

# Wildlife Services

Protecting People  
Protecting Agriculture  
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2015

# Montana

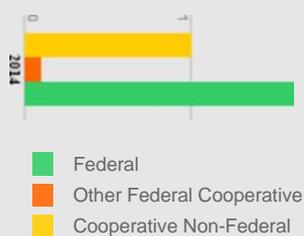


### Contact Information:

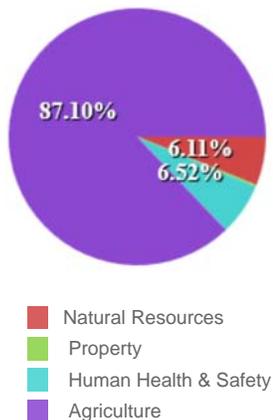
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### Total Funding (\$ Million)



### Resources Protected % of Total Funds



### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Montana

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

With one million inhabitants, Montana is one of the least populated States but the fourth largest in size and second in agricultural lands, with almost 60 million acres of ranch and farm land. Agriculture, particularly cattle and sheep production, is vital to the State's economy. WS-Montana focuses its efforts on managing the junction between livestock and 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 in person, by telephone, or through the mail or internet. During 2014, WS delivered technical advice and recommendations to more than 1.6 million people.

In most cases, landowners and resource managers implement habitat management and the recommendation to reduce damage. In Montana, WS spends considerable time educating ranchers on methods to reduce predation on livestock caused by coyotes, mountain lions, black bears, grizzly bears, and gray wolves. Ranchers invest in nonlethal methods including guard dogs, electric fences, night penning, herders, range riders, and carcass removal.

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 Crops and Other Agricultural Resources** — Agricultural landscapes provide abundant wildlife habitat. WS assists farmers and ranchers throughout the United States to protect crops and other agricultural resources and facilities from damage caused by waterfowl, black bears, and other species. WS-Montana provides technical assistance to landowners with recommendations on protecting crops such as wheat from Canada geese.

**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 647,000 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 Montana livestock industry and State agencies recognize WS leadership in reducing damage to livestock and other property cause by predators including ravens, red foxes, coyotes, mountain lions, and bears.

WS conducts all investigations on livestock reportedly killed by predators. The Department of Livestock has authorized WS to administer the Department's aerial operations to protect livestock from wildlife species under their management authority including coyotes. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Department (MFWP) has authorized WS to conduct damage management to protect agricultural resources from wildlife under their management authority including black bears, mountain lions, and gray wolves. The U.S. Fish



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

and Wildlife Service (FWS) and MFWP have authorized WS to conduct grizzly bear damage management according to the Endangered Species Act.

**Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports** — Wildlife strikes cause more than 590,000 hours of aircraft down time and cost the nation's civil aviation industry approximately \$937 million annually. American military aircraft sustain losses exceeding \$10 million annually. WS has assisted the Nation's airports for decades and collaborates closely with the Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Defense, and other government agencies. WS provided assistance to 839 airports in 2014.

WS-Montana has worked at several State airports, including Great Falls International Airport, Billings Logan International Airport, and the Montana Air National Guard Facilities providing both technical assistance and direct operations to reduce wildlife strike threats. It has completed numerous wildlife hazard assessments at Montana airports and conducts annual BASH training at all certificated airports in Montana.

**Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species and Other Natural Resources** — WS contributes to the conservation of species listed as threatened and endangered (T&E) through partnerships with the FWS, State wildlife agencies, organizations, and landowners. During 2014, WS safeguarded populations of 162 T&E species nationwide.

WS-Montana works closely with the FWS and MFWP to manage damage to livestock and property caused by grizzly bear, a Federally threatened species. WS conducts the initial investigation to determine if a grizzly bear was responsible for depredation. If so, and upon a request from the FWS and MFWP, WS-Montana attempts to capture the responsible bear. WS typically transfers custody to the State for final disposition, most commonly relocation. Such efforts improve knowledge of the grizzly population through radio-collaring and research.

Beginning in 2014, WS-Montana began assisting the FWS, MFWP, World Wildlife Fund, and the Fort Belknap Indian Community in protecting black-tailed prairie dogs and black-footed ferrets, Federally listed as endangered, black-footed ferrets from plague outbreaks. WS-Montana did so by applying DeltaDust to prairie dogs colonies to control fleas that transmit plague to the prairie dogs and ferrets.

**Monitoring and Controlling Rabies and Other 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. Information obtained through disease surveillance in wildlife populations enables agencies to better prepare for and respond to outbreaks and emergencies. WS-Montana conducts disease surveillance for plague, tularemia, leptospirosis, epizootic hemorrhagic disease, rabies, parvo virus, and avian influenza.

**Responding to Emergencies** — WS has a long history of responding to emergency requests for assistance from farmers, ranchers, and others. Increasingly, WS is asked to assist in responding to natural and manmade disasters such as hurricanes, floods, and oil spills. 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 wildlife disease surveillance and emergency control. WS' National Wildlife Disease Program biologists have extensive training in the Incident Command System, and can be quickly mobilized.

WS-Montana participates in coordinating emergency response activities, planning, and training with Federal, State, and local

agencies. WS participates on the Montana Pest Risk Management Committee, Agricultural Emergency Preparedness Committee, and training workshops. WS also received critical training involving the threat of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical and biological threats.

In 2011, WS-Montana put its training and expertise to the test helping capture oiled wildlife affected by the Yellowstone River oil spill. It was instrumental in capturing oiled wild waterfowl for rehabilitation and eventual release.

### Looking to the Future

WS continues to provide the citizens of Montana 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.

Grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem populations have increased in numbers and expanded onto the prairie. Recovered and removed from endangered species designation, wolves in the state continue to maintain population numbers that are well above delisting criteria. Simultaneously WS is receiving additional requests to deal with livestock predation.

Traffic continues to increase at Montana's airports along with hazards posed by wildlife, especially birds. In particular, Canada geese numbers are increasing and fewer migrate in winter, which causes increased bird strike risks. Airports seek WS expertise to reduce this strike hazard.

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 Montana

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.

All of Montana's livestock producers contribute funds through a state livestock per capita tax to support WS' livestock protection efforts. Sheep producers in 47 counties and cattle producers in 26 counties provide additional funding for livestock protection through county livestock taxes.

### Top 5 Major WS Assistance Activities in Montana

- Protecting livestock from predation
- Assessing and reducing wildlife hazards at airports
- Protecting black-tailed prairie dogs and the Federally listed as endangered black-footed ferret from plague epidemics
- Assessing and reducing public health threats from wildlife diseases
- Protecting agricultural crops from damage caused by Canada geese

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

- Developing tools/methods to reduce predator damage to livestock
- Quantifying and assessing the damage caused by predators to livestock
- Evaluating the effectiveness of wildlife damage management to reduce wildlife strike hazards at airports
- Evaluating and monitoring coyotes, wolves, and red foxes for diseases (plague, parvo virus, leptospirosis)
- Investigating the biology/ecology/behavior of wolves

### Major Cooperators:

- Montana Stockgrowers Association
- Montana Wool Growers Association
- Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Department
- Montana Department of Livestock
- Montana Livestock Loss Board