

# Wildlife Services

Protecting People  
Protecting Agriculture  
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2015

# Virginia

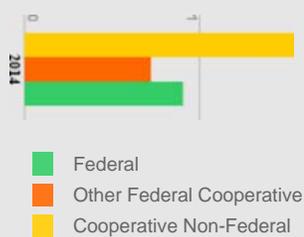


## Contact Information:

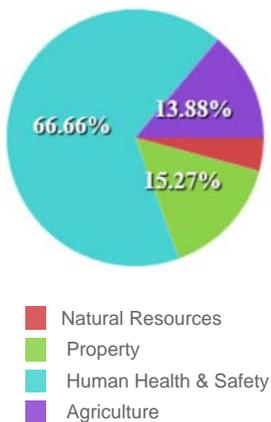
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## Total Funding (\$ Million)



## Resources Protected % of Total Funds



## USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Virginia

Every day, the Wildlife Services (WS) program in Virginia helps citizens, organizations, industries, and Government agencies resolve conflicts with wildlife to protect agriculture, private and public property, 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.

Virginia is home to abundant wildlife populations, a diverse agricultural community, a large and complex transportation and utility infrastructure, commerce vital to the nation's economy, military facilities vital to the nation's defense, and the people who make these things possible. WS-Virginia partners with State and local contacts to reduce wildlife-related conflicts while minimizing impacts to treasured wildlife resources.

## 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.

WS works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to document damage and issue migratory bird depredation permits and with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) to issue agricultural depredation permits to farmers experiencing resident Canada goose damage. In FY 2014, WS partnered with VDGIF to implement a toll-free wildlife conflict assistance line, providing assistance to more than 8,000 callers in the first year.

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. The following examples highlight WS' role in protecting resources in Virginia.

**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 more than \$138 million.

Coyote predation on sheep, goats, and calves has escalated since the 1980's. Vultures will also kill lambs and calves, injuring adult livestock during the birthing process. Prior to the WS predation management program, the average sheep producer lost 17 lambs to coyotes annually, compared to today's losses of two sheep per farm.

**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 collaborates closely with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Department of Defense, and other Government agencies and assisted 839 airports in 2014.

WS works with the FAA, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, Virginia Department of Aviation, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and most passenger airports to reduce wildlife threats to aviation in Virginia.

**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. Virginia's barrier islands are home to the State's most sensitive bird populations, many impacted by predation from raccoons, red fox, and gulls. In a public-private effort, WS implemented predator removal to enhance nesting success of piping plovers, American oyster catchers, and gull-billed terns.

Protected mussel species in the Clinch and Powell River drainages have yet to recover from historic over-harvest and water quality problems. WS assists their recovery by removing muskrats and raccoons that eat rare mussels and beaver that bury them with silt.



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

WS also protects T&E plants threatened by the Commonwealth's burgeoning beaver populations where dam-building and flooding threatens stands of swamp pink and small whorled pogonia.

**Protecting People and Animals from Rabies** — 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 U.S with the goal of controlling and eventually eliminating certain rabies variants. This management program is one of the largest coordinated efforts to control a disease in wildlife populations ever undertaken in North America. WS-Virginia participates in this multi-state effort to prevent the westward spread of raccoon rabies, implementing a 35-mile wide barrier of vaccinated raccoons along the Appalachian Ridge. Since 1992 ORV operations have distributed more than 155 million vaccine baits across 19 States by air and ground.

**Protecting Virginia from Invasive Species** — Nonnative species that cause harm are collectively known as invasive species. 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 sits on the Virginia Invasive Species Advisory Committee, which coordinates many invasive species management programs in the Commonwealth. Virginia's agricultural and natural resources are impacted by invasive species including feral cats, feral swine, monk parakeets, nutria, snakehead fish, and many insects and plants.

**Reducing the Negative Impacts of Feral Swine** — Feral swine, an invasive species, are prolific breeders that 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.

Feral swine are rapidly expanding their range, populations, and impacts in Virginia. WS-Virginia is working closely with the Virginia Departments of Game and Inland Fisheries and Agriculture and Consumer Services to identify populations of feral swine, monitor diseases in these populations, and remove feral swine from the landscape.

**Addressing Property Damage Caused by Vultures** — Statewide black and turkey vulture populations have increased dramatically. Vultures damage property by ripping roofing materials and rubber vent seals. On vehicles, they scratch paint and destroy rubber windshield seals and wipers. Congregating in roosts of 50 to 400 birds, accumulated vulture feces may cause human health risks. WS helps communities establish harassment programs to disperse vultures and, when necessary, to obtain Federal permits to shoot birds, which reinforces harassment.

**Protecting Aquaculture and Resources from Fish-eating Birds** — The United States 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.

Double-crested cormorants use many State water bodies as migratory stopover and wintering habitats. Some cormorants also breed in Virginia. In 2010 and 2011, WS responded to requests to disperse cormorants from reservoirs and public property where guano accumulations were damaging water-craft, killing island vegetation, and contributing to soil erosion.

**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. Beaver presence increases wetland habitats, but in some areas that is problematic.

Beaver damage Virginia highways and railways by flooding, saturating road beds, and felling trees, which increases maintenance costs and threatens highway safety. They also interfere with water management systems designed to treat storm water runoff and manage wildlife habitat. WS assists the transportation department, county governments, and wildlife managers by making site and wetland evaluations and removing problem beaver.

**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. 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.

#### **Looking to the Future**

In Virginia, WS is receiving increasing requests for assistance with problems associated with bald eagles, Canada geese, coyotes, feral cats, feral swine, nutria, and vultures. Given constraints on Government resources, WS will work with other agencies to more efficiently resolve human-wildlife conflicts affecting Government operations and constituencies and meet the demands for assistance within the constraints of its existing resources and capabilities so that all citizens have access to program services.

#### **Wildlife Services Funding in Virginia**

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 Virginia**

- Assessing and reducing wildlife hazards at airports
- Protecting livestock and T&E species from predation
- Protecting bridges, roads, and natural resources from beaver damage
- Managing migratory birds to protect human safety and property
- Protecting the public, pets, and livestock from rabies

#### **Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Virginia**

- Evaluating the effectiveness of raptor relocation as a management tool at airports.
- Developing effective strategies for managing eagles at airports
- Quantifying and assessing the damage caused by resident Canada geese to human safety and property
- Developing effective methods for communicating information on human-wildlife conflicts
- Evaluating the role of feral cat colonies on human-wildlife conflicts

#### **Major Cooperators:**

- Capital Region Airport Commission
- Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- Norfolk Airport Authority
- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Department of Defense
- Virginia Farm Bureau Federation
- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Virginia Department of Aviation
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- Virginia Department of Health
- Virginia Department of Transportation