counties, cities, State parks, military bases, and water management district's request assistance. Resources protected include the federally threatened Okaloosa Darter, a small fish that inhabits fast-flowing streams whose only suitable habitat occurs on and around Eglin Air Force Base.

**Responding to Emergencies**—WS has a long history of responding to emergency requests for assistance from farmers, ranchers, and others. On emergency response teams, WS employees use their specialized skills to capture and safely handle almost any wildlife species found in the United States. WS expertise has been instrumental in recovering wild and domestic animals, hazing wildlife away from contaminated areas, and conducting emergency control.

WS-Florida is a participating member of the Florida State Agriculture Response Team, which conducts readiness exercises and organizes resources anticipating emergencies like tropical storms, fires, and other disasters. Most recently, WS-Florida responded to the Deep-water Horizon Oil Spill to help recover wildlife coated with oil.

### Looking to the Future

WS continues to provide Florida citizens with safe, effective, and responsible management assistance for varied wildlife damage problems. The potential for human-wildlife conflicts likely will increase and WS' ability to respond will depend on personnel and resource availability, as well as supportive legislative authorities.

WS-Florida receives increasing requests for assistance to problems with wildlife at airports and military bases, T&E species protection, feral swine, and invasive species. Predators continue to adversely impact localized T&E species populations. Targeted predator removal allows for increased reproduction and survival.

As development reduces natural areas and feral swine populations increase, more protection is need on remaining areas.

WS strives to meet the demands within the constraints of its existing resources and capabilities so that all citizens access 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 Florida

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.

### Top 5 Major WS Assistance Activities in Florida

- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Protecting T&E species and their habitats from wildlife damage
- Managing damage caused by vultures, feral swine, beaver, and coyotes
- Protecting aquaculture and other agricultural interests from wildlife damage
- Reducing impacts of invasive species

### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Florida

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Identifying and refining methods to control predators of endangered species
- Improving surveillance and monitoring techniques
- Improving techniques for reducing wildlife damage to aquaculture and agriculture
- Defining and reducing impacts of invasive species