

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
(FINAL)

**Managing Damage and Threats of Damage caused by Birds in the  
State of North Dakota**

Prepared by

United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service  
Wildlife Services

March 2021



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wildlife are an important public resource that can provide economic, recreational, emotional, and esthetic benefits to many people. However, wildlife can cause damage to agricultural resources, natural resources, property, and threaten human safety. When people experience damage caused by wildlife or when wildlife threatens to cause damage, people may seek assistance from other entities. The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) program is the lead federal agency responsible for managing conflicts between people and wildlife. Therefore, people experiencing damage or threats of damage associated with wildlife could seek assistance from WS. In North Dakota, WS has and continues to receive requests for assistance to reduce and prevent damage associated with several bird species.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to incorporate environmental planning into federal agency actions and decision-making processes. Therefore, if WS provided assistance by conducting activities to manage damage caused by bird species, those activities would be a federal action requiring compliance with the NEPA. The NEPA requires federal agencies to have available and fully consider detailed information regarding environmental effects of federal actions and to make information regarding environmental effects available to interested persons and agencies. To comply with the NEPA, WS prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) to determine whether the potential environmental effects caused by several alternative approaches to managing bird damage might be significant, requiring the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). WS developed this EA under the 1978 NEPA regulations and existing APHIS NEPA implementing procedures because WS initiated this EA prior to the NEPA revisions that went into effect on September 14, 2020.

Chapter 1 of this EA discusses the need for action and the scope of analysis associated with requests for assistance that WS receives involving several bird species in North Dakota. Chapter 2 identifies and discusses the issues that WS identified during the scoping process for this EA and through consultation with state and federal agencies. Issues are concerns regarding potential effects that might occur from proposed activities. Federal agencies must consider such issues during the decision-making process required by the NEPA. Chapter 2 also discusses the alternative approaches that WS developed to meet the need for action and to address the issues identified during the scoping process.

Issues of concern addressed in detail include: 1) effects on target bird populations, 2) effects on non-target species, including threatened and endangered species, 3) effects of management methods on human health and safety, and 4) humaneness and animal welfare concerns of methods. Alternative approaches evaluated to meet the need for action and to address the issues include: 1) continuing the current integrated methods approach to managing damage, 2) using an integrated methods approach using only non-lethal methods, 3) addressing requests for assistance through technical assistance only, and 4) no involvement by WS. Depending on the alternative approach, several methods would be available to manage damage caused by birds in the state. Appendix B discusses the methods that WS could consider when responding to a request for assistance.

Chapter 3 provides information needed for making informed decisions by comparing the environmental consequences of the four alternative approaches to determine the extent of actual or potential impacts on each of the issues. WS will use the analyses in this EA to help inform agency decision-makers on the significance of the environmental effects, which will aid the decision-makers with determining the need to prepare an EIS or concluding the EA process with a Finding of No Significant Impact.

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## ACRONYMS

APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
AVMA	American Veterinary Medical Association
BBS	Breeding Bird Survey
CBC	Christmas Bird Count
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DNC	4,4'-dinitrocarbanilide
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FIFRA	Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act
FR	Federal Register
FY	Federal Fiscal Year
HDP	2-hydroxy-4,6-dimethylpyrimidine
LD	Median Lethal Dose
MBTA	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
NDDA	North Dakota Department of Agriculture
NDGFD	North Dakota Game and Fish Department
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PL	Public Law
T&E	Threatened and Endangered
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
USC	United States Code
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
WS	Wildlife Services

## CHAPTER 1: NEED FOR ACTION AND SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Wildlife are an important public resource greatly valued by people. In general, people regard wildlife as providing economic, recreational, emotional, and esthetic benefits. Knowing that wildlife exists in the natural environment provides a positive benefit to many people. However, the behavior of animals may result in damage to agricultural resources, natural resources, property, and threaten human safety. Therefore, wildlife can have either positive or negative values depending on the perspectives and circumstances of individual people.

Wildlife damage management is the alleviation of damage or other problems caused by or related to the behavior of wildlife and can be an integral component of wildlife management (Berryman 1991, Reidinger and Miller 2013, The Wildlife Society 2015) and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (Organ et al. 2010, Organ et al. 2012). Resolving damage caused by wildlife requires consideration of both sociological and biological carrying capacities. The wildlife acceptance capacity, or cultural carrying capacity, is the limit of human tolerance for wildlife or the maximum number of a given species that can coexist compatibly with local human populations. Biological carrying capacity is the land or habitat's ability to support healthy populations of wildlife without degradation to the species' health or their environment during an extended period of time (Decker and Purdy 1988).

The cultural carrying capacity is especially important because it defines the sensitivity of a person or community to a wildlife species. For any given damage situation, there are varying thresholds of tolerance exhibited by those people directly and indirectly affected by the species and any associated damage. This damage threshold determines the wildlife acceptance capacity. While the biological carrying capacity of the habitat may support higher populations of wildlife, in many cases the wildlife acceptance capacity is lower or already met. Once the wildlife acceptance capacity is met or exceeded, people begin to implement population or damage management to alleviate damage or address threats to human health and safety. Therefore, the wildlife acceptance capacity helps define the range of wildlife population levels and associated damages acceptable to individuals or groups (Decker and Purdy 1988, Decker and Brown 2001).

Animals have no intent to do harm. They utilize habitats (*e.g.*, feed, shelter, and reproduce) where they can find a niche. If their activities result in lost value of resources or threaten human safety, people often characterize this as damage. When damage exceeds or threatens to exceed an economic threshold and/or pose a threat to human safety, people often seek assistance. The threshold triggering a person to seek assistance with alleviating damage or threats of damage is often unique to the individual person requesting assistance and many factors (*e.g.*, economic, social, esthetics) can influence when people seek assistance. What one individual person considers damage, another person may not consider as damage. However, the use of the term “*damage*” is consistently used to describe situations where the individual person has determined the losses associated with an animal or animals is actual damage requiring assistance (*i.e.*, has reached an individual threshold). Many people define the term “*damage*” as economic losses to resources or threats to human safety; however, “*damage*” could also occur from a loss in the esthetic value of property and other situations where the behavior of wildlife was no longer tolerable to an individual person. The threat of damage or loss of resources is often sufficient for people to initiate individual actions and the need for damage management could occur from specific threats to resources.

When people experience damage caused by wildlife or when wildlife threatens to cause damage, people may seek assistance from other entities. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) program is the lead federal agency

responsible for managing conflicts between people and wildlife (USDA 2019a)(see WS Directive 1.201)<sup>1</sup>. The primary statutory authority for the WS program is the Act of March 2, 1931 (46 Stat. 1468; 7 USC 8351-8352) as amended, and the Act of December 22, 1987 (101 Stat. 1329-331, 7 USC 8353). WS' directives define program objectives and guide WS' activities when managing wildlife damage (see WS Directive 1.201, WS Directive 1.205, WS Directive 1.210). Therefore, people experiencing damage or threats of damage associated with wildlife could seek assistance from WS.

## 1.2 NEED FOR ACTION

The need for action to manage damage and threats associated with birds in North Dakota arises from requests for assistance<sup>2</sup> that WS could receive to reduce and prevent damage from occurring. Birds can cause damage to agricultural resources, natural resources, property, and pose threats to human safety. Table 1.1 and Appendix D show the bird species associated with requests for assistance that WS could receive and the primary resource types those bird species damage in North Dakota. Most requests for assistance that WS receives are associated with reducing the risk of aircraft striking birds at airports and military facilities in the state. Bird strikes can cause substantial damage to aircraft, which can require costly repairs. In addition, bird strikes can lead to the catastrophic failure of aircraft, which can pose a threat to the safety of people. All bird species shown in Table 1.1 and Appendix D could pose a threat to aircraft when those bird species occur at or near airfields. WS also receives requests for assistance to manage damage to many resources, including additional threats to human health and safety. For example, WS could provide assistance with projects to reduce damage to structures from bird droppings or nesting materials. Damage could also occur to agricultural resources, primarily from birds that consume crops and livestock feed. In addition, birds can feed on livestock or pose disease risks to livestock. Similarly, threats to natural resources would primarily be associated with birds preying upon threatened or endangered species or competing with other wildlife species for resources.

In North Dakota, WS has and continues to receive requests for assistance to reduce and prevent damage associated with several bird species. WS has identified those bird species most likely to be responsible for causing damage in North Dakota based on previous requests for assistance and assessments of bird strike hazards at airports in the state. Those bird species include Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), rock pigeon (*Columba livia*), mourning dove (*Zenaidura macroura*), Franklin's gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*), ring-billed gull (*Larus delawarensis*), California gull (*Larus californicus*), herring gull (*Larus argentatus*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), tree swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*), barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), cliff swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), black-billed magpie (*Pica hudsonia*), American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Brewer's blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), yellow-headed blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*), western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), and common grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*).

In addition to those bird species, WS could also receive requests for assistance to manage damage and threats of damage associated with other bird species, but requests for assistance associated with those species would occur infrequently and/or requests would involve a small number of individual birds of a species. Damages and threats of damages associated with those species would occur primarily at airports where individuals of those species pose a threat of aircraft strikes. Appendix D contains a list of species

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<sup>1</sup>At the time of preparation, WS' Directives occurred at the following web address:  
[https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage/SA\\_WS\\_Program\\_Directives](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage/SA_WS_Program_Directives).

<sup>2</sup>WS would only conduct bird damage management after receiving a request for assistance. Before initiating bird damage activities, WS and the cooperating entity must sign a Memorandum of Understanding, work initiation document, or another comparable document that lists all the methods the property owner or manager would allow WS to use on property they own and/or manage.



that WS could address in low numbers and/or infrequently when those species cause damage or pose a threat of damage.

**Table 1.1 – Bird species that WS could address and the resource types threatened**

Species	Resource*				Species	Resource			
	A	N	P	H		A	N	P	H
Canada Goose	X	X	X	X	Cliff Swallow			X	X
Mallard	X		X	X	Black-billed Magpie	X	X	X	X
Rock Pigeon	X	X	X	X	American Crow	X	X	X	X
Mourning Dove			X	X	European Starling	X	X	X	X
Franklin’s Gull	X	X	X	X	House Sparrow	X	X	X	X
Ring-billed Gull	X	X	X	X	Brewer’s Blackbird	X		X	X
California Gull	X	X	X	X	Yellow-headed Blackbird	X		X	X
Herring Gull	X	X	X	X	Western Meadowlark			X	X
Golden Eagle	X		X	X	Red-winged Blackbird	X		X	X
Bald Eagle	X		X	X	Brown-headed Cowbird	X		X	X
Tree Swallow			X	X	Common Grackle	X		X	X
Barn Swallow	X		X	X					

\* A=Agriculture, N=Natural Resources, P=Property, H=Human Safety (includes aviation safety and potential disease transmission to humans)

Some of the species addressed in this EA are gregarious (*i.e.*, form large flocks), especially during the fall and spring migration periods or during the breeding season. Although damage and threats can occur throughout the year, damage or the threat of damage is often highest during those periods when birds are concentrated into large flocks, such as migration periods and during winter months when food sources are limited. For some bird species, high concentrations of birds occur during the breeding season where suitable nesting habitat exists, such as swallows. The flocking behavior of many bird species during migration periods and during the breeding season can pose increased risks when those species occur near or on airport properties. When an aircraft strikes multiple birds, damage to the aircraft can occur, and there is an increased risk of catastrophic failure of the aircraft, especially if the aircraft ingests multiple birds into aircraft engines. The following subsections of the EA provide additional information regarding the need to manage bird damage.

### 1.2.1 Need to Resolve Bird Damage to Agricultural Resources

Over 39 million acres were devoted to agricultural production in North Dakota during 2017 (USDA 2019b). The total market value of agricultural products sold in the state was over \$8.2 billion in 2017. The value of crops sold in the state was nearly \$6.7 billion in 2017. The value of livestock, poultry, and their products sold in the state during 2017 was nearly \$1.6 billion (USDA 2019b). As of January 2020, there were 1.9 million cattle (including calves), 75,000 sheep (including lambs), and 142,000 hogs in North Dakota (USDA 2020a).

As shown in Table 1.1 and Appendix D, many of the bird species that WS could address can cause damage to or pose threats to agricultural resources in North Dakota. Damage and threats of damage to agricultural resources are often associated with bird species that exhibit flocking behaviors (*e.g.*, red-winged blackbirds) or colonial nesting behavior (*e.g.*, rock pigeons). Damage occurs through direct consumption of agricultural resources, the contamination of resources from fecal droppings, or the threat of disease transmission to livestock from contact with fecal matter.

### ***Damage to Aquaculture Resources***

The National Agricultural Statistics Service defines aquaculture as the farming of fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and other aquaculture products (USDA 2019b). In 2017, the National Agricultural Statistics Service reported five farms producing aquaculture stock in North Dakota with the market value of agricultural products sold estimated at \$942,000 (USDA 2019b). In 2017, aquaculture farms in North Dakota raised baitfish, sport/game fish, trout, and other food fish (USDA 2019b). According to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD), there are currently only two licensed private aquaculture facilities in the state (S. Johnson, NDGFD pers. comm. 2020). Therefore, requests for WS' assistance to manage bird damage occurring at aquaculture facilities in the state are likely to occur infrequently. However, WS could respond to requests for assistance involving bird damage at aquaculture farms if they occur.

Damage to aquaculture resources occurs primarily from the economic losses associated with birds consuming fish and other commercially raised aquatic organisms. Damage can also result from the death of fish and other aquatic wildlife when injuries occur as birds attempt to capture them. Price and Nickum (1995) concluded that the aquaculture industry often has small profit margins so that even a small percentage reduction in the farm gate value due to predation is an economic issue. Many of the birds addressed in this EA are known to consume fish, including gulls, herons, egrets, American white pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*), ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), and double-crested cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) that could cause damage at aquaculture facilities in North Dakota.

Another concern at aquaculture facilities could be the transmission of pathogens by birds between impoundments and from facility to facility as birds move between sites. For example, *Aeromonas hydrophila* is a bacterium that can cause disease in fish. Cunningham et al. (2018) found that double-crested cormorants and American white pelicans could shed a highly virulent strain of *Aeromonas hydrophila* bacteria in their feces when fed catfish infected with the bacteria, which demonstrated that those two bird species could transfer the bacteria from an aquaculture pond with infected fish to ponds with uninfected fish. Aquaculture farms often confine aquatic organisms inside water impoundments or similar structures and they often maintain aquatic organisms at high densities within those structures. Therefore, the introduction of a disease could result in substantial economic losses because pathogens can spread quickly and would likely infect nearly all the aquatic organisms confined in the structure.

### ***Damage and Threats to Livestock Operations***

Damage to livestock operations can occur from several bird species in North Dakota. Although birds can be carriers (vectors) of diseases that are transmissible to livestock, the rate of transmission is unknown but is likely to be low. Because many sources of disease transmission exist, identifying a specific source can be difficult. Birds can be vectors of disease, especially when large numbers of birds congregate and defecate in livestock feed or water. Economic damage can occur from birds feeding on livestock feed, from birds feeding on livestock, and from the increased risks of pathogen transmission associated with large concentrations of birds. Although individual or small groups of birds can cause economic damage to livestock producers, most damage occurs from bird species that congregate in large flocks at livestock operations. Birds also defecate while feeding, increasing the possibility of pathogen transmission if livestock directly contact or consume fecal droppings. Birds can also cause damage by defecating on fences, shade canopies, and other structures, which can accelerate corrosion of metal components and can be esthetically displeasing. Large concentrations of birds at livestock feeding operations can also pose potential health hazards to feedlot/dairy operators and their personnel through directly contacting fecal droppings or by droppings creating unsafe working conditions.

Although damage and disease threats to livestock operations can occur throughout the year, damage can be highest during those periods when birds are concentrated into large flocks, such as during migration periods and during winter months when food sources are limited. For some bird species, high concentrations of birds can occur during the breeding season where suitable nesting habitat exists, such as pigeons, house sparrows, and swallows. Of primary concern to livestock feedlots and dairies in North Dakota are European starlings, house sparrows, rock pigeons, red-winged blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, and to a lesser extent American crows and various gull species. The flocking behavior of those species either from roosting and/or nesting behavior can lead to economic losses to agricultural producers from the consumption of livestock feed and from the increased risks associated with the transmission of pathogens from fecal matter being deposited in feeding areas and in water used by livestock.

Economic damages associated with starlings and blackbirds feeding on livestock rations has been documented in France and Great Britain (Feare 1984), and in the United States (Besser et al. 1968, Dolbeer et al. 1978, Glahn and Otis 1981, Glahn 1983, Glahn and Otis 1986). Diet rations for cattle contain all of the nutrients and fiber that cattle need. Livestock feed and rations ensure proper health of the animal. Livestock producers and feedlots often supplement higher fiber roughage in livestock feed with corn, barley, and other grains to ensure weight gain and, in the case of dairies, for dairy cattle to produce milk. Livestock are unable to select for certain ingredients in livestock feed while birds often can selectively choose to feed on the corn, barley, and other grains formulated in livestock feed. Livestock feed provided in open troughs is most vulnerable to feeding by birds. Birds often select for those components of feed that are most beneficial to the desired outcome of livestock. When large flocks of birds selectively forage for components in livestock feeds, the composition and the energy value of the feed can be altered, which can negatively affect the health and production of livestock. The removal of this high-energy source by European starlings and red-winged blackbirds may reduce milk yields and weight gains, which can be economically critical (Feare 1984, Carlson et al. 2018a, Carlson et al. 2018b). Glahn and Otis (1986) reported that starling damage was also associated with proximity to roosts, snow, freezing temperatures, and the number of livestock on feed.

Besser et al. (1968) reported the value of losses in feedlots to starlings near Denver, Colorado was \$84 per 1,000 starlings during the winter in 1967. Forbes (1990) reported European starlings consumed up to 50% of their body weight in feed each day. Glahn and Otis (1981) reported losses of 4.8 kg of pelletized feed consumed per 1,000 bird minutes. Glahn (1983) reported that 25.8% of farms in Tennessee experienced starling depredation problems of which 6.3% experienced considerable economic loss. Williams (1983) estimated seasonal feed losses to five species of blackbirds (primarily brown-headed cowbirds) at one feedlot in south Texas at nearly 140 tons valued at \$18,000. Deppenbusch et al. (2011) estimated that feed consumption by European starlings increased the daily production cost by \$0.92 per animal at a Kansas feedlot. In Washington, dairy operators reported annual feed losses of \$55 per cow due to birds, which resulted in annual losses totaling \$14.7 million in the state (Elser et al. 2019a).

Damage and threats to livestock operations can also occur from the risk of or actual transmission of pathogens from birds to livestock. Agricultural areas provide ideal habitat for many bird species, which can attract a large number of birds to those locations. Large concentrations of birds feeding, roosting, or loafing in those areas increases the possibility of and the concern over the transmission of diseases from birds to livestock. This concern can have far-reaching implications (Daniels et al. 2003, Fraser and Fraser 2010, Miller et al. 2013). Birds feeding alongside livestock in open livestock feeding areas or feeding on stored livestock feed can leave fecal deposits, which livestock can consume. Birds can also deposit fecal matter into sources of water for livestock, which can increase the likelihood of disease transmission. Birds can also contaminate other surface areas where livestock can encounter fecal matter. Many bird species, especially those encountered at livestock operations, are known to carry pathogens, which can be

excreted in fecal matter and pose not only a risk to individual livestock operations, but can be a source of transmission to other livestock operations as birds move from one area to another.

Several pathogens that affect livestock have been associated with rock pigeons, European starlings, and house sparrows (Weber 1979, Carlson et al. 2010, Carlson et al. 2011a). Pigeons, starlings, and house sparrows can be carriers of erysipeloid, salmonellosis, pasteurellosis, avian tuberculosis, streptococcosis, vibriosis, and listeriosis (Weber 1979, Gough and Beyer 1981). Weber (1979) also reported pigeons, starlings, and house sparrows as carriers of several viral, fungal, protozoal, and rickettsial pathogens, which can infect livestock and pets. Numerous studies have focused on starlings and the transmission of *Escherichia coli* (LeJeune et al. 2008, Gaukler et al. 2009, Cernicchiaro et al. 2012). LeJeune et al. (2008) found that starlings could play a role in the transmission of *E. coli* between dairy farms. Carlson et al. (2010) found *Salmonella enterica* in the gastrointestinal tract of starlings at cattle feedlots in Texas and suggested starlings could contribute to the contamination of cattle feed and water. *Salmonella* contamination levels can relate directly to the number of European starlings present (Carlson et al. 2010, Carlson et al. 2011b, Carlson et al. 2012). Poultry operations can be highly susceptible to pathogens, such as *Salmonella* spp., campylobacter, and clostridium, that are sometimes isolated in wild birds, such as European starlings and house sparrows (Craven et al. 2000).

Contamination of livestock facilities through fecal accumulation by various bird species can be an important concern to those facilities. Numerous pathogens can spread through feces, with *Salmonella* spp. and *E. coli* being two pathogens of concern. *Salmonella* spp. bacteria cause salmonellosis and numerous bird species may be reservoirs for *Salmonella* spp. (Friend and Franson 1999, Tizard 2004). *E. coli* is a fecal coliform bacterium associated with the fecal material of warm-blooded animals. Multiple studies document birds can be an important source of *E. coli* contamination of both land and water sources (Fallacara et al. 2001, Kullas et al. 2002, Hansen et al. 2009, Silva et al. 2009, Franklin et al. 2020). Multiple species of birds can carry dangerous strains of *E. coli*, including gulls, geese, pigeons, and starlings (Pedersen and Clark 2007, Franklin et al. 2020). European starlings may also harbor various strains of *E. coli* (Gaukler et al. 2009), including O157:H7, a strain that can cause human mortalities (LeJeune et al. 2008, Cernicchiaro et al. 2012).

Transmission of *Salmonella* spp. from gulls to livestock can also be a concern (Williams et al. 1977, Johnston et al. 1979, Coulson et al. 1983). Williams et al. (1977) and Johnston et al. (1979) reported that gulls can transmit *Salmonella* spp. to livestock through droppings and contaminated drinking water. Pedersen and Clark (2007) did an extensive review of the literature and found Canada geese, gulls, pigeons, house sparrows, cowbirds, grackles, blackbirds and starlings have the potential to play a role in the direct transmission of *E. coli* and *S. enterica* among cattle at feedlots and dairies and between livestock operations. Migratory birds are capable of spreading pathogens over a larger area, and domestic livestock might serve as reservoirs within farm operations. The birds also cause damage by defecating on fences, shade canopies, and other structures, which can accelerate corrosion of metal components and can be esthetically displeasing. Large concentrations of birds at livestock feeding operations can also pose potential health hazards to feedlot/dairy operators and their personnel through directly contacting fecal droppings or by droppings creating unsafe working conditions.

Although it is difficult to document, there is a strong association of wild birds and the contamination of food and water sources at livestock facilities. The potential for introduction of *E. coli* or *Salmonella* spp. to a livestock operation or the transmission of these pathogens between sites by wild birds is a strong possibility (Pedersen and Clark 2007).

Starlings, gulls, and other species can transfer pathogens that are specific to some livestock, such as transmittable gastroenteritis (Faulkner 1966, Gough et al. 1979). Many bird species that use barn areas, pastures, manure pits, or carcass disposal areas can directly or indirectly contact a pathogen and transfer it

to another farm or to healthy animals at the same farm. Due to the ability of those bird species to move large distances and from one facility to another, farm-to-farm transmission can be an important concern.

Waterfowl, including ducks, geese, and swans, can also be a concern to livestock producers because the fecal droppings of waterfowl can carry pathogens that can cause diseases in livestock. Fraser and Fraser (2010) provided a literature review of disease pathogens of concern to livestock from Canada geese and other waterfowl. This review highlighted several bacterial, viral, and fungal diseases, and parasites that can infect livestock, including swine, cattle, and poultry. However, Fraser and Fraser (2010) pointed out that due to a lack of data, they could not perform an evidence-based risk assessment on the health risks to humans or livestock from free ranging waterfowl. Livestock producers may have concerns that waterfowl droppings in and around ponds that provide drinking water for livestock could affect water quality and could be a source of several different types of pathogens. For example, *Salmonella* spp. can cause shedding of the intestinal lining and severe diarrhea in cattle. If undetected and untreated, salmonellosis can kill cattle and calves. In addition, the contamination of feed by waterfowl through droppings in pastures, crops, or harvested grasses is also a possible method of pathogen transmission to livestock (e.g., see Fraser and Fraser 2010).

Another disease often associated with waterfowl is avian influenza. Avian influenza is a viral disease caused by various strains of avian influenza viruses. Avian influenza viruses occur naturally among many bird species throughout the world. Wild and domestic waterfowl, as well as a variety of other bird species, can be reservoirs for a variety of avian influenza viruses (Davidson and Nettles 1997, Alexander 2000, Stallknecht 2003, Brown et al. 2006, Keawcharoen et al. 2008, Pedersen et al. 2010, United States Geological Survey 2020a). Scientists often categorize the different types of avian influenza viruses as either a low pathogenic avian influenza virus or a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus, which refers to the viruses ability to produce disease (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017, United States Geological Survey 2020a).

Most of the avian influenza viruses that circulate naturally in wild birds are low pathogenic avian influenza viruses. Typically, the low pathogenic avian influenza viruses circulate among wild birds without clinical signs and is not an important mortality factor in wild birds (Davidson and Nettles 1997, Clark and Hall 2006, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017, United States Geological Survey 2020a). However, highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses can cause severe disease and high mortality in birds, especially in domestic poultry and domestic waterfowl (Nettles et al. 1985, Clark 2003, Gauthier-Clerc et al. 2007, Pedersen et al. 2010, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017, United States Geological Survey 2020a). The potential for avian influenza virus to produce devastating disease in domestic poultry makes its occurrence in waterfowl an important issue (Davidson and Nettles 1997, Hahn and Clark 2002, Clark and Hall 2006, Gauthier-Clerc et al. 2007). The potential impacts of a severe outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in domestic poultry could cripple the industry through losses in trade, consumer confidence, and eradication efforts (Pedersen et al. 2010).

Another viral disease that is often associated with wild birds and can be a concern to the poultry industry is Newcastle disease. More than 230 species of birds may be susceptible to natural or experimental infections with the viruses that cause Newcastle disease, but in most cases were asymptomatic. In wild birds, the effects appear to vary depending on the species of bird and the virulence of the particular strain of viruses that causes Newcastle disease. Newcastle disease can cause high rates of mortality in some bird populations, such as double-crested cormorants, but often show little effect on other species (Glaser et al. 1999), although poultry have been found to be highly susceptible (Docherty and Friend 1999, Alexander and Senne 2008). Other species, such as pigeons, may carry avian paramyxoviruses, which may pose a risk of transmission because of their close association with livestock (Kommers et al. 2001).

Certain bird species may also injure and prey upon livestock that result in economic losses to livestock producers. Direct damage to livestock occurs primarily from raptors but can also include black-billed magpies and common ravens (*Corvus corax*). Raptors, particularly red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*), and great horned owls (*Bubo virginianus*) can prey on domestic fowl, such as chickens and waterfowl (Washburn 2016). Free-ranging fowl or fowl allowed to range outside of confinement for a period are particularly vulnerable to predation by raptors. Bald eagles and golden eagles can prey on livestock, primarily young livestock, such as lambs, young goats, and calves (Phillips and Blom 1988, Phillips et al. 1996, Avery and Cummings 2004). Common ravens and black-billed magpies are primarily associated with causing injuries to newborn livestock, especially lambs, calves, and goats, but they can cause death of newborn livestock by mobbing and attacking individual newborns (Hall 1994, Peebles and Spencer 2020).

### ***Damage to Agricultural Crops***

Besser (1985) estimated damage to agricultural crops associated with birds exceeded \$100 million annually in the United States. Bird damage to agricultural crops occurs primarily from the consumption of crops (*i.e.*, loss of the crop and revenue), but also consists of trampling emerging crops, compaction of soil, consumption of cover crops used to prevent erosion and condition soil, damage to fruits associated with feeding, and fecal contamination. In 2017, the market value of all agricultural crops accounted for 48% of the total market value of agricultural products (livestock and crops) in North Dakota. According to NDGFD, in 2019, producers reported damage from Canada geese on a variety of crops that totaled \$538,331 averaging about \$2,639 per producer (NDGFD 2020a). Some of the crop commodities harvested in 2019 included soybeans, wheat, corn, canola, potatoes, sugar beets, sunflower, barley, peas, flaxseed, lentils, oats, rye, and chickpeas (USDA 2020a). Table 1.1 and Appendix D identify several bird species that can cause damage to agricultural resources, including agricultural crops.

Birds can also cause damage to fruit, berry, and nut crops by consuming them or by causing damage to them in a way that would make them unmarketable. Fruit growers are often concerned about the damage that birds can cause and often employ several methods to alleviate bird damage (Elser et al. 2019b). In 2017, there were 78 orchard farms in North Dakota, producing a variety of fruits and nuts, including apples, apricots, cherries, grapes, pears, plums, prunes, chestnuts, and hazelnuts (USDA 2019b). During 2017, there were 63 farms in North Dakota producing berries, including blueberries, raspberries, currants, and strawberries (USDA 2019b). Although production of fruit, berries, and nuts is a small component of the agricultural industry in North Dakota, WS could respond to requests for assistance from fruit, berry, and nut producers if requested.

Besser (1985) estimated bird damage to grapes, cherries, and blueberries exceeded \$1 million annually in the United States. In 1972, Mott and Stone (1973) estimated that birds caused \$1.6 to \$2.1 million in damage to the blueberry industry in the United States, with starlings, American robins (*Turdus migratorius*), and grackles causing the most damage. Red-winged blackbirds, cowbirds, and crows may also cause damage to blueberries (Besser 1985). Damage to blueberries typically occurs from birds plucking and consuming the berry or from knocking the berries from the bushes (Besser 1985). During a survey conducted in 15 states and British Columbia, Avery et al. (1991) found that 84% of respondents to the survey considered bird damage to blueberries to be “*serious*” or “*moderately serious*”. Respondents of the survey identified starlings, robins, and grackles as the primary cause of damage (Avery et al. 1991); however, respondents identified several additional bird species as causing damage to blueberries (Avery et al. 1991). Avery et al. (1991) estimated bird damage to blueberry production in the United States cost growers \$8.5 million in 1989.

Several studies have shown that European starlings and house sparrows can pose an economic threat to agricultural producers (Besser et al. 1968, Dolbeer et al. 1978, Feare 1984). Pimentel et al. (2000, 2005)

estimated starlings damage an estimated \$800 million worth of agricultural resources per year. Starlings and sparrows can also have a detrimental effect on agricultural food production by feeding at vineyards, orchards, gardens, crops, and feedlots (Weber 1979). For example, starlings feed on numerous types of fruits such as cherries, figs, blueberries, apples, apricots, grapes, nectarines, peaches, plums, persimmons, strawberries, and olives (Weber 1979). Starlings can also damage ripening corn (Homan et al. 2017) and sorghum (Weber 1979). Additionally, starlings may pull sprouting grains, especially winter wheat, and feed on planted seed (Homan et al. 2017). Sparrows damage crops by pecking seeds, seedlings, buds, flowers, vegetables, and maturing fruits, and localized damage can be considerable because sparrows often feed in large flocks on a small area (Fitzwater 1994).

North Dakota is one of the top sunflower producing states in the United States (USDA 2019c). In 2019, agricultural producers harvested 488,000 acres of sunflowers in North Dakota with a production value of nearly \$136 million (USDA 2020a). From 2009 to 2010, Klosterman et al. (2013) estimated blackbirds caused \$3.5 million in damages to sunflower production annually in North Dakota's Prairie Pothole Region. In North Dakota, Ernst et al. (2019) estimated blackbirds caused an average of \$10.7 million per year in damage to sunflowers with an average annual total economic impact estimated at \$18.7 million from 2009 to 2013.

North Dakota supports large concentrations of nesting and migrating blackbirds, including red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, common grackles, and brown-headed cowbirds. Indices from the North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) indicate that some of the highest breeding densities of red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, common grackles, and brown-headed cowbirds occur in North Dakota. The number of red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, common grackles, and brown-headed cowbirds observed along BBS routes can exceed 100 birds per route in areas of the state (United States Geological Survey 2020b). After the nesting season, blackbirds begin congregating into large mixed species flocks that often roost and feed together. In North Dakota, large concentrations of blackbirds often roost and loaf in cattails (*Typha* spp.) associated with wetlands. Blackbird roosts in North Dakota can exceed 10,000 birds in August and September, with some roosts exceeding 50,000 blackbirds (Lutman 2000). Similarly, foraging flocks of blackbirds can range from a few blackbirds to over 100,000 blackbirds (Linz et al. 2011). The most vulnerable period for blackbird damage to ripening sunflower occurs from early seed set in mid-August through harvest in mid-October, which corresponds with the period when large flocks of blackbirds begin forming after the nesting season (Cummings et al. 1989, Linz et al. 2011). Peer et al. (2003) estimated the late summer blackbird population (red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, and common grackles) in the northern Great Plains of North America at 75 million blackbirds, which represents those blackbirds likely responsible for causing damage to the sunflower crop.

In the Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota<sup>3</sup>, Ralston et al. (2007) found 13 wetlands per square kilometer with 28% of those wetlands containing cattails, which equates to approximately four wetlands containing cattails per square kilometer. Blackbirds can travel up to 16 kilometers from wetland roosts to feed on sunflower (Linz and Hanzel 1997). Therefore, over 3,200 wetlands containing cattails may occur within a 16-kilometer radius of a sunflower field at a cattail wetland density estimated at four wetlands per square kilometer, which can make it difficult for agricultural producers to avoid planting sunflowers near potential blackbird roosts. One of the most common reasons that sunflower producers stop planting sunflower is blackbird damage (Linz et al. 2011).

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<sup>3</sup>The Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota covers approximately 95,200 square kilometers (Ralston et al. 2007). The State of North Dakota covers approximately 178,711 square kilometers (United States Census Bureau 2010); therefore, the Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota covers approximately 53.3% of the of state.

Bird damage to sweet corn can also result in economic losses to producers. Damage to sweet corn caused by birds can make the ear of corn unmarketable because the damage is unsightly to the consumer (Besser 1985). Large flocks of red-winged blackbirds are responsible for most of the damage reported to sweet corn with damage also occurring from grackles and starlings (Besser 1985). Damage occurs when birds rip or pull back the husk exposing the ear for consumption. Most bird damage occurs during the development stage known as the milk and dough stage when the kernels are soft and filled with a milky liquid. Birds will puncture the kernel to ingest the contents. Once punctured, the area of the ear damaged often discolors and is susceptible to disease introduction into the ear (Besser 1985). Damage usually begins at the tip of the ear as the husk is ripped and pulled back but can occur anywhere on the ear (Besser 1985).

Damage can also occur to sprouting corn as birds pull out the sprout or dig the sprout up to feed on the seed kernel (Besser 1985, Bodenchuk and Bergman 2020). Damage to sprouting corn occurs primarily by grackles and crows, but red-winged blackbirds can also cause damage to sprouting corn (Stone and Mott 1973). Additionally, starlings may pull sprouting grains and feed on planted seed (Homan et al. 2017). Damage to sprouting corn is likely localized and highest in areas where breeding colonies of grackles exist in close proximity to agricultural fields planted with corn (Stone and Mott 1973, Rogers and Linehan 1977). Rogers and Linehan (1977) found grackles damaged two corn sprouts per minute on average when present at a field planted near a breeding colony of grackles.

As resident Canada goose populations have increased across the United States, including the resident population in North Dakota, the number of requests for assistance to manage damage associated with geese has also increased. Agricultural impacts include losses to corn, soybeans, and winter wheat, as well as overgrazing of pastures and a degradation of water quality (Mississippi Flyway Council Technical Section 1996, Gabig 2000, Atlantic Flyway Council 2011, Mississippi Flyway Council Technical Section 2017). In North Dakota, since 2014, WS has developed a robust goose damage management program consisting of both non-lethal and lethal components. The program provides assistance to approximately 85 landowners/properties each year. Section 3.1.1 describes this program in detail.

### **1.2.2 Need to Resolve Threats that Birds Pose to Human Safety**

Several bird species listed in Table 1.1 and Appendix D can be closely associated with people and often exhibit gregarious roosting or flocking behavior, including species such as vultures, gulls, pigeons, sparrows, starlings, waterfowl, crows, swallows, grackles, cowbirds, and red-winged blackbirds. The close association of those bird species with human activity can pose threats to human safety from the transmission of pathogens and increased risk of aircraft striking birds. In addition, excessive droppings can be esthetically displeasing, accumulations of nesting material can pose a fire risk in buildings and on electrical transmission structures, and aggressive behavior, primarily from waterfowl and raptors, can pose risks to human safety.

#### ***Threat of Disease Transmission***

Birds can play a role in the transmission of zoonotic diseases (*i.e.*, diseases that animals can transmit to people) (Conover 2002). However, few studies are available on the occurrence of zoonotic diseases in wild birds or the risks to people or domestic animals from transmission of those diseases (Clark and McLean 2003). Complicating the study of disease threats is the fact that people can contract some disease-causing agents associated with birds from other sources. Although many people are concerned about disease transmission from birds, the probability of contracting a disease indirectly (when no physical contact occurs) is likely to be low. However, direct contact with birds, nesting material, fecal droppings, or the inhalation of fecal particles from accumulations of droppings increases the likelihood of



disease transmission. WS could receive requests to assist with identifying the cause or source of a disease by collecting samples from birds for testing.

Elevated contaminant levels associated with breeding and/or roosting concentrations of birds and their potential effects on water supplies can be concerns. Fecal droppings often accumulate in areas where birds congregate for long periods of time (e.g., roosts, nesting areas). Accumulation of fecal droppings can pose a threat to human health and safety in areas where people may encounter those accumulations of fecal droppings. For example, starlings may roost inside barns at night and fecal droppings may accumulate in areas of the barn used by people. Accumulations of bird droppings in public areas are esthetically displeasing and are often in areas where people may come in direct contact with fecal droppings. Fecal droppings in and around water resources can affect water quality and be a source of a number of different types of pathogens and contaminants. Because the fecal droppings of birds can contain coliform bacteria, streptococcus bacteria, *Salmonella* spp., toxic chemicals, and nutrients, fecal droppings that enter water could compromise water quality, depending on the number of birds, the amount of excrement, and the size of the water body.

Birds can play a role in the transmission of diseases to people. For example, birds may serve as a reservoir for pathogens that mosquitoes can transmit from birds to people, such as the West Nile virus and the virus that causes encephalitis. Birds may also play a direct and indirect role in transmission of *E. coli* and *S. enterica* to people through contact with infected cattle feces, watering troughs, and agricultural fields fertilized with manure slurries (Pedersen and Clark 2007). For example, as many as 65 different diseases transmittable to humans or domestic animals have been associated with pigeons, European starlings, and house sparrows (Weber 1979). Fecal droppings that accumulate from large communal bird roosts can facilitate the growth of disease organisms, which grow in soils enriched by bird excrement, such as the fungus *Histoplasma capsulatum*, which causes the disease histoplasmosis in people (Weeks and Stickley 1984).

In North Dakota, crows, blackbirds, and starlings can form large communal roosts, which could facilitate the growth of disease organisms, such as *H. capsulatum* (Weeks and Stickley 1984). The disturbance of soil or fecal droppings at those roosts where fecal droppings have accumulated can cause *H. capsulatum* to become airborne. Once airborne, people in the area can inhale the fungus. For example, two siblings contracted pneumonia in Arkansas during 2011, and additional family members suffered from respiratory disease, after burning bamboo from a grove described as a prominent red-winged blackbird roost (Haselow et al. 2014). *H. capsulatum* can remain in the soil and can become airborne several years after blackbirds abandon a roost (Clark and McLean 2003).

People may contract salmonellosis (caused by *Salmonella* spp.) when handling materials contaminated with bird feces (Stroud and Friend 1987). Wild birds can carry several types of the *Salmonella* bacteria. *Salmonella* spp. has been isolated from the gastrointestinal tract of starlings (Carlson et al. 2010). Friend and Franson (1999) reported relative rates of detection of *Salmonella* spp. in free ranging birds. *Salmonella* spp. isolates were frequent in songbirds, common in doves and pigeons, occasional in starlings, blackbirds and cowbirds, and infrequent in crows. Infection by *Salmonella* spp. can cause gastrointestinal illness, including diarrhea in humans. Public health concerns related to *Salmonella* spp. often arise when gulls feed and loaf near fast food restaurants and picnic facilities; deposit waste from landfills in urban areas and drinking water reservoirs; and contaminate industrial facility ventilation systems with feathers, nesting debris, and droppings. Gulls can also potentially contaminate vegetable crops and livestock feed while feeding on them.

*E. coli* are fecal coliform bacteria associated with fecal material of warm-blooded animals. There are over 200 specific serological types of *E. coli* with the majority of serological types not causing disease in people (Sterritt and Lester 1988). The serological type of *E. coli* that is best known for causing serious

illness is *E. coli* O157:H7 and is usually associated with cattle (Gallien and Hartung 1994). Many communities monitor water quality at swimming beaches and lakes but lack the financial resources to pinpoint the source of elevated fecal coliform counts. When fecal coliform counts at swimming beaches exceed established standards, governmental entities may temporarily close beaches to the public even though the strain of *E. coli* may be unknown. Linking the elevated bacterial counts to the frequency of waterfowl use and attributing the elevated levels to human health threats can be problematic. However, advances in genetic engineering have allowed microbiologists to match genetic code of coliform bacteria to specific animal species and link those animal sources of coliform bacteria to fecal contamination (Simmons et al. 1995, Jamieson 1998). For example, Simmons et al. (1995) used genetic fingerprinting to link fecal contamination of small ponds on Fisherman Island, Virginia to waterfowl.

Microbiologists implicated waterfowl and gulls as the source of fecal coliform bacteria at the Kensico Watershed, a water supply for New York City (Klett et al. 1998, Alderisio and DeLuca 1999). In addition, fecal coliform bacteria counts coincided with the number of Canada geese and gulls roosting at the reservoir. Cole et al. (2005) found that geese might serve as a vector of antimicrobial resistance genes, indicating that they not only harbor and spread zoonotic pathogens but also may spread strains that are resistant to current control measures. Financial costs related to human health threats involving birds may include testing of water for coliform bacteria, cleaning and sanitizing beaches regularly of feces, contacting and obtaining assistance from public health officials, and implementing non-lethal and lethal methods of wildlife damage management.

Various species of bacteria, such as *Bacillus* spp., *Clostridium* spp., *Campylobacter* spp., *E. coli*, *Listeria* spp., and *Salmonella* spp. can occur in gulls (MacDonald and Brown 1974, Fenlon 1981, Butterfield et al. 1983, Monaghan et al. 1985, Norton 1986, Quessey and Messier 1992, Franklin et al. 2020). Transmission of bacteria from gulls to humans is difficult to document; however, Reilly et al. (1981) and Monaghan et al. (1985) both suggested that gulls were the source of fecal contamination in cases of human salmonellosis. Gulls can threaten the safety of municipal drinking water sources by contaminating water with fecal matter and potentially causing dangerously high levels of coliform bacteria. Gulls have been implicated in contamination of public water supplies in several cases (*e.g.*, see Jones et al. 1978, Hatch 1996). Gull feces has also been implicated in accelerated nutrient loading of aquatic systems (Portnoy 1990), which could have serious implications for municipal drinking water sources.

As discussed in Section 1.2.1, birds can be a reservoir for a variety of avian influenza viruses (Davidson and Nettles 1997, Alexander 2000, Stallknecht 2003, Pedersen et al. 2010). While most avian influenza viruses are restricted to birds, on extremely rare occasion, a few, including a highly pathogenic H5N1 strain, can be transmitted to people, and have sometimes resulted in death (Gauthier-Clerc et al. 2007, Peiris et al. 2007, Majumdar et al. 2011, Koopmans et al. 2004, Tweed et al. 2004). A pandemic outbreak of avian influenza could have impacts on human health and economies (World Health Organization 2005, Peiris et al. 2007).

While transmission of pathogens or parasites from birds to people is uncommon, the potential exists (Luechtefeld et al. 1980, Wobeser and Brand 1982, Hill and Grimes 1984, Pacha et al. 1988, Blankespoor and Reimink 1991, Hatch 1996, Graczyk et al. 1997, Saltoun et al. 2000, Kassa et al. 2001). Infections may even be life threatening for people with suppressed or compromised immune systems (Roffe 1987, Graczyk et al. 1998). Human exposure to bird fecal droppings through direct contact or through the disturbance of accumulations of fecal droppings increases the likelihood of disease transmission. Several of the bird species addressed in this EA often exhibit gregarious roosting and nesting behavior, which can lead to accumulations of fecal droppings in areas associated with people. Accumulations of bird droppings in public areas are not only esthetically displeasing, but are often in areas where people may come in direct contact with fecal droppings. In nearly all cases in which human health concerns are a major reason for requesting assistance, no actual cases of transmission of pathogens from birds to people

have occurred but entities want to reduce the risk of disease transmission. However, the risk of disease transmission is the primary reason people request assistance. WS recognizes and defers to the authority and expertise of local and state health officials in determining what does or does not constitute a threat to public health.

### ***Threat to Human Safety associated with Aircraft Striking Birds at Airports and Military Bases***

In addition to potentially transmitting zoonotic pathogens, birds also pose a threat to human safety related to aircraft. Bird strikes can cause catastrophic failure of aircraft systems (e.g., ingesting birds into engines), which can cause the plane to become uncontrollable leading to a crash. The civil and military aviation communities have acknowledged that the threat to human health and safety from aircraft collisions with wildlife is increasing (Dolbeer 2000, MacKinnon et al. 2004).

While bird strikes that result in human fatalities are rare, the consequences can be catastrophic. The worst strike on record for loss of human lives in the United States occurred in Boston during 1960 when 62 people died in the crash of an airliner that collided with a flock of European starlings (Terres 1980, Dolbeer and Wright 2008). In 1995, 24 individuals died when a military aircraft struck a flock of Canada geese at Elmendorf, Alaska and crashed (Smith et al. 1999). In Oklahoma, an aircraft struck American white pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) causing the plane to crash, which killed all five people aboard (Dove et al. 2009). From 1990 through 2018, 32 human fatalities have occurred after civil aircraft struck birds in the United States (Dolbeer et al. 2019). Among those 32 fatalities, eight occurred after striking birds that were not identified, eight occurred after strikes involving red-tailed hawks, and one fatality each occurred from striking turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*), American white pelicans, bald eagles, snow geese (*Anser caerulescens*), and Canada geese (Dolbeer et al. 2019). From 1988 through 2018, wildlife strikes have killed more than 282 people and destroyed over 263 aircraft globally (Dolbeer et al. 2019).

Injuries can also occur to aircraft crewmembers and passengers from bird strikes. From 1990 through 2018, injuries to crewmembers and passengers have occurred from aircraft strikes involving vultures, waterfowl, hawks, gulls, eagles, cormorants, kestrels, pigeons, doves, grebes, and unknown bird species. For example, from 1990 through 2018, 48 aircraft strikes involving unknown bird species caused 64 human injuries and 18 strikes involving turkey vultures resulted in 22 injuries (Dolbeer et al. 2019).

### ***Additional Human Safety Concerns Associated with Birds***

As people are increasingly living with wildlife, the lack of harassing and threatening behavior by people toward many species of wildlife, especially around urban areas, may lead to a reduction of fear wildlife have toward people. When wildlife species begin to habituate to the presence of people and human activity, a loss of apprehension can occur, which can lead those species to exhibit threatening or abnormal behavior toward people. Threatening behavior can occur in the form of aggressive posturing, a general lack of apprehension toward people, or abnormal behavior. Although birds attacking people occurs rarely, aggressive behavior by birds does occur, especially during nest building and the rearing of eggs and chicks. Raptors can aggressively defend their nests, nesting areas, and young, and may swoop and strike at pets, children, and adults.

In addition to raptors, waterfowl can also aggressively defend their nests and nestlings during the nesting season. Feral waterfowl often nest in high densities in areas used by people for recreational purposes, such as industrial areas, parks, beaches, and sports fields (VerCauteren and Marks 2004). If people or their pets unknowingly approach waterfowl or their nests at those locations, injuries can occur if waterfowl react aggressively to the presence of those people or pets (Conover 2002). During the nesting season, geese aggressively defend the area around their nests and goslings from other animals and people

(Mississippi Flyway Council Technical Section 1996, Gabig 2000, Atlantic Flyway Council 2011). Additionally, the buildup of feces from birds on docks, walkways, and other foot traffic areas can create slipping hazards. To avoid those conditions, regular cleanup is often required to alleviate threats of slipping on fecal matter, which can be economically burdensome.

### **1.2.3 Need to Resolve Bird Damage Occurring to Property**

As shown in Table 1.1 and in Appendix D, all of the bird species addressed in this EA have the potential to cause damage to property in North Dakota but not all incidents result in damage, such as the threat of aircraft striking birds at airports. Property damage can occur in a variety of ways and can result in costly repairs and clean-up. Bird damage to property occurs through direct damage to structures, roosting behavior, and their nesting activities. Accumulations of fecal droppings can cause damage to buildings and statues. Aircraft striking birds can also cause substantial damage requiring costly repairs and aircraft downtime. Direct damage can also result from birds that act aggressively toward their reflection in mirrors and windows, which can scratch paint and siding.

#### ***Damage to Aircraft from Bird Strikes***

Collisions between aircraft and wildlife are a concern throughout the world because wildlife strikes threaten passenger safety (Thorpe 1996), result in lost revenue, and repairs to aircraft can be costly (Linnell et al. 1996, Robinson 1996). Aircraft collisions with wildlife can also erode public confidence in the air transportation industry as a whole (Conover et al. 1995). Wildlife strikes pose increasing risks and economic losses to the aviation industry worldwide. Annual economic losses from wildlife strikes with civil aircraft are likely to exceed \$1.2 billion worldwide (Allan 2002). Wildlife strikes result in millions of dollars in direct and indirect damages annually. Direct costs include damage to aircraft, aircraft downtime, and medical expenses of injured personnel and passengers. Indirect costs can include lost revenue from the flight, cost of housing delayed passengers, rescheduling aircraft, and flight cancellations.

From 1990 through 2018, Federal Aviation Administration records indicate total reported losses from bird strikes cost the civil aviation industry over \$742 million in monetary losses and 758,617 hours of aircraft downtime (Dolbeer et al. 2019). Because reporting rates of aircraft strikes have been historically low, these figures likely underestimate total damage caused by bird strikes. Historically, wildlife strike reporting rates may have been as low as 20% (Linnell et al. 1999, Wright and Dolbeer 2005). However, reporting rates for civil aviation in the United States appear to be increasing (Dolbeer et al. 2019). Not all reports provide notation as to whether or not there was damage and some strike reports to the Federal Aviation Administration that indicate there was an adverse impact on the aircraft from the strike do not include a monetary estimate of the damage caused. Additionally, most reports indicating damage to aircraft report direct damages and do not include indirect damage, such as lost revenue, cost of putting passengers in hotels, rescheduling aircraft, and flight cancellations. Thus, actual monetary losses from bird strikes are likely much higher than estimated losses.

Target bird species can present a safety threat to aviation when those species occur in areas on and around airports. Species of birds that occur in large flocks or flight lines entering or exiting a roost at or near airports or when present in large flocks foraging on airport property can result in aircraft strikes involving several individuals of a bird species, which can increase damage and increase the risks of catastrophic failure of the aircraft. A high percentage of bird strikes occur during peak migration periods, but dangerous situations can develop during any season. Aircraft are most vulnerable to bird strikes while at low altitudes, generally related to landing and take-off. From 1990 through 2018, approximately 71% of reported bird strikes to general aviation aircraft in the United States occurred when the aircraft was at an

altitude of 500 feet above ground level or less. Additionally, approximately 92% occurred at less than 3,500 feet above ground level (Dolbeer et al. 2019).

Gulls, raptors, waterfowl, shorebirds, and doves/pigeons are the bird groups most frequently struck by aircraft in the United States with aircraft strikes involving waterfowl, gulls, and raptors causing the most damage. From 1990 through 2018, aircraft strikes involving waterfowl caused more than \$261 million in damages to civil aircraft in the United States and strikes involving hawks, eagles, and vultures caused nearly \$140 million in damages (Dolbeer et al. 2019). In total, aircraft strikes involving birds has resulted in over \$742 million in reported damages to civil aircraft from 1990 through 2018 in the United States (Dolbeer et al. 2019).

From January 1990 through February 2020, the Federal Aviation Administration (2020) has reports of aircraft striking up to 1,008 birds in North Dakota. In North Dakota, nearly 96% of the reported aircraft strikes with wildlife from January 1990 through February 2020 involved birds (Federal Aviation Administration 2020). Of the 1,008 reported aircraft strikes involving birds, 221 strikes involved gull species, such as the ring-billed gull, Franklin's gull, herring gull, California gull, and the Bonaparte's gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*). Ducks, geese, swans, and mergansers were involved with 79 reported aircraft strikes in North Dakota from January 1990 through February 2020 with 62 aircraft strikes involving falcons, eagles, hawks, owls, and vultures (Federal Aviation Administration 2020). Aircraft in North Dakota have struck at least 92 species of birds (Federal Aviation Administration 2020). From January 1990 through February 2020, 273 aircraft strike reports in North Dakota indicated the aircraft struck an "unknown bird" species. In addition, some reports provide limited identification information, such as aircraft striking "gulls" or "hawks" (Federal Aviation Administration 2020). Therefore, aircraft strikes may have involved additional species during this period.

The open habitats associated with airports often make ideal locations for golden eagles to forage. From 1990 through 2018, there have been 25 civil aircraft strike reports involving golden eagles in the United States causing nearly 3,800 hours of aircraft downtime and over \$1 million in damages to aircraft (Dolbeer et al. 2019). Two of those aircraft strikes resulted in injuries to four people (Dolbeer et al. 2019). Requests for assistance associated with golden eagles that WS could receive would primarily occur at airports within the state where those eagles were posing aircraft strike risks.

Vultures and raptors can present a risk to aircraft because of their large body mass and slow-flying or soaring behavior. Geese and vultures are two of the most hazardous birds for an aircraft to strike based on the frequency of strikes, effect on flight, and amount of damage caused by vultures throughout the country (Dolbeer et al. 2000, DeVault et al. 2011, Dolbeer et al. 2019). When in large flocks or flight lines entering or exiting a winter roost at or near airports, starlings and blackbirds present a safety threat to aviation. Starlings and blackbirds are particularly dangerous birds to aircraft during take-offs and landings because of their high body density and tendency to travel in large flocks of hundreds to thousands of birds (Seamans et al. 1995). Mourning doves also present similar risks when their late summer behaviors include creating large roosting and loafing flocks. Their feeding, watering, and picking up grit on airport turf and runways further increase the risks of bird-aircraft collisions.

The open, grassland habitats of airports and military facilities can provide ideal habitat for many grassland bird species, such as barn swallows and meadowlarks. Barn swallows will often forage in large groups. The open habitats associated with airports can provide ideal locations for swallows to forage and the presence of those swallows can increase the risks of an aircraft strike. From 1990 through 2018, 11,071 reported civil aircraft strikes have occurred in the United States involving swallows resulting in 1,022 hours of aircraft downtime and nearly \$655,000 in damages to aircraft (Dolbeer et al. 2019). From January 1990 through February 2020, 58 reported aircraft strikes involving swallows occurred in North Dakota, including barn swallows and cliff swallows. Of the bird species identified most frequently as

being struck by civil aircraft in the United States, barn swallows ranked fourth from 1990 through 2018 and second in 2018 (Dolbeer et al. 2019).

The open areas found at airports also make ideal habitat for meadowlarks to forage and nest while providing ample perching areas. Most requests for assistance to reduce threats associated with meadowlarks occur at airports in North Dakota. Meadowlarks found on and adjacent to airport property can pose a strike hazard, causing damage to the aircraft and threatening passenger safety. From 1990 through 2018, there have been 4,809 reported civil aircraft strikes involving meadowlarks in the United States causing over \$1 million in damages (Dolbeer et al. 2019). From January 1990 through February 2020, 65 reported civil aircraft strikes involving meadowlarks have occurred in North Dakota (Federal Aviation Administration 2020).

Similar to meadowlarks, airports often have ideal habitat for killdeer. From 1990 through 2018, there have been 6,357 reported civil aircraft strikes involving killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) in the United States causing over \$4.2 million in damages (Dolbeer et al. 2019). From January 1990 through February 2020, 38 reported civil aircraft strikes involving killdeer have occurred in North Dakota (Federal Aviation Administration 2020).

In addition to the open grassland habitats found at airports, other habitat types can attract bird species, such as wetlands, water retention ponds, and agricultural practices (DeVault and Washburn 2013). Wetlands and water retention ponds can attract waterfowl and waterbirds, such as geese, gulls, herons, and egrets. Agricultural practices on airfields can attract geese, blackbirds, doves, and cranes. Abundant food sources found on airport property can attract certain bird species, such as waste grains from agricultural practices, a high density of small mammals, or the presence of earthworms on runways and taxiways after a rainfall (DeVault and Washburn 2013).

### ***Other Property Damage Associated with Birds***

Damage to property can occur from accumulations of droppings and feather debris associated with large concentrations of birds, such as blackbirds, crows, gulls, pigeons, swallows, vultures, and waterfowl. Although damage and threats can occur throughout the year, damage can be highest during those periods when birds are concentrated into large flocks, such as migration periods and during winter months when food sources are limited. Birds that routinely nest, roost, and/or loaf in the same areas often leave large accumulations of droppings and feather debris, which can be esthetically displeasing and can cause damage to property. The reoccurring presence of fecal droppings under bird roosts can lead to constant cleaning costs for property owners.

Property damage most often involves fecal matter that contaminates landscaping and walkways, often at golf courses and waterfront property. Fecal droppings and the overgrazing of vegetation can be esthetically displeasing (e.g. see Fitzwater 1994, Gorenzel and Salmon 1994a, Gorenzel and Salmon 1994b, Johnson 1994, Williams and Corrigan 1994, Cummings 2016, Homan et al. 2017). Accumulated bird droppings can reduce the functional life of some building roofs by 50% (Weber 1979). Corrosion damage to metal structures and painted finishes, including those on automobiles, can occur because of uric acid from bird droppings (Homan et al. 2017).

The accumulation of fecal matter from birds can also negatively affect landscaping and walkways, often at golf courses and waterfront property (Conover and Chasko 1985). Businesses may be concerned about the negative esthetic appearance of their property caused by excessive droppings and excessive grazing and are sensitive to comments by clients and guests. Costs associated with property damage include labor and disinfectants to clean and sanitize fecal droppings, implementation of wildlife management methods, loss of property use, loss of esthetic value of flowers, gardens, and lawns consumed by birds, loss of

customers or visitors irritated by walking in fecal droppings, repair of golf greens, and replacing grazed turf. The reoccurring presence of fecal droppings can lead to constant cleaning costs for property owners.

For example, in the fall and winter, American crows often form large roosting flocks in urban areas. American crows typically roost in trees and they tend to concentrate in areas where abundant food and roosting sites are available. In the United States, some crow roosts may reach a half-million birds (Verbeek and Caffrey 2020). These large flocks disperse to different feeding areas during the day. Crows can fly six to 12 miles from a roost to a feeding site each day (Johnson 1994). Large fall and winter crow roosts may cause serious problems in some areas particularly when located in towns or other sites near people. Such roosts are objectionable because of the odor of the bird droppings, health concerns, noise, and damage to trees in the roost.

In addition to damage caused by the accumulation of droppings, damage can also occur in other ways. Damage from vultures can include tearing and consuming latex window caulking or rubber gaskets that seal windowpanes, asphalt and cedar roof shingles, vinyl seat covers from boats, patio furniture, and other equipment. Similarly, nesting colonies of gulls frequently cause damage to structures when they nest on rooftops and peck at spray-on-foam roofing and rubber roofing material, including caulking. Birds can also cause damage to windows, siding, vehicles, and other property when they mistake their reflection as another bird and attack the image. Waterfowl can cause damage to landscaping, when they consume or trample flowers, gardens, and lawns (Conover 1991). Gulls pick up refuse at landfills and carry it off the property to feed, resulting in garbage being deposited on buildings, equipment, and vehicles in neighboring areas.

When gulls, European starlings, house sparrows, raptors, rock pigeons, swallows and other birds nest on or in buildings or other structures they transport large amounts of nest material and food debris to the area. These materials can obstruct roof drainage systems and lead to structural damage or roof failure if clogged drains result in rooftop flooding (Vermeer et al. 1988, Blokpoel and Scharf 1991, Belant 1993). Nesting material and feathers can also clog ventilation systems or fall onto or into equipment or goods (Gorenzel and Salmon 1994b, Homan et al. 2017). Electrical utility companies frequently have problems with bird nests causing power outages when they short out transformers and substations (United States Geological Survey 2005, Pruett-Jones et al. 2007). Nesting material can also be esthetically displeasing, or in the case of some species can cause a fire hazard (Fitzwater 1994).

Large numbers of gulls can be attracted to landfills as they often use landfills as feeding and loafing areas throughout the year, while attracting larger populations of gulls during migration periods (Mudge and Ferns 1982, Patton 1988, Belant et al. 1995, Belant et al. 1998, Gabrey 1997, Bruleigh et al. 1998). Landfills may be contributing to the increase in gull populations (Verbeek 1977, Patton 1988, Belant and Dolbeer 1993). Gulls that visit landfills may loaf and nest on nearby rooftops, causing health concerns and structural damage to buildings and equipment. Bird conflicts associated with landfills include accumulation of feces on equipment and buildings, distraction of heavy machinery operators, and the potential for birds to transmit pathogens to landfill employees. The tendency for gulls to carry waste off site results in accumulation of feces and deposition of garbage in surrounding industrial and residential areas which creates a nuisance, as well as generates the potential for birds to transmit pathogens to neighboring residences.

Damage and the threat of damage associated with increasing populations of resident Canada geese are well documented (*e.g.*, see Mississippi Flyway Council Technical Section 1996, Gabig 2000, Atlantic Flyway Council 2011, Mississippi Flyway Council Technical Section 2017). Those potential impacts include damage to property. Damage to property can occur when geese congregate on lawns or mowed areas, including athletic fields, golf courses, lawns, and parks, as well as beaches and marinas, depositing

their droppings and feathers (Mississippi Flyway Council Technical Section 1996, Gabig 2000, Atlantic Flyway Council 2011).

#### 1.2.4 Need to Resolve Bird Damage Occurring to Natural Resources

Birds can also negatively affect natural resources through habitat degradation, competition with other wildlife, and through direct depredation of natural resources. Habitat degradation can occur when large concentrations of birds in a localized area negatively affect characteristics of the surrounding habitat, which can adversely affect other wildlife species and can be esthetically displeasing. Direct depredation occurs when predatory bird species feed on other wildlife species, which can negatively influence those species' populations, especially when depredation occurs on threatened and endangered (T&E) species. Competition can occur when two species compete (usually to the detriment of one species) for available resources, such as food or nesting sites.

For example, brood parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds may be a concern for wildlife professionals where those birds are plentiful. Somewhat unique in their breeding habits, brown-headed cowbirds are known as brood parasites, meaning they lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species (Lowther 2020). Female cowbirds can lay up to 41 eggs per season with eggs reportedly being laid in the nests of over 220 species of birds (Lowther 2020). The raising of cowbird young occurs by the host species because brown-headed cowbirds provide no parental care. Young cowbirds often out-compete the young of the host species (Lowther 2020). Due to this, brown-headed cowbirds can have adverse effects on the reproductive success of other species (Lowther 2020) and can threaten the viability of a population or even the survival of a host species (Trail and Baptista 1993).

Crows and gulls consume a variety of food items, including the eggs and chicks of other birds (Nisbet et al. 2020, Pollet et al. 2020, Verbeek and Caffrey 2020). They are among the most frequently reported avian predators of colonial nesting waterbirds in the United States (Frederick and Collopy 1989). Some of the species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) are preyed upon or otherwise could be adversely affected by certain bird species. For example, interior least terns (*Sternula antillarum*) are prey for a variety of avian species, including crows, grackles, gulls, herons, owls, American kestrels (*Falco sparverius*), and northern harriers (*Circus hudsonius*) (USFWS 1990, USFWS 2013). Impacts on the productivity and survivorship of rare or threatened colonial waterbirds can be severe when nesting colonies become targets of avian predators. Fish eating birds such as cormorants, egrets, and herons also have the potential to impact local fish and amphibian populations, especially those of T&E species.

Gulls can displace other colonial nesting birds (Hunter et al. 2006). For example, gulls nesting on islands can displace piping plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) and removing gulls may effectively increase the number of piping plovers nesting on an island (USFWS 2016a, USFWS 2020a). European starlings and house sparrows can be aggressive and often out-compete native species, destroying their eggs, and killing nestlings (Cabe 2020, Lowther and Cink 2020). Miller (1975) and Barnes (1991) reported European starlings were responsible for a severe depletion of the eastern bluebird (*Sialis sialis*) population due to nest competition. Nest competition by European starlings has been known to displace American kestrels (Von Jarchow 1943, Nickell 1967, Wilmer 1987, Bechard and Bechard 1996), red-bellied woodpeckers (*Melanerpes carolinus*), Gila woodpeckers (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) (Kerpez and Smith 1990, Ingold 1994), northern flickers (*Colaptes auratus*), purple martins (*Progne subis*) (Allen and Nice 1952), and wood ducks (*Aix sponsa*) (Shake 1967, McGilvrey and Uhler 1971, Grabill 1977, Heusmann et al. 1977). Weitzel (1988) reported nine native species of birds in Nevada had been displaced by starling nest competition, and Mason et al. (1972) reported European starlings evicting bats from nest holes.



Bird species that roost, nest, and/or loaf in large concentrations can cause damage to natural resources and property because accumulations of fecal droppings can kill vegetation and cause property damage. For example, cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) form gregarious nesting colonies, or heronries, generally in medium to tall upland trees found in woodlands, swamps, and wooded islands adjacent to water. However, proximity to water is not a requirement of egret nesting sites with many heronries located in or near residential areas (Telfair II 2020). The accumulation of guano under heronries can defoliate and kill vegetation (Telfair II 2020). Telfair II and Bister (2004) noted that the composition of vegetation under heronries rapidly changed within two- to three-years after the establishment of a cattle egret heronry in Texas due to large concentrations of feces. Similarly, a study conducted in Oklahoma found fewer annual and perennial plants in locations where crows roosted over several years (Hicks 1979). Nesting colonies of double-crested cormorants can also have an impact on vegetation and change soil characteristics (Rush et al. 2011, Lafferty et al. 2016, Veum et al. 2019).

Birds can carry a wide range of bacterial, viral, fungal, and protozoan pathogens that can affect other bird species, as well as mammals. Birds carry various pathogens that can affect other species (e.g., see Friend and Franson 1999, Forrester and Spalding 2003, Thomas et al. 2007). There is a risk that birds will transmit pathogens to a single individual or a local population, new habitat, or other species including birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish species. Birds may also act as a vector, reservoir, or intermediate host of various pathogens and parasites. Diseases like avian botulism, avian cholera, and Newcastle disease can result in death of hundreds to thousands of bird species across the natural landscape (Friend et al. 2001). For example, an avian botulism outbreak in Lake Erie was responsible for a mass die-off of common loons (*Gavia immer*) (Campbell et al. 2001) as well as other species that may have fed on the carcasses or on fly larva associated with the carcasses (Duncan and Jensen 1976). Although diseases spread through populations of birds, it is often difficult to determine the potential impacts they will have on other wildlife species due to the range of variables that are involved in a disease outbreak (Friend et al. 2001).

### **1.3 NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT AND WS' DECISION-MAKING**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to incorporate environmental planning into federal agency actions and decision-making processes (Public Law 9-190, 42 USC 4321 et seq.). Therefore, if WS provided assistance by conducting activities to manage damage caused by bird species, those activities would be a federal action requiring compliance with the NEPA. The NEPA requires federal agencies to have available and fully consider detailed information regarding environmental effects of federal actions and to make information regarding environmental effects available to interested persons and agencies.

As part of the decision-making process associated with the NEPA, WS follows the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing the NEPA (40 CFR 1500 et seq.) along with the implementing procedures of the USDA (7 CFR 1b) and the APHIS (7 CFR 372). The NEPA sets forth the requirement that federal agencies evaluate their actions in terms of their potential to significantly affect the quality of the human environment to avoid or, where possible, to mitigate and minimize adverse impacts, making informed decisions, and including agencies and the public in their planning to support informed decision-making.

#### **1.3.1 Complying with the National Environmental Policy Act**

To comply with the NEPA and Council on Environmental Quality regulations, WS is preparing this Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate alternative approaches of achieving the objectives of WS and to determine whether the potential environmental effects caused by the alternative approaches might be significant, requiring the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As described by the

Council on Environmental Quality (2007), the intent of an EA is to provide brief but sufficient evidence and analysis to determine whether to prepare an EIS, aid in complying with the NEPA when an EIS is not necessary, and to facilitate preparation of an EIS when one is necessary. The Council on Environmental Quality (2007) further states, “*The EA process concludes with either a Finding of No Significant Impact...or a determination to proceed to preparation of an EIS*”. WS developed this EA under the 1978 NEPA regulations and existing APHIS NEPA implementing procedures because WS initiated this EA prior to the NEPA revisions that went into effect on September 14, 2020.

### **1.3.2 Rationale for Preparing an EA Rather Than an EIS**

One comment that WS often receives during the public involvement process associated with the development of an EA is that WS should have prepared an EIS instead of an EA or that proposed activities require the development of an EIS. As discussed previously, the primary purpose for developing an EA is to determine if the alternative approaches developed to meet the need for action could potentially have significant individual and/or cumulative impacts on the quality of the human environment that would warrant the preparation of an EIS (see 40 CFR 1501.4, 40 CFR 1508.9(a)(3)). WS prepared this EA so that WS can make an informed decision on whether or not an EIS would be necessary if WS implemented the alternative approaches to meeting the need for action.

WS is preparing this EA to facilitate planning, promote interagency coordination, streamline program management, clearly communicate to the public the analysis of individual and cumulative impacts of proposed activities, and to evaluate and determine if there would be any potentially significant or cumulative effects from the alternative approaches developed to meet the need for action. The analyses contained in this EA are based on information derived from WS’ Management Information System, available documents (see Appendix A), interagency consultations, and public involvement.

If WS makes a determination that implementation of a selected alternative approach would have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment based on this EA, WS would publish a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS. This EA would be the foundation for developing that EIS in accordance with the 1978 NEPA implementing regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9(a)(3)).

### **1.3.3 Using this EA to Inform WS’ Decisions and the Decisions to be made**

Although WS only provides assistance when requested, WS is required to comply with the NEPA before making final decisions about actions that could have environmental effects. WS will use the analyses in this EA to help inform agency decision-makers, including a decision on whether the alternative approaches of meeting the need for action requires the preparation of an EIS or the EA process concludes with a Finding of No Significant Impact.

Another major purpose of the NEPA is to include other agencies and the public during the planning process to support informed decision-making. Prior to making and publishing the decision<sup>4</sup> to conclude this EA process, WS will make this EA available to the public, agencies, tribes, and other interested or affected entities for review and comment. Making the EA available to the public, agencies, tribes, and other interested or affected entities during the planning process will assist with understanding applicable issues and reasonable alternative means to meeting the need for action (see Section 1.2) and to ensure that the analyses are complete for informed decision-making. WS will proceed under the 1978 regulations and existing APHIS procedures as this EA was initiated prior to the September 14, 2020 NEPA revisions.

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<sup>4</sup>As discussed in Section 1.3, the EA process concludes with either a Finding of No Significant Impact or the publication of a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS.

Based on agency relationships, Memorandum of Understandings, and legislative authorities, WS is the lead agency for this EA, and therefore, responsible for the scope, content, and decisions made. Section 1.5 discusses the roles and responsibilities of agencies related to activities discussed in this EA. As discussed in Section 1.2, WS receives requests for assistance associated with many bird species in North Dakota. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the NDGFD have regulatory authority over many of those bird species and WS' activities involving the take of certain bird species would require authorization from the USFWS and/or the NDGFD prior to WS conducting activities. In addition, WS would be subject to any conditions associated with the authorizations given by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD. Therefore, the take of many bird species to alleviate damage or reduce threats of damage would only occur at the discretion of the USFWS and/or the NDGFD.

Based on the scope of this EA, a decision to be made is should WS conduct activities to alleviate damage and threats of damage in North Dakota. If so, how can WS best respond to the need to reduce damage in North Dakota and would activities conducted responding to that need result in effects to the human environment requiring the preparation of an EIS.

#### **1.3.4 Public Involvement**

Public outreach and notification methods for this EA will include posting a notice on the national WS program webpage and on the [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) webpage. In addition, WS will send out direct mailings to local known stakeholders and an electronic notification to stakeholders registered through the APHIS Stakeholder Registry. WS will also publish a notice in the legal section of the *Bismarck Tribune* newspaper. WS will provide for a minimum of a 30-day comment period for the public and interested parties to review the EA and provide their comments. WS will inform the public of the decision using the same venues. If WS receives comments during the public comment period, WS will summarize the comments received and provide responses to those comments in Chapter 4.

WS will coordinate the preparation of this EA with consulting partner agencies and tribes to facilitate planning, to promote interagency and tribal coordination, and to incorporate agency and tribal expertise, which includes the NDGFD. WS has asked each consulting agency to review the draft EA and provide input and direction to WS to ensure proposed activities would comply with applicable federal and state regulations and policies, federal land management plans, Memorandum of Understandings, and cooperative agreements.

#### **1.3.5 Period for which this EA is Valid**

If WS determines that the analyses in this EA indicate that an EIS is not warranted, this EA remains valid until WS determines that new or additional needs for action, changed conditions, new issues, and/or new alternatives having different environmental impacts need to be analyzed to keep the information and analyses current. At that time, this analysis and document would be reviewed and, if appropriate, supplemented if the changes would have “*environmental relevance*” (40 CFR 1502.9(c)), or a new EA prepared pursuant to the NEPA.

If WS provides assistance with managing damage caused by birds, WS would monitor activities conducted by its personnel to ensure those activities and their impacts remain consistent with the activities and impacts analyzed in this EA and selected as part of the decision. Monitoring activities would ensure that WS' activities and the effects associated with those activities occurred within the limits of evaluated/anticipated activities. Monitoring involves review of the EA for all the issues evaluated in Chapter 3 to ensure that the activities and associated impacts have not changed substantially over time.

## 1.4 SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

WS has decided that one EA analyzing potential effects of implementing the alternatives approaches of meeting the need for action for the entire State of North Dakota provides a more comprehensive and less redundant analysis than multiple EAs covering smaller regions. This approach also provides a broader scope for the effective analysis of potential cumulative impacts and for using data and reports from state and federal wildlife management agencies, which are typically on a statewide basis.

Many of the bird species discussed in Section 1.2 and Appendix D occur statewide and may occur throughout the year in North Dakota. Birds are dynamic and mobile; therefore, damage and threats of damage caused by birds can occur wherever those bird species occur in the state. Birds could occur in and around commercial, industrial, public, and private buildings, facilities, and properties where birds may roost, loaf, feed, nest, or otherwise occur. Examples of areas where birds occur include, but are not necessarily limited to, residential buildings, golf courses, athletic fields, recreational areas, swimming beaches, parks, corporate complexes, subdivisions, businesses, industrial parks, and schools. Activities could also occur in and around agricultural areas, wetlands, restoration sites, cemeteries, public parks, bridges, industrial sites, urban/suburban woodlots, hydro-electric dam structures, reservoirs and reservoir shore lands, hydro and fossil power plant sites, substations, transmission line rights-of-way, landfills, military bases, or at any other sites where birds may roost, loaf, or nest. Target bird species could occur in and around agricultural fields, vineyards, orchards, farmyards, dairies, ranches, livestock operations, grain mills, and grain handling areas (*e.g.*, railroad yards) where birds destroy crops, feed on spilled grains, or contaminate food products for human or livestock consumption. Additionally, target bird species could occur at airports and surrounding properties where birds represent a threat to aviation safety.

Responding to requests for assistance falls within the category of actions in which the exact timing or location of individual requests for assistance can be difficult to predict with sufficient notice to describe accurately the locations or times in which WS could reasonably expect to be acting. Although WS could predict some of the possible locations or types of situations and sites where some requests for assistance could occur, WS cannot predict the specific locations or times at which affected resource owners would determine that damage had become intolerable and they request assistance from WS. WS must be ready to provide assistance on short notice anywhere in North Dakota when receiving a request for assistance. Therefore, the geographic scope of the actions and analyses in this EA is statewide and this EA analyzes actions that could occur on federal, tribal, state, county, city, and private lands, when requested. However, WS would only provide assistance when the appropriate property owner or manager requested such assistance and only on properties where WS and the appropriate property owner or manager has signed a work initiation document.

The analyses in this EA would apply to any actions that WS may conduct to alleviate damage caused by bird species in any locale and at any time within North Dakota when WS receives a request for such assistance from the appropriate property owner or property manager. The standard WS Decision Model (see WS Directive 2.201; Slate et al. 1992) would be the site-specific procedure for individual actions conducted by WS in the state (see Chapter 2 for a description of the WS Decision Model and its application). The WS Decision Model is an analytical thought process used by WS' personnel for evaluating and responding to requests for assistance. If WS determines that the analyses in this EA do not warrant the preparation of an EIS, the decisions made by WS' personnel using the model would be consistent with the alternative approach that WS selects to meet the need for action. In addition, decisions made using the model would be in accordance with WS' directives as well as relevant laws and regulations.

As discussed previously, the property owner or property manager would determine when assistance from WS was appropriate. WS would only conduct activities after receiving a request from the appropriate property owner or property manager. In addition, WS would only conduct activities after the appropriate property owner or manager signed a work initiation document allowing WS to conduct activities on the property they own or manage. Therefore, this EA meets the intent of the NEPA with regard to site-specific analysis, informed decision-making, and providing the necessary timely assistance to those people requesting assistance from WS.

## **1.5 AGENCIES INVOLVED IN THIS EA AND THEIR ROLES AND AUTHORITIES**

If WS provides assistance to meet the need for action, several state and federal agencies would have roles and authorities that would relate to WS conducting activities. Below are brief discussions of the roles and authorities of other state and federal agencies, as those authorities relate to conducting wildlife damage management.

### **1.5.1 United States Fish and Wildlife Service**

The USFWS is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats. The USFWS shares responsibility with other federal, tribal, state, and local entities. However, the USFWS has specific responsibilities for the protection of T&E species under the ESA, migratory birds, inter-jurisdictional fish, and certain marine mammals, as well as for lands and waters that the USFWS administers for the management and protection of those resources, such as the National Wildlife Refuge System.

### **1.5.2 United States Environmental Protection Agency**

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for implementing and enforcing the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), which regulates the registration and use of pesticides, including repellents for dispersing birds and avicides available for use to take birds lethally.

### **1.5.3 North Dakota Game and Fish Department**

The mission of the NDGFD is to protect, conserve, and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitat for sustained public consumptive and non-consumptive use (NDGFD 2019a). The NDGFD has statutory authority for all wildlife in the state. The North Dakota Century Code defines the authorities of the NDGFD, which include the following:

#### ***North Dakota Century Code §20.1-01-02(58). Definition of “wildlife”***

*“Wildlife”* means any member of the animal kingdom including any mammal, fish, bird (including any migratory, nonmigratory, or endangered bird for which protection is also afforded by treaty or other international agreement), amphibian, reptile, mollusk, crustacean, or other invertebrate, and includes any part, product, egg, or offspring thereof, or the dead body or parts thereof. Wildlife does not include domestic animals as defined by section 36-01-00.1 or birds or animals held in private ownership.

#### ***North Dakota Century Code §20.1-02-05(14). Powers of director***

Pursuant to section 4-01-17.1, cooperate with the agriculture commissioner, the United States fish and wildlife service, and other agencies in the destruction of predatory animals, destructive birds, and injurious field rodents. The director may adopt rules in accordance with organized and systematic plans of

the department of the interior for the destruction of these birds and animals. The director may determine the necessity and issue permits and rules and regulations therefor for the operation and use of private aircraft to assist in the destruction of the above birds and animals and aid in the administration or protection of land, water, wildlife, livestock, domesticated animals, human life, or crops.

***North Dakota Century Code §20.1-04-02. Game birds protected***

No person may hunt, take, kill, possess, convey, ship, or cause to be shipped, by common or private carrier, sell, or barter any game bird or any part thereof taken in this state, except as provided in this title.

***North Dakota Century Code §20.1-04-03. Harmless wild birds protected - Imported songbirds as domestic pets may be possessed and sold.***

No person, without a permit issued by the director, shall kill, catch, take, ship, cause to be shipped, purchase, offer, or expose for sale, sell, have in that person's possession or under that person's control, any harmless wild bird, or any part thereof, irrespective of whether the harmless wild bird was captured or killed in or out of this state. Imported songbirds used and to be used as domestic pets may be bought, sold, shipped, or possessed at any time.

**1.5.4 North Dakota Department of Agriculture**

In North Dakota, pesticide use and regulation occurs within the Pesticide and Fertilizer Division of the North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA). The NDDA regulates pesticide dealers, distributors, and users to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. The NDDA stated, “...compliance with pesticide laws will prevent unreasonable adverse effects to human health and the environment, as well as ensure that North Dakota food and feed crops continue to be recognized as high-quality and safe” (NDDA 2017).

**1.6 DOCUMENTS RELATED TO THIS EA**

Additional environmental documents relate to activities that WS could conduct to manage damage or threats of damage associated with bird species in the state. The relationship of those documents to this EA occurs below for each of those documents.

**1.6.1 Resident Canada Goose Management Final Environmental Impact Statement**

The USFWS has issued a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) addressing the need for and potential environmental impacts associated with managing damage caused by the resident Canada goose population (USFWS 2005). The FEIS also contains detailed analyses of the issues and methods used to manage Canada goose damage. The USFWS published a Record of Decision and Final Rule for the FEIS on August 10, 2006 (71 FR 45964-45993). On June 27, 2007, WS, as a cooperating agency, issued a Record of Decision and adopted the FEIS (72 FR 35217).

**1.6.2 Light Goose Management Final Environmental Impact Statement**

The USFWS has issued a FEIS that analyzes the potential environmental impacts of management alternatives for addressing problems associated with overabundant light goose populations. The “light” geese referred to in the FEIS include the snow goose (*Anser caerulescens*) and Ross’s goose (*Anser rossii*) that nest in Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Canada and migrate and winter throughout the United States. The USFWS published a Record of Decision and issued a final rule that went into effect on December 5, 2008.

### **1.6.3 Eagle Rule Revision Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement**

Developed by the USFWS, this EIS evaluated the issues and alternatives associated with the promulgation of new regulations to authorize the “take” of bald eagles and golden eagles as defined under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The preferred alternative in the EIS evaluated the management on an eagle management unit level (similar to the migratory bird flyways) to establish limits on the amount of eagle take that the USFWS could authorize in order to maintain stable or increasing populations. This alternative further establishes a maximum duration for permits of 30 years with evaluations in five-year increments (USFWS 2016b). The USFWS issued a Record of Decision for the preferred alternative in the EIS. The USFWS published a Final Rule on December 16, 2016 (81 FR 91551-91553).

### **1.6.4 National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines**

The USFWS developed national bald eagle management guidelines to advise people of when and under what circumstances the protective provisions of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act may apply to their activities (USFWS 2007). A variety of human activities can potentially interfere with bald eagles, affecting their ability to forage, nest, roost, breed, or raise young. The USFWS developed the bald eagle management guidelines to help people minimize such impacts to bald eagles, particularly where they may constitute “disturbance”.

### **1.6.5 WS’ Blackbird Damage Management Environmental Assessment**

WS previously developed an EA that analyzed the need for action to manage damage associated with blackbirds. That EA identified the issues associated with managing damage associated with blackbirds in the state and analyzed alternative approaches to meet the specific need identified in the EA while addressing the identified issues. Changes in the need for action and the affected environment have prompted WS to initiate this new analysis to address damage management activities in the state. This new EA will address more recently identified changes and will assess the potential environmental effects of several alternative approaches based on a new need for action. Because this EA will re-evaluate activities conducted under the previous EA, the outcome of the Decision issued based on the analyses in this EA will supersede the previous EA that addressed blackbirds.

### **1.6.6 USFWS Double-crested Cormorant Final Environmental Impact Statement**

The USFWS has issued a FEIS that analyzes the potential environmental impacts of alternative approaches to address damage caused by double-crested cormorants in the contiguous 48 states. The USFWS has issued a Record of Decision for the FEIS (USFWS 2020b) and published a final rule that implements the selected alternative from the Record of Decision (see 85 FR 85535-85556). The USFWS selected an alternative that created a special state/tribal permit that would allow states and tribes to manage damage to state and tribal resources caused by double-crested cormorants (see 50 CFR 21.28). In addition, the USFWS would continue to issue standard depredation permits to manage damage to other resources caused by double-crested cormorants.

### **1.6.7 North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan**

State Wildlife Action Plans are the principle documents for preventing endangered species throughout the United States and its territories. The intent of the North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan “to identify species of greatest conservation priority, provide fundamental background information, strategic guidance, input from partners, and most importantly, a framework for developing and coordinating

*conservation actions to safeguard all fish and wildlife resources”* (Dyke et al. 2015). WS consulted the State Wildlife Action Plan (Dyke et al. 2015) as part of this analysis and the alternatives would be consistent with the plan.

## **1.7 STATE AND FEDERAL REGULATIONS THAT COULD APPLY TO WS’ ACTIVITIES**

In addition to the NEPA, several regulations and executive orders would be relevant to activities that WS could conduct when providing assistance. This section discusses several regulations and executive orders that would be highly relevant to WS’ activities when providing assistance. All management actions conducted and/or recommended by WS would comply with appropriate federal, state, and local laws in accordance with WS Directive 2.210.

### **1.7.1 Federal regulations that could apply to WS’ activities**

If WS provides assistance to manage bird damage or threat of damage, several federal regulations could apply to the activities that WS conducts. The following are the primary federal regulations that could apply to WS’ activities.

#### ***Endangered Species Act***

Under the ESA, all federal agencies will seek to conserve T&E species and will utilize their authorities in furtherance of the purposes of the ESA (Section 2(c)). Evaluation of the alternatives in regard to the ESA will occur in Section 3.1.2 of this EA.

#### ***National Historic Preservation Act***

The National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations (see 36 CFR 800) require federal agencies to initiate the Section 106 process if an agency determines that the agency’s actions are undertakings as defined in Section 800.16(y) and, if so, whether it is a type of activity that has the potential to cause effects on historic properties. If the undertaking is a type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, assuming such historic properties were present, the agency official has no further obligations under Section 106.

#### ***Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 USC 703-711; 40 Stat. 755), as amended***

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) makes it unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, barter, or offer for sale, purchase, or barter, any migratory bird, or their parts, nests, or eggs (16 USC 703-711). A list of bird species protected under the MBTA occurs at 50 CFR 10.13. The MBTA also provides the USFWS regulatory authority to protect families of migratory birds. The law prohibits any “take” of migratory bird species by any entities, except as authorized by the USFWS. Under permitting guidelines in the MBTA, the USFWS may issue depredation permits to requesters experiencing damage caused by bird species protected under the MBTA. In addition, the USFWS may establish depredation/control orders for migratory birds that allow people to take bird species without the need for a depredation permit when those species cause damage. Information regarding migratory bird permits and depredation/control orders occurs in 50 CFR 13 and 50 CFR 21, respectively. The USFWS has the overall regulatory authority to manage populations of migratory bird species, while the NDGFD has the authority to manage wildlife populations in the State of North Dakota.



### ***Depredation Order for Blackbirds, Cowbirds, Grackles, Crows, and Magpies***

Pursuant to the MBTA under 50 CFR 21.43, a depredation permit is not required to take certain species of blackbirds, cowbirds, grackles, crows, and magpies when those species cause serious injuries to agricultural crops, horticultural crops, or livestock feed. In addition, a depredation permit is not required when those species cause a health hazard or cause structural property damage. A depredation permit is also not required to protect species designated as endangered, threatened, or a candidate species by a federal, state, and/or tribal government. Those blackbird species in North Dakota that WS could lethally remove pursuant to the blackbird depredation order include Brewer's blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, brown-headed cowbirds, American crows, common grackles, and black-billed magpies.

### ***Depredation/Control Orders for Canada Geese***

As discussed previously, the USFWS developed an EIS to evaluate alternatives to address increasing resident goose populations across the United States and to reduce associated damage (USFWS 2005). Canada geese are “resident” when they nest within the lower 48 states and the District of Columbia or that reside within the lower 48 states and the District of Columbia in the months of April, May, June, July, or August (see 50 CFR 20.11, 50 CFR 21.3) (Rusch et al. 1995, Ankney 1996). The USFWS selected an approach that established several depredation/control orders to manage damage associated with resident Canada Geese. When certain criteria are occurring, the depredation/control orders allow people to take resident Canada geese without the need for a depredation permit from the USFWS; however, a state wildlife agency may still require authorization before take of resident Canada geese can occur.

Under 50 CFR 21.49, airport authorities or their agents can lethally take resident Canada Geese at airports and military airfields without the need for a depredation permit from the USFWS when resident Canada geese are causing damage or posing a threat of damage to aircraft. The USFWS also established a Canada goose nest and egg depredation order that allows people to destroy the nests and eggs of those resident Canada geese causing or posing a threat to people, property, agricultural crops, and other interests without the need for a depredation permit once the participant has registered with the USFWS (see 50 CFR 21.50). The USFWS established a similar depredation order to manage damage to agricultural resources associated with Canada geese. Under 50 CFR 21.51, designated people can lethally remove resident Canada geese without a permit from the USFWS in those states designated, including North Dakota, when geese are causing damage to agricultural resources. Pursuant to 50 CFR 21.52, state agencies, tribes, and the District of Columbia can address resident Canada geese using lethal and non-lethal methods when those geese pose a direct threat to human health.

### ***Control Order for Muscovy Ducks***

Muscovy ducks (*Cairina moschata*) are native to South America, Central America, and Mexico with a small naturally occurring population in southern Texas. People have domesticated Muscovy ducks and they have sold and kept Muscovy ducks for food and as pets in the United States. In many states, people have released Muscovy ducks or Muscovy ducks have escaped captivity and have formed feral populations, especially in urban areas, that are non-migratory. The USFWS has issued a Final Rule on the status of the Muscovy duck in the United States (75 FR 9316-9322). Because naturally occurring populations of Muscovy ducks are known to inhabit parts of south Texas, the USFWS has included the Muscovy duck in the list of bird species afforded protection under the MBTA at 50 CFR 10.13 (75 FR 9316-9322). To address damage and threats of damage associated with Muscovy ducks, the USFWS has also established a control order for Muscovy ducks under 50 CFR 21.54 (75 FR 9316-9322). Under 50 CFR 21.54, Muscovy ducks, and their nests and eggs, may be removed or destroyed without a

depredate permit from the USFWS at any time in the United States, except in Hidalgo, Starr, and Zapata Counties in Texas (75 FR 9316-9322).

***Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 USC 668-668c), as amended***

The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the MBTA protect the bald eagle and the golden eagle from a variety of harmful actions and impacts. Under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 USC 668-668c), the take of bald eagles is prohibited without a permit from the USFWS. Under the Act, the definition of “take” includes actions that can “molest” or “disturb” eagles. For the purposes of the Act, under 40 CFR 22.3, the term “disturb” as it relates to take has been defined as “to agitate or bother a Bald and Golden Eagles to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, based on the best scientific information available, 1) injury to an eagle, 2) a decrease in its productivity, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior, or 3) nest abandonment, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior.”

***Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act***

The FIFRA requires the registration, classification, and regulation of all pesticides used in the United States. The EPA is responsible for implementing and enforcing the FIFRA. The NDDA works in partnership with the EPA and the NDDA has the authority to enforce the FIFRA pursuant to state laws and administrative rules.

***The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990***

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act requires federal agencies to notify the Secretary of the Department that manages the federal lands upon the discovery of Native American cultural items on federal or tribal lands. Federal projects would discontinue work until they have made a reasonable effort to protect the items and have notified the proper authority.

***Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds - Executive Order 13186***

Executive Order 13186 requires each federal agency taking actions that have, or are likely to have, a measurable negative effect on migratory bird populations, to develop and implement a Memorandum of Understanding with the USFWS that shall promote the conservation of migratory bird populations. The APHIS has developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the USFWS as required by this Executive Order. WS would abide by the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the APHIS and the USFWS.

***Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations - Executive Order 12898***

Executive Order 12898 promotes the fair treatment of people of all races, income levels, and cultures with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice is the pursuit of equal justice and protection under the law for all environmental statutes and regulations without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Executive Order 12898 requires federal agencies to make environmental justice part of their mission, and to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects of federal programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income persons or populations. This EA will evaluate activities addressed in the alternative approaches for their potential impacts on the human environment and compliance with Executive Order 12898.

### ***Protection of Children from Environmental Health and Safety Risks - Executive Order 13045***

Children may suffer disproportionately for many reasons from environmental health and safety risks, including the development of their physical and mental status. Federal agencies must make it a high priority to identify and assess environmental health risks and safety risks that may disproportionately affect children. In addition, federal agencies must ensure agency policies, programs, activities, and standards address disproportionate risks to children that result from environmental health risks or safety risks.

### ***Invasive Species - Executive Order 13112 and Executive Order 13751***

Executive Order 13112 establishes guidance to federal agencies to prevent the introduction of invasive species, provide for the control of invasive species, and to minimize the economic, ecological, and human health impacts that invasive species cause. The Order states that each federal agency whose actions may affect the status of invasive species shall, to the extent practicable and permitted by law: 1) reduce invasion of exotic species and the associated damages, 2) monitor invasive species populations and provide for restoration of native species and habitats, 3) conduct research on invasive species and develop technologies to prevent introduction, and 4) provide for environmentally sound control and promote public education of invasive species. Executive Order 13751 amended Executive Order 13112 by clarifying the operations of the National Invasive Species Council and by expanding its membership. In addition, Executive Order 13751 incorporated additional considerations into federal efforts to address invasive species and to strengthen coordinated, cost efficient federal actions.

#### **1.7.2 State regulations that could apply to WS' activities**

If WS provides assistance to manage bird damage or the threat of damage, state regulations could also apply to the activities that WS conducts. The following are the primary state regulations that could apply to WS' activities.

#### ***Cooperation between the NDGFD, the NDDA, and the APHIS***

Under North Dakota Century Code 4.1-01-05, the commissioner of the NDDA may cooperate with and enter into agreements with the APHIS, or other appropriate federal agencies, to manage damage associated with birds causing crop damage, substantial economic loss, or threatening human health. Similarly, under North Dakota Century Code 20.1-02-05, the Director of the NDGFD may cooperate with the NDDA and other agencies to manage damage associated with birds.

#### ***Protection of wild bird species***

Pursuant to North Dakota Century Code 20.1-04-03, no person may take a harmless wild bird species without a permit issued by the NDGFD. Harmless wild bird species include all wild birds not classified as harmful wild birds or game birds (see North Dakota Century Code 20.1-01-02). Harmful wild bird species includes blackbirds, magpies, house sparrows, and starlings (see North Dakota Century Code 20.1-01-02). A person may take harmful wild bird species at any time during daylight hours in the state (see North Dakota Century Code 20.1-04-13). In addition, no person may take the nests or eggs of protected birds without a permit from the NDGFD (see North Dakota Century Code 20.1-04-04).

### *Use of propane cannons and similar noisemaking device*

Pursuant to North Dakota Century Code 20.1-04-14, “*Any propane exploder or similar noisemaking device designed to ward off blackbirds which is located within one hundred sixty rods [804.67 meters] of an inhabited dwelling may only be used during the period between sunrise and sunset*”.

## **CHAPTER 2: ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVES**

WS has identified a need for action based on requests for assistance that WS receives to manage damage caused by birds in the state (see Section 1.2). WS has identified several issues associated with the activities that WS could implement to meet that need for action. Issues are concerns regarding potential effects that might occur from proposed activities. Federal agencies must consider such issues during the decision-making process required by the NEPA. Section 2.1 of this EA discusses the issues that WS identified, which could occur from the implementation of alternative approaches to meet the need for action. Section 3.2 discusses additional issues that WS identified; however, the EA does not analyze those issues in detail for the reasons provided in Section 3.2.

WS developed four alternative approaches to meet the need for action that Section 1.2 of this EA identifies and to address the identified issues discussed in Section 2.1. Section 2.4.1 discusses the four alternative approaches that WS could implement to meet the need for action. Section 2.4.2 discusses alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail and provides the rationale for not considering those alternative approaches in detail within this EA. In addition, WS’ directives would provide guidance to WS’ personnel conducting official activities (see WS Directive 1.101).

### **2.1 ISSUES USED TO DEVELOP THE ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

This section describes the issues that WS identified during the scoping process for this EA. Section 3.1 analyzes the environmental consequences of each alternative in comparison to determine the extent of actual or potential impacts on the issues. WS evaluated, in detail, the following four issues.

#### **2.1.1 Issue 1 - Effects of Damage Management Activities on Target Bird Populations**

A common issue when addressing damage caused by wildlife is the potential impacts of management actions on the populations of target species. Methods available to alleviate bird damage or threats of damage are either non-lethal or lethal methods. Non-lethal methods available can capture, exclude, disperse, or otherwise make an area unattractive to target species causing damage, which can reduce the presence of those species at the site and potentially the immediate area around the site where people use those non-lethal methods. Lethal methods could also be available to remove a bird or those birds responsible for causing damage or posing threats to human safety. Therefore, if WS’ personnel used lethal methods, the removal of a bird or birds could result in local population reductions in the area where damage or threats were occurring. The number of individuals from a target species that WS could remove from a population using lethal methods under the alternatives would be dependent on the number of requests for assistance received, the number of individual birds involved with the associated damage or threat, and the efficacy of methods employed.

The basis for the analysis to determine the magnitude of impacts on the populations of those target bird species addressed in this EA from the use of lethal methods would be a measure of the number of individuals lethally removed in relation to that species abundance. Magnitude may be determined either quantitatively or qualitatively. Quantitative determinations may rely on population estimates, allowable removal levels, and actual removal data. Qualitative determinations may rely on population trend data, when available. WS would monitor the annual take of target bird species by comparing the number of

birds lethally removed with overall populations or trends. WS' personnel would only use lethal methods at the request of a cooperators seeking assistance. In addition, the take of those migratory bird species protected pursuant to the MBTA would only occur after the USFWS authorized the take. For those bird species not protected by the MBTA that are managed by the NDGFD (e.g., sharp-tailed grouse, gray partridge), take by WS would only occur when authorized by the NDGFD.

In addition, people can harvest some of the bird species addressed in this EA during annual hunting seasons in the state, such as waterfowl species. A concern is that damage management activities conducted by WS would affect the ability of people to harvest those bird species during the regulated hunting seasons either by reducing local populations through the lethal removal of birds or by reducing the number of birds present in an area through dispersal techniques. Therefore, any activities conducted by WS under the alternatives addressed would be occurring along with other natural processes and human-induced events, such as natural mortality, human-induced mortality from private damage management activities, mortality from regulated harvest, and human-induced alterations of wildlife habitat.

Section 3.1.1 analyzes the effects on the populations of target bird species in the state from implementation of the alternative approaches. Information on bird populations and population trend data can be available from several sources including the BBS, the Christmas Bird Count (CBC), the Partners in Flight Landbird Population database, available literature, and harvest data. Further information on those sources of information occurs below.

### ***Breeding Bird Survey***

The BBS is a large-scale inventory of North American birds coordinated by the United States Geological Survey, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (United States Geological Survey 2020b). The BBS is a combined set of over 3,700 roadside survey routes primarily covering the continental United States and southern Canada. During the BBS, observers count birds at established survey points along roadways for a set duration along a pre-determined route. Survey routes are 24.5 miles long with the observer stopping every 0.5 miles along the route to conduct the survey. The observer records the number of birds seen and heard within 0.25 miles of each survey point during a 3-minute sampling period. A survey along the route occurs once per year. Surveys first occurred in 1966 and occur in June, which is generally the period of time when those birds present at a location are likely breeding in the immediate area. The BBS occurs annually in the United States and Canada, across a large geographical area, under standardized survey guidelines. Scientists monitor bird populations by using trend data derived from bird observations collected during the BBS. Populations of birds tend to fluctuate, especially locally, because of variable local habitat and climatic conditions. Hierarchical model analysis is the basis for the current population trends derived from BBS data (Link and Sauer 2002, Sauer and Link 2011) and are dependent upon a variety of assumptions (Link and Sauer 1998).

### ***Christmas Bird Count***

Numerous volunteers conduct the CBC annually in December and early January under the guidance of the National Audubon Society. The CBC reflects the number of birds frequenting a location during the winter months. Survey data consists of the number of birds observed within a 15-mile diameter circle around a central point (177 mi<sup>2</sup>). The CBC data does not provide a population estimate, but the data can be an indicator of trends in a population over time. Researchers have found that population trends reflected in CBC data tend to correlate well with those from censuses taken by more stringent means (National Audubon Society 2010).

### ***Partners in Flight Landbird Population Estimate***

The BBS monitors the status of trends of North American bird populations, but it is also possible to use BBS data to develop a general estimate of the size of bird populations (Will et al. 2019). Using relative abundances derived from the BBS conducted from 2006 through 2015, the Partners in Flight (2019) extrapolated population estimates for many bird species in North America as part of the Partners in Flight Landbird Population Estimate database (see Will et al. 2019). The Partners in Flight system involves extrapolating the number of birds in the 50 quarter-mile circles (total area/route = 10 mi<sup>2</sup>) surveyed during the BBS to an area of interest. The model used by the Partners in Flight (2019) makes assumptions on the detectability of birds, which can vary for each species (see Stanton et al. 2019, Will et al. 2019). Some species of birds that are more conspicuous (visual and auditory) are more likely to be detected during bird surveys when compared to bird species that are more secretive and do not vocalize often. Therefore, the Partners in Flight Landbird Population Estimate database uses information on the detectability of a species to create a detectability factor, which may be combined with relative abundance data from the BBS to yield a population estimate (Rich et al. 2004, Blancher et al. 2013, Will et al. 2019).

### ***Annual Harvest Data***

The populations of several migratory bird species are sufficient to allow for annual harvest seasons that typically occur during the fall migration periods of those species. The USFWS establishes frameworks for the migratory bird hunting seasons that the NDGFD implements in the state. Those bird species addressed in this EA that have established hunting seasons include Canada geese, gadwalls, mallards, mourning doves, American crows, snow geese, Ross's geese, greater white-fronted geese (*Anser albifrons*), tundra swans (*Cygnus columbianus*), wood ducks (*Aix sponsa*), blue-winged teal (*Spatula discors*), northern shovelers (*Spatula clypeata*), American wigeons (*Mareca americana*), northern pintail (*Anas acuta*), green-winged teal (*Anas crecca*), canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*), redheads (*Aythya americana*), ring-necked ducks (*Aythya collaris*), lesser scaup (*Aythya affinis*), buffleheads (*Bucephala albeola*), common goldeneyes (*Bucephala clangula*), hooded mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), common mergansers (*Mergus merganser*), red-breasted mergansers (*Mergus serrator*), ruddy ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*), gray partridge (*Perdix perdix*), ring-necked pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus*), sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*), wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*), Eurasian collared-doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*), American coots (*Fulica americana*), Sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis*), and Wilson's snipe (*Gallinago delicata*).

For crows, take can also occur under the blackbird depredation order established by the USFWS pursuant to the MBTA. Therefore, the take of crows can occur during annual hunting seasons and under the blackbird depredation order that allows people to take crows to alleviate damage and to alleviate threats of damage. For many migratory bird species considered harvestable during a hunting season, the USFWS and/or the NDGFD estimates the number of birds harvested during the season.

#### **2.1.2 Issue 2 - Effects on the Populations of Non-target Wildlife Species, Including T&E Species**

The potential for effects on non-target species and threatened or endangered species arises from the use of non-lethal and lethal methods identified in the alternative approaches. The use of non-lethal and lethal methods has the potential to inadvertently exclude, disperse, capture, or kill non-target wildlife. A non-target animal would be an animal that WS' personnel excludes, disperses, captures, or kills unintentionally while targeting a specific bird or group of birds. Appendix B describes the methods available for use under the alternative approaches. As part of the scoping process for this EA, WS consulted with the USFWS pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA during the development of this EA, which Section 3.1.2 discusses in further detail.

### **2.1.3 Issue 3 - Effects of Damage Management Methods on Human Health and Safety**

An additional issue often raised is the potential risks to human health and safety associated with employing methods to manage damage caused by target species. WS' employees would use and recommend only those methods that were legally available, selective for target species, and were effective at resolving the damage associated with the target species. Still, some concerns exist regarding the safety of methods despite their legality, selectivity, and effectiveness. As a result, this EA will analyze the potential for proposed methods to pose a risk to members of the public and employees of WS. Section 3.1.3 further evaluates the risks to human safety as this issue relates to the alternative approaches.

### **2.1.4 Issue 4 - Humaneness and Animal Welfare Concerns of Methods**

Several non-lethal and lethal methods would be available to alleviate damage associated with bird species. The use of non-lethal and lethal methods has the potential to disperse, exclude, capture, or kill target bird species. Section 3.1.4 will discuss concerns regarding the humaneness of available methods and animal welfare concerns.

## **2.2 COMMON ACTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH DAMAGE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

The following subsections discuss those actions WS identified that would continue to occur if WS implemented any of the alternative approaches identified in Section 2.4 that involve WS providing assistance.

### **2.2.1 WS' Co-managerial Approach to Making Decisions**

Those entities experiencing damage associated with birds could conduct activities on their own, they could contact a private business for assistance, they could seek assistance from another governmental agency, they could seek assistance from WS, if available, or they could take no action. However, in all cases, the person and/or entity experiencing damage or threats of damage would determine the appropriate involvement of other people and/or entities and to what degree those people or other entities were involved in the decision-making process.

If a person and/or entity requested assistance from WS and WS was able to provide assistance, WS would follow the "*co-managerial approach*" to alleviate damage or threats of damage as described by Decker and Chase (1997). Within this management model, WS could provide technical assistance regarding the biology and ecology of target bird species and effective, practical, and reasonable methods available to a local decision-maker(s) to reduce damage or threats. Generally, a decision-maker seeking assistance would be part of a community, municipality, business, governmental agency, and/or a private property owner.

Under a community based decision-making process, WS would provide information, demonstration, and discussion on all available methods to the appropriate representatives of the community for which services were requested to ensure a community-based decision was made. By involving decision-makers in the process, WS could present damage management recommendations to the appropriate decision-maker(s) to allow decisions on damage management to involve those individuals that the decision maker(s) represents. As addressed in this EA, WS would provide technical assistance to the appropriate decision-maker(s) to allow the decision-maker(s) to present information on damage management activities to those persons represented by the decision-maker(s), including demonstrations and presentations by WS at public meetings to allow for involvement of the community. Requests for assistance to manage damage caused by birds often originate from the decision-maker(s) based on community feedback or from concerns about damage or threats to human safety. As representatives, the

decision-maker(s) would be able to provide the information to local interests either through technical assistance provided by WS or through demonstrations and presentations by WS on activities to manage damage. This process would allow WS to recommend and implement activities based on local input.

The decision-maker for the local community would be officials or representatives of the communities that residents of a community have elected to represent them. The elected officials or representatives would be people who oversee the interests and business of the local community. This person or persons would represent the local community's interest and make decisions for the local community or bring information back to a higher authority or the community for discussion and decision-making. In the case of private property owners, the decision-maker would be the individual that owns or manages the affected property. The decision-maker for local, state, or federal property would be the official responsible for or authorized to manage the public land to meet interests, goals, and legal mandates for the property. If WS implemented Alternative 4, WS would not provide any assistance with managing the damage that birds can cause in the state; therefore, the co-managerial approach would not be applicable.

### **2.2.2 Availability of Methods to Manage Damage Caused by Birds**

Appendix B discusses several methods available to alleviate damage or threats of damage associated with birds. All of the methods discussed in Appendix B would be available to any entity for use when managing damage or threats of damage caused by birds in the state, except the use of the avicide DRC-1339 and the aversive conditioning egg treatment referred to as mesurol, which are currently only available for use by WS. Therefore, despite the level of involvement by WS in North Dakota, most methods discussed in Appendix B would be available to other entities to manage damage or threats of damage associated with birds, including the public, private businesses, tribal entities, and other state or federal agencies.

### **2.2.3 Effectiveness of Methods to Address Damage and Threats of Damage**

Defining the effectiveness of any damage management activities often occurs in terms of losses or risks potentially reduced or prevented. Effectiveness can be dependent upon how accurately practitioners diagnose the problem, the species responsible for the damage, and how people implement actions to correct or mitigate risks or damages. To determine that effectiveness, WS must be able to complete management actions expeditiously to minimize harm to non-target animals and the environment, while at the same time, using methods as humanely as possible. Efficacy is based on the types of methods employed, the application of the method, restrictions on the use of the method(s), the skill of people using the method and, for WS' personnel, the guidance provided by WS' directives and policies. For any management methods employed, the proper timing is essential in effectively dispersing those birds causing damage. Employing methods soon after damage begins or soon after identifying damage threats increases the likelihood that those damage management activities would achieve success in addressing damage. Therefore, coordination and timing of methods is necessary to be effective in achieving expedient resolution of bird damage.

WS is considering several methods (see Appendix B) that WS' personnel could incorporate into alternative approaches (see Section 2.4) to meet the need for action. If WS provides assistance and depending on the alternative approach selected to meet the need for action (see Section 2.4), WS could consider the use of an individual method or consider the use of several methods in combination to address damage and threats of damage. When WS provides assistance, WS' personnel would use the WS Decision Model (see WS Directive 2.201) to identify methods (see WS Directive 2.101) appropriate to reducing damage and reducing the threat of damage. In general, when providing assistance, WS' personnel would consider an adaptive approach that would integrate a combination of methods to resolve damage and reduce threats of damage (see WS Directive 2.105).



The use of non-lethal methods in an integrated approach may effectively disperse birds. For example, Avery et al. (2002) and Seamans (2004) found that the use of vulture effigies were an effective non-lethal method to disperse roosting vultures. Non-lethal methods have been effective in dispersing crow roosts (Gorenzel et al. 2000, Chipman et al. 2008), including the use of crow effigies (Avery et al. 2008a), lasers (Gorenzel et al. 2002), and electronic distress calls (Gorenzel and Salmon 1993). Chipman et al. (2008) found the use of only non-lethal methods to disperse urban crow roosts often requires a long-term commitment of affected parties, including financial commitments, to achieve and maintain the desired result of reducing damage.

The continued use of non-lethal methods often leads to the habituation of birds to those methods, which can decrease the effectiveness of those methods (Conover 2002, Avery et al. 2008a, Chipman et al. 2008, Seamans and Gosser 2016). The intent of lethal methods is to reduce the number of birds present at a location. A reduction in the number of birds at a location leads to a reduction in damage, which is applicable whether using lethal or non-lethal methods. The use of lethal methods can successfully reduce bird damage (Boyd and Hall 1987, Gorenzel et al. 2000). The intent of non-lethal methods is to haze, exclude, or otherwise make an area unattractive to birds, which disperses those birds to other areas and leads to a reduction in damage. Similarly, the intent of using lethal methods is to reduce the number of birds in the area where damage is occurring, which can lead to a reduction in the damage occurring at that location.

If WS implements Alternative 1, WS' personnel could consider the use of an avicide known as DRC-1339, which could be applied as part of an integrated methods approach to managing damage or threats of damage. Like other methods, including non-lethal methods, the intent in using DRC-1339 is to reduce the number of birds present at a location where damage or threats of damage are occurring. Reducing the number of birds at a location where damage or threats of damage are occurring either using non-lethal methods or lethal methods can lead to a reduction in damage. The dispersal of birds using non-lethal methods can reduce the number of birds using a location, which can correlate to a reduction in damage at a location (Avery et al. 2008a, Chipman et al. 2008). Similarly, the use of lethal methods reduces the number of birds at a location by removing those birds identified as causing damage or posing a threat of damage. Similarly, the use of DRC-1339 can reduce the number of birds using a location. Boyd and Hall (1987) found the use of DRC-1339 to reduce local crow roosts by up to 25% could lead to a reduction in damage associated with those crows.

Often of concern with the use of lethal methods is that birds that are lethally taken would only be replaced by other birds either during the application of those methods (from other birds that immigrate into the area) or by birds the following year (increase in reproduction that could result from less competition). WS does not use lethal methods to manage a species population. The intent of lethal methods, including the use of DRC-1339, is to reduce the number of birds present at a location where damage is occurring by targeting those birds causing damage or posing threats. Because the intent of lethal methods is to manage those birds causing damage and not to manage entire bird populations, WS considers those methods effective even if birds return the following year.

Chipman et al. (2008) found that crows returned to roosts previously dispersed using non-lethal methods within two to eight weeks. In addition, Chipman et al. (2008) had to re-use non-lethal methods every year during a six-year project evaluating the use of only non-lethal methods. At some roost locations, Chipman et al. (2008) found the number of crows that returned each year to roosts over a six-year period actually increased despite the use of non-lethal methods each year. Chipman et al. (2008) determined the use of non-lethal methods could be effective at dispersing urban crow roosts in New York despite needing to reapply non-lethal methods annually. Avery et al. (2008a) found similar results during the use of crow effigies and other non-lethal methods to disperse urban crow roosts in Pennsylvania. Crows returned to

roost locations in Pennsylvania annually despite the use of non-lethal methods and effigies (Avery et al. 2008a). Gorenzel et al. (2002) found that crows returned to roost locations after the use of lasers. This suggests the use of both lethal and non-lethal methods may require repeated use of those methods. The return of birds to areas where damage management methods were previously employed does not indicate previous use of those methods were ineffective because the intent of those methods is to reduce the number of birds present at a site where damage is occurring at the time those methods are employed.

If WS provides assistance, WS' personnel would evaluate the request for assistance and would consider the effectiveness of the methods available for that request based on how effective a method or methods were during previous requests for assistance and/or how effective methods were when used by those entities experiencing damage or threats of damage. When using methods, WS' personnel would continue to evaluate method effectiveness during the use of those methods. Therefore, WS' personnel would consider method effectiveness as part of the decision making-process during their use of the WS Decision Model for each damage management request based on continual evaluation of methods and results.

In meeting the need for action, the objective would be to reduce damage, risks, and conflicts with birds as requested and not to reduce/eliminate a species population. If WS excludes, removes, and/or disperses birds from an area where they were causing damage or posing a threat of damage, those birds would no longer be present at that location to cause damage or pose a threat. The removal and/or dispersal of birds could be short-term because new individuals may immigrate to an area, especially during the migration periods. Therefore, the return of birds to an area after removal and/or dispersal activities does not mean individual management actions or methods were unsuccessful, but that periodic management may be necessary.

Similar to the effectiveness of methods to reduce damage or reduce threats of damage is the cost effectiveness of methods. The cost of methods and/or the cost of implementing methods may sometimes be a secondary consideration because of overriding environmental, legal, human health and safety, humaneness, animal welfare, or other concerns. Therefore, the cost effectiveness of methods and/or a cost benefit analysis is not essential to making a reasoned choice among the alternative approaches that WS is considering. In addition, the Council on Environmental Quality does not require a formal, monetized cost benefit analysis to comply with the NEPA.

#### **2.2.4 Research Methods and Information on the Life History of Birds**

Under any of the alternatives, WS would continue to research and develop methods to address bird damage through the National Wildlife Research Center. The National Wildlife Research Center functions as the research unit of WS by providing scientific information and developing methods to address damage caused by animals. Research biologists with the National Wildlife Research Center work closely with WS' personnel, wildlife managers, researchers, and others to develop and evaluate methods and techniques. For example, one research area that is a focus of the National Wildlife Research Center is aviation safety and reducing risks of aircraft striking birds at airports and military facilities. In addition, the National Wildlife Research Center could conduct research to understand the life history of bird species, such as migration routes and feeding habits.

#### **2.2.5 Authorization of Migratory Bird Take by the USFWS**

As noted in Section 1.7, the MBTA makes it unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, barter, or offer for sale, purchase, or barter, any migratory bird, or their parts, nests, or eggs (16 USC 703-711). Most target bird species addressed in this EA are a migratory bird species protected by the MBTA (see 50 CFR 10.13), except native resident bird species (e.g., wild turkey, sharp-tailed grouse, gray partridge) and non-native species (e.g., domestic waterfowl, house

sparrows, European starlings). Pursuant to 50 CFR 21.41, “...a depredation permit is required before any person may take, possess, or transport migratory birds for depredation control purposes. No permit is required merely to scare or herd depredating migratory birds other than endangered or threatened species or bald or golden eagles”. Therefore, prior to the use of lethal methods to alleviate damage or threats of damage associated with a migratory bird species, any entity, including WS, must apply for and receive a depredation permit from the USFWS. In general, the dispersal (*i.e.*, scaring) of birds from an area using non-lethal methods would not require an entity to apply for and receive a depredation permit. A depredation permit is also not required to destroy inactive nests (*i.e.*, nests without eggs or nestlings). Under the permitting application process for a depredation permit, the USFWS requires applicants to describe prior non-lethal damage management techniques that they have used.

The USFWS can also authorize the take of migratory birds by establishing depredation orders, control orders, and other permitting processes. The USFWS has created depredation and control orders that allow the take of specific species of migratory birds for specific purposes without the need for a depredation permit. For example, the USFWS has established a depredation order that allows people to take specific species of blackbirds, cowbirds, grackles, magpies, and crows for specific purposes without the need for a depredation permit from the USFWS (see 50 CFR 21.43). Section 1.7 discusses the depredation and control orders that could apply to WS’ activities.

## **2.2.6 Authorization of Take by the NDGFD**

As discussed in Section 1.7, no person may take a harmless wild bird species in North Dakota without a permit issued by the NDGFD (see North Dakota Century Code 20.1-04-03). In addition, no person may take the nests or eggs of protected birds without a permit from the NDGFD (see North Dakota Century Code 20.1-04-04).

In addition, most target bird species addressed in this EA are a migratory bird species protected by the MBTA (see 50 CFR 10.13), except native resident bird species (*e.g.*, wild turkey, sharp-tailed grouse, gray partridge) and non-native species (*e.g.*, domestic waterfowl, house sparrows, European starlings). Activities that involve the take of migratory bird species protected by the MBTA require authorization (*e.g.*, depredation permit, depredation order, control order) from the USFWS. The take of most bird species also require authorization from the NDGFD. Therefore, WS’ activities would only occur when authorized by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD, when required, and take would not exceed the levels authorized. WS would submit activity reports to the USFWS and/or the NDGFD, when required, so the USFWS and/or the NDGFD had the opportunity to evaluate WS’ activities and the cumulative take occurring for bird species. Conducting activities only when authorized and providing activities reports would ensure the USFWS and/or the NDGFD have the opportunity to incorporate any activities WS’ conducts into population objectives established for wildlife populations in the state.

## **2.2.7 Influence of Global Climate Change on Bird Populations**

The State of the Climate in 2012 report indicates that every year has been warmer than the long-term average since 1976 (Blunden and Arndt 2013). Impacts of this change will vary throughout the United States, but some areas could experience air and water temperature increases, alterations in precipitation, and increased severe weather events. Temperature and precipitation often influence the distribution and abundance of a plant or animal species. According to the EPA (2016), as temperatures continue to increase, the ranges of many species will likely expand into northern latitudes and higher altitudes. Species adapted to cold climates may struggle to adjust to changing climate conditions (*e.g.*, less snowfall, range expansions of other species). Sheikh et al. (2007) stated, “*Wildlife species can be affected by several climatic variables such as increasing temperatures, changes in precipitation, and extreme*

*weather events*”. Sheikh et al. (2007) further stated that changes in climate could benefit some species of wildlife.

The impact of climate change on wildlife and their habitats is of increasing concern to land managers, biologists, and members of the public. Climate change may alter the frequency and severity of habitat-altering events, such as wildfires, weather extremes, such as drought, presence of invasive species, and wildlife diseases. WS recognizes that climate change is an ongoing concern and may result in changes in species range and abundance. Climate change may also affect other factors, such as agricultural practices and the timing of water freeze up, which can influence the timing and movement pattern of bird migrations. Over time, climate change would likely lead to changes in the scope and nature of human-wildlife conflicts in the state. Because these types of changes are an ongoing process, WS has developed adaptive management strategies that allow WS and other agencies to monitor for and adjust to impacts of ongoing changes in the affected environment.

If WS selected an alternative approach to meeting the need for action that allows WS to provide assistance (see Section 2.4), WS would monitor activities, in context of the issues analyzed in detail, to determine if the need for action and the associated impacts remain within the parameters established and analyzed in this EA.

If WS determines that a new need for action, changed conditions, new issues, or new alternatives having different environmental impacts warrant a new or additional analysis, WS would supplement this analysis or conduct a separate evaluation pursuant to the NEPA. Through monitoring, WS can evaluate and adjust activities as changes occur over time.

WS’ monitoring would also include reviewing the list of species the USFWS considers as threatened or endangered within the state pursuant to the ESA. As appropriate, WS would consult with the USFWS pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA to ensure the activities conducted by WS would not jeopardize the continued existence of threatened or endangered species or result in adverse modification to areas designated as critical habitat for a species within the state. Through the review of species listed as threatened or endangered and the consultation process with the USFWS, WS can evaluate and adjust activities conducted to meet the need for action. Accordingly, WS could supplement this analysis or conduct a separate evaluation pursuant to the NEPA based on the review and consultation process. If deemed necessary through the monitoring process, WS could adjust activities to assure that WS’ actions do not significantly contribute to changes in the environmental status quo that occur because of climate change.

### **2.2.8 Impacts of Avian Influenza on Bird Populations**

A virus in the Orthomyxovirus group causes avian influenza. Viruses in this group vary in the intensity of illness (*i.e.*, virulence) they may cause. Wild birds, in particular waterfowl and shorebirds, can be natural reservoirs for the avian influenza virus (Davidson and Nettles 1997, Alexander 2000, Stallknecht 2003, Pedersen et al. 2012). Most strains of the avian influenza virus rarely cause severe illness or death in birds, although some strains tend to be highly virulent and very contagious. However, even the strains that do not cause severe illness in birds are a concern for human and animal health officials because the viruses have the potential to become virulent and transmissible to other species through mutation and reassortment (Clark and Hall 2006).

There are two types of avian influenza viruses, low pathogenic and high pathogenic avian influenza. The low and high refer to the potential of the viruses to kill domestic poultry (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017). In wild birds, low pathogenic avian influenza rarely causes signs of illness and it is not an important mortality factor (Davidson and Nettles 1997, Clark and Hall 2006). In contrast, high

pathogenic avian influenza can cause clinical signs and lead to death in wild birds. Prior to 2014, high pathogenic strains were not known to occur in wild waterfowl species in North America (Brown et al. 2006, Keawcharoen et al. 2008, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015).

In December 2014, a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus was isolated from a northern pintail (*Anas acuta*) in Washington State making it the first detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza virus in wild birds in North America (United States Geological Survey 2015). The detection in North America coincided with the detection of the virus in poultry across the western and central United States (USDA 2015a). WS has been one of several agencies and organizations conducting surveillance and monitoring of avian influenza in migratory birds. Between December 20, 2014 and February 1, 2015, Bevins et al. (2016) reported 63 cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza virus in wild birds across the United States. All 63 cases involved detection of the virus in waterfowl that people harvested during the annual hunting season (Bevins et al. 2016). Although mortality events involving the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus have occurred in waterfowl, there have been no reports of major waterfowl die-offs from the virus. In addition, no reports of major die-offs of other bird species have occurred. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest that the avian influenza virus is or will have an effect on bird populations. As stated previously, most strains of avian influenza do not cause severe illnesses or death in wild bird populations.

### **2.3 WS' DIRECTIVES AND STANDARD PROCEDURES WHEN PROVIDING ASSISTANCE**

WS' directives define program objectives and guide WS' activities when managing wildlife damage (see WS Directive 1.201, WS Directive 1.205, WS Directive 1.210). WS' personnel would adhere to applicable WS' directives when responding to and providing assistance. WS' directives improve the safety, selectivity, and efficacy of activities that WS' personnel could conduct to alleviate or prevent bird damage. For example, WS Directive 2.615 establishes guidelines for the use of firearms by WS' employees and prescribes standard training requirements. WS Directive 2.401 establishes guidelines for the safe and effective storage, disposal, recordkeeping, and use of pesticides. In addition, WS' personnel would follow the standard conditions and requirements of appropriate permits and depredation/control orders issued by the USFWS or the NDGFD, including any requirements to report WS' activities.

### **2.4 ALTERNATIVES THAT WS CONSIDERED**

This section discusses those alternative approaches that WS identified during the initial scoping process for this EA and provides a description of how WS would implement those approaches. WS developed the alternative approaches based on the need for action. The need for action identified by WS is associated with requests for assistance that WS receives to manage damage and threats of damage caused by birds in North Dakota (see Section 1.2). WS also developed the alternative approaches to address those issues identified in Section 2.1.

#### **2.4.1 Alternatives Considered in Detail within this EA**

As discussed in Section 1.2, people experiencing damage or threats of damage associated with wildlife often seek assistance from other entities to alleviate that damage or to prevent damage from occurring. The WS program is the lead federal agency responsible for managing conflicts between people and wildlife (see Section 1.2); therefore, people could request assistance from WS. This EA considers in detail the following four alternative approaches to meeting the need for action identified in Section 1.2 and those issues identified in Section 2.1.

***Alternative 1 – WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota (Proposed Action/No Action)***

If WS implements Alternative 1, WS would be available to provide assistance when people experience damage or threats of damage associated with those target bird species addressed in this EA and, consequently, request assistance from WS. When responding to a request for assistance, WS' personnel would use the WS Decision Model (Slate et al. 1992; see WS Directive 2.201) to formulate a management strategy to address each request for assistance.

The general process and procedures of the WS Decision Model would include the following steps.

1. **Receive Request for Assistance:** WS would only provide assistance after receiving a request for such assistance. WS would not respond to public bid notices.
2. **Assess Problem:** First, WS would make a determination as to whether the assistance request was within the authority of WS. If an assistance request were within the authority of WS, WS' employees would gather and analyze damage information to determine applicable factors, such as what species was responsible for the damage, the type, extent, and magnitude of damage. Other factors that WS' employees could gather and analyze would include the current economic loss or current threat (*e.g.*, threat to human safety), the potential for future losses or damage, the local history of damage, and what management methods, if any, were used to reduce past damage and the results of those actions.
3. **Evaluate Management Methods:** Once a problem assessment was completed, a WS' employee would conduct an evaluation of available management methods (see Appendix B). The employee would evaluate available methods in the context of their legal and administrative availability and their acceptability based on biological, environmental, humaneness, social, and cultural factors.
4. **Formulate Management Strategy:** A WS' employee would formulate a management strategy using those methods that the employee determines to be practical for use. The WS employee would also consider factors essential to formulating each management strategy, such as available expertise, legal constraints on available methods, human safety, humaneness, non-target animal risks, costs, and effectiveness.
5. **Provide Assistance:** After formulating a management strategy, a WS employee could provide technical assistance and/or direct operational assistance to the requester (see WS Directive 2.101). All management actions conducted and/or recommended by WS would comply with appropriate federal, state, and local laws in accordance with WS Directive 2.210.
6. **Monitor and Evaluate Results of Management Actions:** When providing direct operational assistance, it is necessary to monitor the results of the management strategy. Monitoring would be important for determining whether further assistance was required or whether the management strategy resolved the request for assistance. Through monitoring, a WS' employee would continually evaluate the management strategy to determine whether additional techniques or modification of the strategy was necessary.
7. **End of Project:** When providing technical assistance, a project would normally end after a WS' employee provided recommendations or advice to the requester. A direct operational assistance project would normally end when WS' personnel stop or reduce the damage or threat to an acceptable level to the requester or to the extent possible. Some damage situations may require continuing or intermittent assistance from WS' personnel and may have no well-defined termination point.

Therefore, if WS implements Alternative 1, WS could respond to requests for assistance by: 1) taking no action, if warranted, 2) providing only technical assistance to property owners or managers on actions they could take to reduce damage caused by birds, or 3) providing technical assistance and direct operational assistance to a property owner or manager experiencing damage. WS would provide

technical assistance to those entities requesting assistance as described for Alternative 3. Direct operational damage management assistance would include damage management activities that WS' personnel would conduct directly or supervise. WS' employees may initiate operational damage management assistance when technical assistance alone would not effectively alleviate the damage or the threat of damage and when WS and the entity requesting assistance have signed a work initiation document. Funding for WS' activities could occur from state appropriations, federal appropriations, and/or from cooperative service agreements with an entity requesting WS' assistance.

Appendix B discusses those methods that WS' employees would consider when evaluating management methods to alleviate damage or threats of damage associated with birds. Non-lethal methods from Section I in Appendix B that WS could use and/or recommend include repellents, exclusion methods (*e.g.*, fencing, netting, overhead wires), auditory deterrents (*e.g.*, propane cannons, pyrotechnics, electronic distress calls), visual deterrents (*e.g.*, scarecrows, lasers, lights), trained dogs, nest destruction, translocation, live traps (*e.g.*, cage traps, modified padded foothold traps), and nets (*e.g.*, cannon nets, mist nets). In addition, WS could recommend minor habitat modifications (*e.g.*, pruning trees to discourage roosting) and changes in cultural practices (*e.g.*, changes in flight patterns at an air facility or using bird proof livestock feeders). Lethal methods would include the use of a firearm, euthanasia after live-capture, egg destruction (*i.e.*, puncturing, breaking, oiling, or shaking an egg), Avitrol (pigeons, crows, blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds, starlings, house sparrows only), and the avicide DRC-1339 (pigeons, crows, ravens, magpies, blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds, starlings, Eurasian collared-doves, gulls only). Section II in Appendix B describes those lethal methods that would be available to manage damage and threats of damage associated with birds. The initial investigation would define the nature, history, and extent of the problem; species responsible for the damage; and methods available to alleviate the problem. When evaluating management methods and formulating a management strategy, WS' personnel would give preference to non-lethal methods when they determine those methods to be practical and effective (see WS Directive 2.101).

For those migratory bird species protected by the MBTA, WS would only use lethal methods, including egg destruction, after the USFWS authorized the lethal removal of the target migratory bird species and would only use those methods allowed in an authorization. The use of methods that live capture migratory birds protected by the MBTA also require authorization from the USFWS; therefore, WS would only use live-capture methods after the USFWS had issued the appropriate permit or authorization allowing capture of the target bird species (see Section 1.7.1). Similarly, the NDGFD may also require authorization before conducting activities that lethally removes or captures a target bird species, including their nests and eggs (see Section 1.7.2). Many non-native species, such as rock pigeons, European starlings, and house sparrows, do not require authorization from the USFWS or the NDGFD to use lethal methods or live-capture methods. WS' activities to manage damage associated with birds in North Dakota would comply with WS Directive 2.301.

In general, the most effective approach to resolving damage would be to integrate the use of several methods simultaneously or sequentially while continuing to evaluate the effectiveness of the method or methods. Alternative 1 would be an adaptive approach to managing damage that would integrate the use of the most practical and effective methods as determined by a site-specific evaluation for each request after applying the WS Decision Model. The philosophy behind an adaptive approach would be to integrate the best combination of methods while minimizing the potentially harmful effects on people, target and non-target species, and the environment. WS' personnel would not necessarily use every method from Appendix B to address every request for assistance but would use the WS' Decision Model to determine the most appropriate approach to address each request for assistance, which could include using additional methods from Appendix B if initial efforts were unsuccessful at reducing damage or threats of damage adequately.

***Alternative 2 - WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota using only non-lethal methods***

Under this alternative, WS would implement an adaptive integrated methods approach as described under Alternative 1, including the use of the WS' Decision Model; however, WS would only consider non-lethal methods when formulating approaches to resolve damage associated with bird species. WS could provide technical assistance and/or direct operational assistance similar to Alternative 1. WS would provide technical assistance to those entities requesting assistance as described for Alternative 3. The only methods that WS could recommend and/or use would be non-lethal methods. Non-lethal methods that WS could use and/or recommend include human presence, exclusion methods (e.g., netting, overhead wires, fencing, surface coverings), auditory deterrents (e.g., propane cannons, pyrotechnics, electronic distress calls), visual deterrents (e.g., scarecrows, lasers, lights), and chemical repellents. In addition, WS could use and/or recommend inactive nest destruction, live-capture (e.g., nets, live traps), limited habitat alteration/modification (e.g., pruning trees), supplemental feeding, lure crops, and the reproductive inhibitor nicarbazin (rock pigeons, starlings, blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds only). WS could also use aircraft to conduct surveillance and monitoring of bird populations in the state. Section I of Appendix B describes those non-lethal methods in more detail.

WS would refer requests for information regarding lethal methods to the USFWS, the NDGFD, and/or private entities. Although WS would not recommend or use lethal methods under this alternative, other entities, including private entities, could continue to use many of the lethal methods discussed in Section II of Appendix B to resolve damage or threats of damage. The USFWS could continue to authorize the lethal take of migratory birds protected by the MBTA and the NDGFD could authorize the lethal take of resident bird species, such as wild turkeys, sharp-tailed grouse, and gray partridge.

***Alternative 3 – WS would recommend an integrated methods approach to managing bird damage in North Dakota through technical assistance only***

If WS implements Alternative 3, WS would continue to use the WS' Decision Model to respond to requests for assistance; however, WS would only provide those cooperators requesting assistance with technical assistance. Technical assistance would provide those cooperators experiencing damage or threats of damage associated with birds with information, demonstrations, and recommendations on available and appropriate methods available. The implementation of methods and techniques to alleviate or prevent damage would be the responsibility of the requester with no direct involvement by WS. In some cases, WS may provide supplies or materials that were of limited availability for use by private entities (e.g., loaning of propane cannons). Similar to Alternative 1 and Alternative 2, a key component of assistance provided by WS would be providing information to the requester about birds and how to manage damage associated with target bird species.

Education would be an important component of technical assistance because wildlife damage management is about finding balance and coexistence between the needs of people and needs of wildlife. This is extremely challenging as nature has no balance, but rather is in continual flux. When responding to a request for assistance, WS would provide those entities with information regarding the use of appropriate methods. WS would provide property owners or managers requesting assistance with information regarding the use of effective and practical techniques and methods. In addition to the routine dissemination of recommendations and information to individuals or organizations experiencing damage, WS could provide lectures, courses, and demonstrations to agricultural producers, homeowners, governmental entities, colleges and universities, and other interested groups. WS frequently cooperates with other entities in education and public information efforts. Additionally, WS' personnel may present technical papers at professional meetings and conferences so that other wildlife professionals and the public receive updates on recent developments in damage management technology, programs, laws and



regulations, and agency policies.

Technical assistance would include collecting information, such as the number of birds involved, the extent of the damage, and previous methods that the cooperator had used to alleviate the problem. WS' personnel would then provide information on appropriate methods that the cooperator could consider to alleviate the damage themselves. Types of technical assistance projects may include a site visit to the affected property, written communication, telephone conversations, or presentations to groups such as homeowner associations or civic leagues.

Generally, WS' personnel would describe several management strategies to the requester for short and long-term solutions to managing damage based on the level of risk, need, and the practicality of their application. WS' personnel would recommend and loan only those methods legally available for use by the appropriate individual. Those methods described in Appendix B would be available to those people experiencing damage or threats associated with birds in the state, except for DRC-1339, and mesuro, which are currently only available for use by WS.

Those entities seeking assistance with reducing damage could seek direct operational assistance from other governmental agencies, private entities, or conduct activities on their own. In situations where non-lethal methods were ineffective or impractical, WS could advise the property owner or manager of appropriate lethal methods to supplement non-lethal methods. In addition, WS' personnel would also advise the property owner or manager of the potential need to seek authorization from the USFWS and/or the NDGFD to take target bird species such as the need to apply for a depredation permit from the USFWS to take migratory birds and the need to receive authorization from the NDGFD. Similarly, WS would advise the property owner or manager of the potential need to seek authorization from the USFWS and/or the NDGFD to remove nests and eggs.

When conducting technical assistance, WS' personnel could assist people experiencing damage caused by birds with the process for applying for their own depredation permit from the USFWS and/or seeking authorization from the NDGFD. In accordance with WS Directive 2.301, WS' personnel will assist people seeking assistance with applying for a depredation permit from the USFWS by completing a USFWS Migratory Bird Permit Application or Review form (WS Form 37). The USFWS Migratory Bird Permit Application or Review form provides the USFWS with the basic information required as part of the application process for a depredation permit, which includes information on the extent of the damages or risks, the number of birds involved, and recommended methods to alleviate damage (see 50 CFR 21.41 for required information). Following review by the USFWS of a complete application for a depredation permit from a property owner or manager and the USFWS Migratory Bird Permit Application or Review form, the USFWS could issue a depredation permit authorizing the lethal take of a specified number of birds and bird species.

***Alternative 4 – WS would not provide any assistance with managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota***

This alternative would preclude any activities by WS to alleviate damage or threats of damage associated with those bird species addressed in the EA. WS would refer all requests for assistance associated with target bird species to the USFWS, to the NDGFD and/or to private entities. This alternative would not prevent other governmental agencies and/or private entities from conducting damage management activities directed at alleviating damage and threats associated with birds in the state. Therefore, under this alternative, entities seeking assistance with addressing damage caused by those bird species addressed in this EA could contact WS but WS would immediately refer the requester to other entities. The requester could then contact other entities for information and assistance, could take actions to alleviate damage without contacting any entity, or could take no further action.

Many of the methods listed in Appendix B would be available for use by other governmental agencies and private entities to manage damage and threats associated with birds. The only methods discussed in Appendix B that would not be available for other entities to use would be the avicide DRC-1339 and the chemical repellent mesurol. The avicide DRC-1339 is only available to alleviate damage associated with European starlings, red-winged blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, American crows, common ravens, rock pigeons, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, black-billed magpies, Eurasian collared-doves, herring gulls, ring-billed gulls, and California gulls. The chemical repellent mesurol is only available to alleviate damage associated with crows.

#### **2.4.2 Alternatives and Strategies that WS Did Not Consider in Detail**

In addition to those alternatives discussed in Section 2.4.1, WS identified several additional alternative approaches to meeting the need for action. However, those alternatives will not receive detailed analysis in this EA for the reasons provided for each alternative. Those alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail include the following.

##### ***Implementation of Alternative 1 but WS must use all of the non-lethal methods identified in Appendix B before using lethal methods***

Implementation of this alternative would be an adaptive integrated methods approach similar to Alternative 1. However, this alternative would require that WS apply non-lethal methods or techniques described in Appendix B to all requests for assistance to reduce damage and threats to safety associated with target bird species in the state. If the use of non-lethal methods failed to alleviate the damage situation or reduce threats to human safety at each damage situation, WS' personnel would use lethal methods to alleviate the damage or threat occurring. WS' personnel would apply non-lethal methods to every request for assistance regardless of severity or intensity of the damage or threat until the employee deemed those non-lethal methods inadequate to resolve the damage or threat. This alternative would not prevent the use of lethal methods by other entities to alleviate damage or threats of damage.

WS did not carry this alternative forward for further analysis in Chapter 3 because people experiencing damage often employ non-lethal methods to reduce damage or threats prior to contacting WS. For example, Stickley and Andrews (1989) conducted a survey of catfish farms in Mississippi to determine the methods and costs associated with dispersing fish-eating birds from ponds where the farms were raising catfish. Of the 281 catfish farms that replied to the survey, 87% of the farmers felt the economic losses associated with fish-eating birds was sufficient to warrant hazing fish-eating birds from the ponds (Stickley and Andrews 1989). Stickley and Andrews (1989) found that catfish farms in Mississippi spent an average of 2.6 man-hours per day hazing waterbirds from aquaculture ponds. Of those aquaculture facilities that used propane cannons, 9% indicated their use was "*very effective*", 51% indicated they were "*somewhat effective*" and 40% indicated they were "*not effective*" (Stickley and Andrews 1989). Similarly, of the aquaculture facilities using pyrotechnics, 24% considered their use to be "*very effective*", 57% considered them to be "*somewhat effective*" and 19% determined the use of pyrotechnics was "*not effective*" (Stickley and Andrews 1989). For example, aquaculture producers in Mississippi reported spending an average of \$7,400 per farmer, or a total of more than \$2.1 million, to haze birds from their ponds during 1988 (Stickley and Andrews 1989). Elser et al. (2019b) found that fruit producers used several non-lethal methods to reduce bird damage to wine grapes, sweet cherries, and apples. Elser et al. (2019a) found that dairy farmers in Washington used non-lethal methods to reduce bird damage. In addition, the USFWS requires the use of non-lethal methods prior to authorizing the take of those bird species protected from take by the MBTA. Therefore, people often use nonlethal methods prior to contacting WS for assistance.

If WS implemented this alternative, WS would be required to implement non-lethal methods the entity requesting assistance had already used or would have to establish criteria to measure the efforts of the requesting entity to determine if the requesting entity applied non-lethal methods appropriately. For example, Price and Nickum (1995) concluded that the aquaculture industry has small profit margins so that even a small percentage reduction in the farm gate value due to predation is an economic issue. Therefore, continuing to use methods already proven ineffective at alleviating the damage could prolong the amount of time damage occurs, which could increase the economic losses. Because many people that request assistance use non-lethal methods but continue to experience damage or threats of damage and because there is no standard that exists for the use of non-lethal methods, WS did not carry this alternative forward for further analysis in Chapter 3. In addition, implementation of Alternative 1 would be similar to a non-lethal before lethal alternative because WS' personnel would consider the use of non-lethal methods before considering the use of lethal methods (see WS Directive 2.101). Adding a non-lethal before lethal alternative and the associated analysis would not add additional information to the analyses in this EA.

***WS would implement Alternative 1 but would only use lethal methods***

This alternative would be similar to Alternative 1 but WS would use only those methods that lethally remove birds. Under WS Directive 2.101, WS must consider the use of non-lethal methods before lethal methods. The USFWS also requires the use of non-lethal methods prior to issuing a depredation permit to take migratory birds. Non-lethal methods have been effective in alleviating some bird damage. For example, the use of non-lethal methods has been effective in dispersing urban crow roosts and vulture roosts (Avery et al. 2002, Seamans 2004, Avery et al. 2008a, Chipman et al. 2008). In those situations where damage could be alleviated using non-lethal methods, WS' personnel could use those methods and/or recommend those methods as determined by the WS Decision Model. Therefore, WS did not consider this alternative in detail.

***WS would develop a program that compensates people for damage***

This alternative would require WS to establish a system to reimburse persons impacted by bird damage. Under such an alternative, WS would continue to provide technical assistance to those persons seeking assistance with managing damage. In addition, WS would conduct site visits to verify damage. Compensation would require large expenditures of money and labor to investigate and validate damage claims and to determine and administer appropriate compensation. Compensation would most likely be below full market value. Compensation for damages would give little incentive to resource owners to limit damage through improved cultural or other practices and management strategies and would not be practical for reducing threats to human health and safety. For the above listed reasons, WS did not carry this alternative forward for further analysis in Chapter 3.

***WS would implement Alternative 1 but would establish a loss threshold before allowing lethal methods***

There is also a concern that damage caused by animals should be a cost of doing business and/or that there should be a threshold of damage before allowing the use of lethal methods to manage damage. In some cases, cooperators likely tolerate some damage and economic loss until the damage reaches a threshold where the damage becomes an economic burden. The appropriate level of allowed tolerance or threshold before employing lethal methods would differ among cooperators and damage situations. In some cases, any loss in value of a resource caused by birds could be financially burdensome to some people. In addition, establishing a threshold would be difficult or inappropriate to apply to human health and safety situations. For example, aircraft striking birds could lead to property damage and could threaten passenger safety if a catastrophic failure of the aircraft occurred because of the strike. Therefore, addressing the threats of aircraft strikes prior to an actual strike occurring would be appropriate. For

those reasons, WS did not carry this alternative forward for further analysis in Chapter 3.

***WS would require cooperators completely fund activities (no taxpayer money)***

This alternative would be similar to Alternative 1 or Alternative 2 except WS would require the entity requesting assistance to pay for any activities conducted by WS. Therefore, no activities conducted by WS would occur through federal appropriations or state funding (*i.e.*, no taxpayer money). Funding for WS' activities could occur from federal appropriations, through state funding, and/or through money received from the entity requesting assistance. In those cases where WS receives federal and/or state funding to conduct activities, federal, state, and/or local officials have made the decision to provide funding for damage management activities and have allocated funds for such activities. Additionally, damage management activities are an appropriate sphere of activity for government programs because managing wildlife is a government responsibility. Treves and Naughton-Treves (2005) and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (2005) discuss the need for wildlife damage management and that an accountable government agency is best suited to take the lead in such activities because it increases the tolerance for wildlife by those people being impacted by their damage and has the least impacts on wildlife overall. Therefore, WS did not carry this alternative forward for further analysis in Chapter 3.

***WS would implement Alternative 1 but would require cooperators fund the use of lethal methods***

This alternative would be identical to Alternative 1 except WS would require people requesting assistance to pay for all the costs associated with using lethal methods to resolve their request for assistance. If WS used lethal methods to alleviate or prevent damage, the person requesting assistance would be responsible for paying for the costs associated with those activities. WS could then use existing federal and/or state funding to pay for the costs associated with using non-lethal methods to manage bird damage. WS did not carry this alternative forward for further analysis because the environmental consequences associated with the use of this method would be identical to Alternative 1.

***WS would refer requests for assistance to Private Nuisance Wildlife Control Agents***

People experiencing damage or threats of damage associated with birds could contact private wildlife control agents and/or other private entities to reduce damage when they deem appropriate. In addition, WS could refer persons requesting assistance to private wildlife control agents and/or other private entities if WS implemented any of the alternative approaches. WS Directive 3.101 provides guidance on establishing cooperative projects and interfacing with private businesses. WS only responds after receiving a request for assistance. If WS implemented Alternative 1 or Alternative 2, WS would inform requesters that other service providers, including private entities, might be available to provide assistance. Therefore, WS did not carry this alternative forward for further analysis.

***Trap and translocate birds only by WS***

Under this alternative, WS would address all requests for assistance using live-capture methods or the recommendation of live-capture methods. Birds could be live-captured using live-traps, cannon nets, rocket nets, bow nets, net guns, mist nets, or hand-capture. All birds live-captured through direct operational assistance by WS would be translocated. Prior to live-capture, WS' personnel would identify a release site or sites and obtain approval from the appropriate property owner and/or manager to release birds on their property or properties. In addition, the translocation of most bird species requires prior authorization from the USFWS and/or the NDGFD. For example, WS would need prior approval from the NDGFD to live-capture and translocate wild turkeys within the state. WS could translocate birds if WS implemented Alternative 1 or Alternative 2. Other entities could translocate birds to alleviate damage

if WS implemented Alternative 3 or Alternative 4.

Translocation may not be appropriate for all bird species. For example, it may be inappropriate to translocate and release non-native bird species in the state. In addition, the translocation of birds causing damage or posing a threat of damage to other areas following live-capture generally would not be effective or cost-effective. Translocation is generally ineffective because problem bird species are highly mobile and can easily return to damage sites from long distances, the same species of birds generally already occupy habitats in other areas, and translocation would most likely result in bird damage problems at the new location. In addition, WS would need to capture and translocate hundreds or thousands of birds to solve some damage problems (*e.g.*, urban blackbird roosts); therefore, translocation would be unrealistic in those circumstances. Translocation of wildlife is also discouraged by WS policy (see WS Directive 2.501) because of the stress to the translocated animal, poor survival rates, the potential for disease transmission, and the difficulties that translocated wildlife have with adapting to new locations or habitats (Nielsen 1988, Craven et al. 1998, Massei et al. 2010). Therefore, WS did not consider this alternative in detail.

### ***Reducing damage by managing bird populations through the use of reproductive inhibitors***

Under this alternative, the only method available to alleviate requests for assistance would be the recommendation and the use of reproductive inhibitors to reduce or prevent reproduction in birds responsible for causing damage. Reproductive inhibitors can be effective where wildlife populations are overabundant and where traditional hunting or lethal control programs are not publicly acceptable (Muller et al. 1997). Population dynamic characteristics (*e.g.*, longevity, age at onset of reproduction, population size, and biological/cultural carrying capacity), habitat and environmental factors (*e.g.*, isolation of target population, cover types, and access to target individuals), socioeconomic factors, and other factors can limit the use and effectiveness of reproductive control as a population management tool.

Reproductive control for wildlife consists of sterilization (permanent) or contraception (reversible). Sterilization can occur through surgical sterilization (vasectomy, castration, and tubal ligation), chemosterilization, or gene therapy. Contraception could be accomplished through hormone implantation (synthetic steroids such as progestins), immunocontraception (contraceptive vaccines), or oral contraception (progestin administered daily).

Population modeling indicates that reproductive control is more effective than lethal control only for some rodent and small bird species with high reproductive rates and low survival rates (Dolbeer 1998). Additionally, the need to treat a sufficiently large number of target animals, multiple treatments, and population dynamics of free-ranging populations place considerable logistic and economic constraints on the adoption of reproductive control technologies as a wildlife management tool for some species. Currently, no reproductive inhibitors are available for use to manage most bird populations. Given the costs associated with live-capturing and performing sterilization procedures on birds and the lack of availability of chemical reproductive inhibitors for the management of most bird populations, WS did not evaluate this alternative in detail.

If a reproductive inhibitor becomes available to manage a large number of bird populations and proven effective in reducing localized bird populations, WS could evaluate the use of the inhibitor as a method available under the alternatives. WS would review and supplement this EA to the degree necessary to evaluate the use of the reproductive inhibitor. Currently, the only reproductive inhibitor registered with the EPA is nicarbazin. In North Dakota, a formulation of nicarbazin is available under the trade name of OvoControl® P (Innolytics, LLC, Rancho Mirage, California), which is available to manage localized populations of urban rock pigeons and resident populations of European starlings, red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, common grackles, and brown-headed cowbirds.

Reproductive inhibitors for the other bird species addressed in this EA do not currently exist.

## **CHAPTER 3: ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS**

Chapter 3 provides information needed for making informed decisions by comparing the environmental consequences of the four alternatives. To determine if the real or potential effects are greater, lesser, or the same as the environmental baseline, Section 3.1 compares the environmental consequences associated with each of the four alternative approaches. A discussion occurs on the cumulative and unavoidable impacts, including direct and indirect effects, in relation to the issues for each of the alternatives. Impacts caused by implementation of an alternative approach and occur at the same time and place are direct effects. In contrast, impacts caused by implementing an alternative approach that occur later in time or further removed in distance, and are still reasonably foreseeable, are indirect effects. The analyses discuss the cumulative effects in relationship to each of the alternatives analyzed, with emphasis on potential cumulative effects from similar activities, and include summary analyses of potential cumulative impacts to target and non-target species, including threatened or endangered species, threats to human health and safety, and the humaneness of methods.

### **3.1 ISSUES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL AND THEIR IMPACTS BY ALTERNATIVE**

WS developed the alternative approaches (see Section 2.4) to meet the need for action identified in Section 1.2 and to address the issues identified in Section 2.1. This section analyzes the environmental consequences of each alternative approach in comparison to determine the extent of actual or potential impacts on each of the issues. Therefore, Alternative 1 serves as the baseline for the analysis and the comparison of expected impacts among the alternative approaches. The analysis also takes into consideration mandates, directives, and the procedures of WS, the USFWS, the NDGFD, and the NDDA.

#### **3.1.1 Issue 1 - Effects of Damage Management Activities on Target Bird Populations**

Maintaining viable populations of native species is a concern of the public and state, tribal, and federal agencies, including WS. If WS implemented Alternative 1, Alternative 2, or Alternative 3, WS could conduct and/or recommend that others conduct activities that could disperse, exclude, capture, or lethally remove birds depending on the alternative approach WS selected and implemented. Appendix B identifies and discusses the methods that WS could consider when formulating strategies to resolve damage caused by birds in North Dakota when someone requests such assistance. If WS implemented Alternative 4, WS would not conduct any activities in North Dakota involving those target bird species addressed in this EA. This section evaluates the magnitude of cumulative effects on the populations of target bird species that could occur if WS implemented one of the four alternative approaches.

##### **➤ Population Impact Analyses of the Alternatives - Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects**

Direct effects are impacts the action causes and occur at the same time and place. Indirect effects occur because of the action but are later in time or farther removed geographically. Indirect effects may include impacts related to actions that induced changes in population density, ecosystems, and land use changes.

Cumulative impacts, as defined by Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.7), are impacts to the environment that result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts may result from individually minor, but collectively significant, actions taking place over time.

The potential cumulative impacts analyzed below would occur from either WS' activities over time or from the aggregate effects of those activities combined with the activities of other agencies and private entities. As discussed in Section 1.5, the USFWS and/or the NDGFD are the federal and state entities responsible for managing those native bird species addressed in this EA. Through ongoing communication with the USFWS and the NDGFD, WS can consider the activities of other agencies and private entities to the extent that those agencies know those activities occur. WS does not typically conduct direct damage management activities concurrently with other governmental or private entities at a location but may conduct damage management activities at adjacent sites within the same period.

WS' actions would be occurring simultaneously over time with other natural processes and human generated changes that are currently taking place. These activities include, but are not limited to

- ◆ Natural mortality of birds
- ◆ Human-induced mortality through vehicle strikes, aircraft strikes, and illegal take
- ◆ Human-induced mortality of birds through private damage management activities
- ◆ Human-induced mortality through regulated harvest
- ◆ Human and naturally induced alterations of wildlife habitat
- ◆ Annual and perennial cycles in wildlife population densities

All those factors play a role in the dynamics of bird populations. WS' employees use the WS Decision Model to evaluate damage occurring (including other affected elements and the dynamics of the damaging species) and to determine appropriate strategies to minimize effects on environmental elements. After WS' personnel apply damage management actions, they subsequently monitor and adjust/cease damage management actions (Slate et al. 1992). This process allows WS to take into consideration other influences in the environment, such as those listed above, in order to avoid cumulative adverse impacts on target species.

With management authority over bird populations, the USFWS and/or the NDGFD could adjust take levels, including the take by WS, to achieve population objectives for bird species. Consultation and reporting of take by WS would ensure the USFWS and/or the NDGFD had the opportunity to consider the activities conducted by WS. As stated previously, WS would not use or recommend those lethal methods available as population management tools over broad areas. WS would use and recommend lethal methods to reduce the number of birds present at a location where damage was occurring by targeting those birds causing damage or posing threats; therefore, the intent of lethal methods would be to manage those birds causing damage and not to manage entire bird populations.

Because take of most bird species can only legally occur when authorized by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD, the USFWS and the NDGFD can consider take when determining population objectives for those bird species. Therefore, the USFWS and/or the NDGFD could adjust the number of birds that people harvest during the regulated hunting season and the number of birds that people can take for damage management purposes to achieve the population objectives. For most species, take by WS and the authorized take allowed would occur at the discretion of the USFWS and/or the NDGFD. Any bird population declines or increases induced through the regulation of take would be the collective objective for bird populations established by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD.

As discussed previously, the analysis for magnitude of impact from lethal take can be determined either quantitatively or qualitatively. Quantitative determinations may rely on population estimates, allowable removal levels, and actual removal data. Qualitative determinations may rely on population trend data, when available. Information on bird populations and trends are often derived from several sources including the BBS, the CBC, the Partners in Flight Landbird Population database, available literature, and

harvest data. The potential impacts of conducting the alternatives on the populations of target bird species occurs below for each alternative.

***Alternative 1 - WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota (Proposed Action/No Action)***

If WS implements Alternative 1, WS would be available to provide both technical assistance and direct operational assistance to those persons requesting assistance with managing damage and threats caused by birds in the state. The effects on populations of target bird species associated with WS providing technical assistance during the implementation of Alternative 1 would be similar to those effects discussed for Alternative 3. Therefore, to reduce redundancy, the effects associated with WS providing technical assistance that would occur if WS implements Alternative 1 occur in the discussion for Alternative 3.

When providing direct operational assistance, WS could employ those methods described in Appendix B in an adaptive approach that would integrate methods to reduce damage and threats associated with birds effectively. WS' personnel would use the WS Decision Model (see WS Directive 2.201) to identify the most appropriate damage management strategies and their impacts. If WS implemented Alternative 1, WS' personnel could choose to use any of the methods discussed in Appendix B when using the WS Decision Model to formulate strategies. Therefore, implementation of Alternative 1 would allow WS' personnel to consider the widest range of methods available when formulating strategies to resolve requests for assistance associated with birds. WS' personnel would employ methods in an adaptive approach that would integrate methods to reduce damage and threats of damage associated with birds in the state. WS would only use methods after WS and the appropriate entity requesting assistance signed a work initiation document allowing WS to use those methods on property they own or manage. When practical and effective, WS' personnel would give preference to non-lethal methods pursuant to WS Directive 2.101.

A common concern is whether damage management actions would adversely affect the population of a target bird species, especially when WS and other entities use lethal methods. If WS implemented Alternative 1, the potential effects on the populations of target bird species associated with WS' use of non-lethal methods would be similar to those potential effects discussed for Alternative 2 because the same non-lethal methods would be available for use by WS' personnel. To limit redundancy, a discussion on the potential effects associated with the use of non-lethal methods does not occur for Alternative 1 because those potential effects would be similar to those discussed for Alternative 2 but those potential effects could possibly occur if WS' implemented Alternative 1. In general, the use of non-lethal methods to disperse, exclude, or capture birds from areas where they are causing damage or posing a threat of damage would have minimal effects on the overall population of a target bird species because those methods generally do not harm birds (see discussion for Alternative 2).

Therefore, the evaluation of potential effects on the populations of target bird species for Alternative 1 will primarily focus on WS' use of lethal methods because WS' personnel could use lethal methods to remove an individual bird or a group of birds to alleviate damage. WS would only target an individual bird or a group of birds identified as causing damage or posing a threat to human safety. Therefore, if WS implemented Alternative 1, WS could lethally remove birds, which could potentially have direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on the populations of target bird species. WS would only take migratory bird species protected by the MBTA when authorized by the USFWS and only at authorized levels. Similarly, WS would only take resident bird species when authorized by the NDGFD and only at authorized levels.

A lethal method that WS could employ would be the destruction of active and inactive nests of target bird species. For those species protected from take by the MBTA, the destruction of active nests (those nests



containing eggs or nestlings) can only occur when the USFWS permits those activities and only at the levels they permit. People can destroy inactive nests (those nests that do not contain eggs or nestlings) without the need for a depredation permit from the USFWS. In addition, no person may take the nests or eggs of protected birds without a permit from the NDGFD. People often use nest destruction to alleviate damage associated with the nesting activities and/or to discourage nesting in an area where damages occur or could occur. Many bird species have the ability to identify areas with regular human disturbance and low reproductive success and they will relocate to nest elsewhere when confronted with repeated nest failure. After the initial removal of active or inactive nests, WS' personnel or the cooperating entity would attempt to monitor the site for additional nesting activity. If new nesting activity occurred, WS' personnel would continue to destroy the inactive nests by hand. After repeated nesting failures, birds often seek other nesting locations. Monitoring a site for nesting activity by WS' personnel would reduce or alleviate the need to destroy eggs and euthanize any nestlings.

Although there may be reduced fecundity for the individuals affected by nest destruction, this activity would not have long-term effects on breeding adult birds because of the limited number of nests removed and the ability of many bird species to re-nest after a nest failure. WS does not use nest destruction as a population management method. WS uses nest destruction to inhibit nesting in an area experiencing damage due to or associated with the nesting activity and those activities only occur at a localized level. If WS' personnel encounter eggs and/or nestlings in an active nest, WS could destroy the eggs by puncturing, oiling, shaking, or by breaking the eggs open. If WS' personnel encountered nestlings in an active nest, WS' personnel would euthanize those nestlings in accordance with WS Directive 2.505. For the purposes of the analysis, WS will consider nestlings euthanized as part of the cumulative take of a target bird species.

The use of lethal methods could result in local population reductions in the area where damage or threats were occurring because those methods would remove birds from a population. WS often uses lethal methods to reinforce non-lethal methods and to remove birds that WS' personnel identify as causing damage or posing a threat of damage. The analysis includes WS' anticipated annual take level for each species, which WS based on previous requests for assistance associated with the species and in anticipation of future requests for assistance. WS' anticipated annual take level for each species is not a prescribed take level but is a maximum take level that WS anticipates could occur annually to alleviate damage. The number of birds removed annually by WS using lethal methods would be dependent on the number of requests for assistance received, the number of birds involved with the associated damage or threat, the efficacy of methods employed, and the take permitted by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD. WS' personnel would only target the bird or birds that they identify as responsible for causing damage or posing a threat of damage. The potential impacts on the populations of target bird species from the implementation of Alternative 1 occurs below.

### ***CANADA GOOSE POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Canada geese are the most widely distributed goose species in North America (Mowbray et al. 2020). Canada geese occur in a broad range of habitats including prairie, arctic plains, mountain meadows, agricultural areas, reservoirs, sewage lagoons, parks, golf courses, lawn-rich suburban areas, or other similar areas not far from permanent sources of water. Their diet consists of grasses, sedges, berries, and seeds, including agricultural grain. Canada geese are highly social birds that often gather and feed in flocks, with some flocks exceeding 1,000 birds (Mowbray et al. 2020).

In the past, most authorities recognized one species of the Canada goose with 11 subspecies, which differed primarily in body size and color (Mowbray et al. 2020). Today, there are generally two recognized, distinct species of geese instead of just a single species. Those two distinct species are the smaller cackling goose and the larger Canada goose (Willcox and Giuliano 2012, Mowbray et al. 2020).

There are four recognized subspecies of cackling geese, which generally occur within western and northwestern North America. In North America, there are seven subspecies of Canada geese recognized (Willcox and Giuliano 2012, Mowbray et al. 2020).

Historically, the breeding range of Canada geese occurred along the northern portion of the United States and across most of Canada and they migrated south to spend the winter in more temperate climates (Mowbray et al. 2020). Overharvest and habitat loss nearly extirpated the native breeding populations of Canada geese in the United States following settlement in the 19th century (Mowbray et al. 2020). In the mid-1900s, state and federal agencies began efforts to restore historic breeding populations and to establish breeding populations of Canada geese in new locations. Canada goose restoration efforts began in the Central Flyway as early as 1936 when Nebraska's first captive flock was established. Between 1938 and 1941, two National Wildlife Refuges in North Dakota maintained captive flocks of Canada geese and over the next two decades, the USFWS established several additional small flocks of Canada geese in the state. After 1981, restoration efforts shifted from maintaining captive flocks to capturing and transplanting wild Canada geese in the state (Gabig 2000).

Due to those restoration efforts, Canada geese now nest statewide. Canada geese are also present in the state during the fall and spring migration periods and may be present during the winter in areas of the state where open water exists (Mowbray et al 2020). The Canada geese that nest in North Dakota are part of the Great Plains population, which consists of Canada geese from restoration efforts in Saskatchewan, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas (USFWS 2019). Canada geese that nest further north augment the breeding population of Canada geese in the state during the migration periods and may spend part of the winter in the state depending of the availability of open water. Canada geese that occur in the state during the migration periods and during the winter are primarily from the Western Prairie population (*i.e.*, Canada geese that nest in eastern Saskatchewan and western Manitoba) and the Central Flyway Artic Nesting population (USFWS 2019). The Central Flyway Artic Nesting population of Canada geese nests across the Canadian Artic and migrate southward to winter throughout the Central Flyway and the Mississippi Flyway (USFWS 2019).

Therefore, depending on the time of year, there are two behaviorally distinct types of Canada goose populations present in the state. People generally label the two distinct types of geese that could be present in the state as “*resident*” and “*migratory*” geese. Discussion on resident and migratory geese that could be present in the state occurs below.

#### ➤ *Resident Canada Geese*

Canada geese are “*resident*” (also sometimes referred to as “*temperate breeding*”) when they nest within the lower 48 states and the District of Columbia or that reside within the lower 48 states and the District of Columbia in the months of April, May, June, July, or August (see 50 CFR 20.11, 50 CFR 21.3) (Rusch et al. 1995, Ankney 1996). Resident Canada geese can have a relatively high nesting success rate compared to migratory Canada geese (Mowbray et al. 2020). Resident Canada geese nest in traditional sites (*e.g.*, along shorelines, on islands and peninsulas, small ponds, lakes, and reservoirs), as well as on rooftops, adjacent to roadways, swimming pools, and in parking lots, playgrounds, planters, and abandoned property (*e.g.*, tires, automobiles).

When migrant populations are present in the state, distinguishing a resident Canada goose from a migratory Canada goose by appearance can be difficult. Therefore, for this analysis, WS will consider those Canada geese addressed from April through August to be resident Canada geese and activities conducted from September to March to involve a larger component of migrant Canada geese from more northern breeding areas. As discussed previously, resident Canada geese present in North Dakota are part of the Great Plains population, which the USFWS (2019) manages jointly with the Western Prairie

population.

Table 3.1 shows the number of resident Canada geese that WS addressed in North Dakota from federal fiscal year (FY) 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS employed several different non-lethal techniques to disperse resident Canada geese including vehicle presence, physical actions (hands/voice), pyrotechnics, propane cannons, and the noise associated with discharging a firearm. In addition, WS employed lethal methods to take resident Canada geese to manage damage and/or threats of damage. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS employed firearms to take resident Canada geese in the state.

**Table 3.1 – Resident Canada geese addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019<sup>†</sup>**

Fiscal Year	Lethal Take	Dispersed
2015	8	435
2016	17	439
2017	62	1,260
2018	178	4,454
2019	190	2,535

<sup>†</sup>WS' activities conducted from April through August when resident Canada geese are present in the state

In addition to WS direct activities associated with addressing resident Canada geese, WS conducts a non-lethal seasonal outreach program to assist landowners with Canada goose problems. The program involves 3-4 seasonal employees that respond to complaints and provide a damage assessment. Following an in-person damage assessment, WS provides assistance to the landowner by implementing one or more non-lethal methods. The equipment (canons, fencing, etc.) is loaned to the landowner by WS and WS also provides technical advice on its use. In some instances, if non-lethal methods prove to be unsuccessful, WS will assist the landowner with acquiring a depredation permit from NDGFD which gives the landowner the ability to implement lethal methods if necessary. Table 3.2 shows the number of landowners/properties and equipment loaned to landowners from FY 2015 through 2019.

**Table 3.2 – Non-lethal Canada goose Assistance Provided by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015-2019**

Fiscal Year	Properties	Canons	Fencing	Flags	Effigies	Pyrotechnics
2015	103	155	36	139	98	6,200
2016	113	158	30	233	131	5,400
2017	83	101	12	59	65	2,700
2018	68	83	10	12	45	2,900
2019	60	74	4	7	26	3,350

Adult Canada geese molt their primary flight feathers generally from mid-June through mid-July each year. Molting is the process whereby geese annually replace their primary and secondary flight (wing) feathers (Welty 1982). When adult Canada geese lose their primary flight feathers, they are unable to fly until their new flight feathers grow back. Portions of a flock of geese can be flightless from about one week before until two weeks after the primary molt period because individual birds molt at slightly different times. Because geese are flightless, WS' personnel can live-capture target geese by slowly guiding them into corral traps. Therefore, another common approach to managing the damage and threats of damage posed by resident Canada geese is to live-capture geese. Once live-captured, WS could euthanize the Canada geese and/or translocate those Canada geese to other areas. Euthanizing and/or translocating of live-captured Canada geese would only occur when authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD.

Based on the number of requests that WS has previously received for assistance and in anticipation of additional efforts to manage damage, WS could lethally remove up to 1,500 resident Canada geese annually in the state to alleviate damage and/or threats of damage. WS' personnel could also destroy the nests (including eggs) of nesting Canada geese in the state as part of an integrated approach to managing damage. WS anticipates that personnel could destroy up to 1,500 nests in the state based on previous requests for assistance and in anticipation of receiving additional requests for assistance. WS would continue to use an integrated method approach when addressing requests for assistance. WS would continue to consider the use of non-lethal methods before the use of lethal methods. As discussed previously, WS has employed several non-lethal methods to address requests for assistance associated with Canada geese. However, WS may employ lethal methods when personnel deem those methods to be appropriate using the WS' Decision Model.

In the spring of 2019, the USFWS (2019) estimated the Western Prairie and Great Plains population at 1.4 million Canada geese, which was a 7% increase from the 2018 estimate. The 10-year trend for the Western Prairie and Great Plains population has shown a 2% increase per year (USFWS 2019). The current resident (temperate breeding) population estimated by NDGFD is 335,118 Canada geese (M. Szymanski, NDGFD pers. comm. 2020). If WS takes up to 1,500 resident Canada geese per year and the breeding population in North Dakota is estimated at 335,118 Canada geese, the take of up to 1,500 Canada geese by WS would represent 0.45% of the breeding population. Under current frameworks, the USFWS currently allows states to implement an annual August management take for Canada geese and an early September Canada goose hunting season to target resident (temperate breeding) Canada geese, in addition to the harvest of Canada geese that can occur during the annual regular waterfowl season. The intent of the September hunting season for Canada geese is to target resident nesting geese before migratory Canada geese arrive in the state and evidence suggests these early season management actions can have an immediate effect on local populations (Dooley et al. 2019). Based on those frameworks, the NDGFD currently allows people in the state to harvest geese during the September resident Canada goose season and the regular waterfowl harvest season. Although some migratory Canada geese are present in the state during the September regular waterfowl harvest season, based on USFWS Parts Collection Survey data, NDGFD estimates that fewer than 10% are arctic nesting (migratory) Canada geese (M. Szymanski, NDGFD pers. comm. 2020).

Figure 3.1 shows the estimated number of Canada geese that people harvested in the state during the August management take and the early September hunting season for Canada geese<sup>5</sup>. During the August management take and the early September hunting season for Canada geese in the state, hunters harvested an average of 43,836 Canada geese per year from 2014 through 2019.

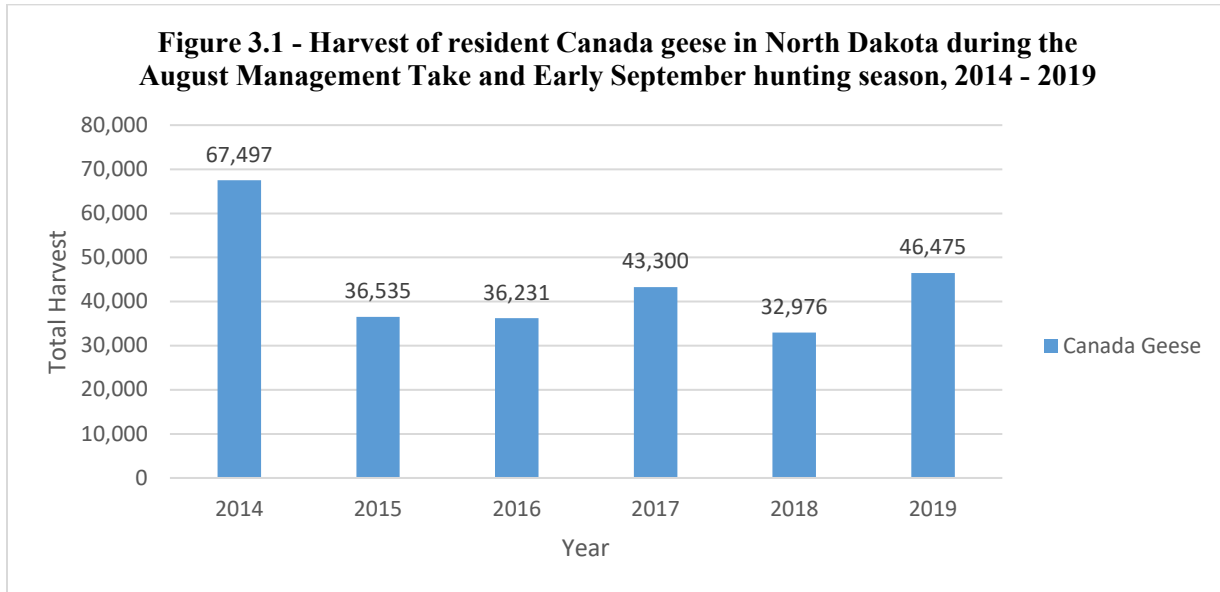
In addition to hunter harvest, entities other than WS have reported the take of Canada geese in North Dakota to the USFWS. From 2015 through 2018, entities other than WS reported to the USFWS the lethal removal of 415 Canada geese in the state, which is an average annual removal of 104 Canada geese. NDGFD also reports an average of 2500 geese taken under state permits (M. Szymanski, NDGFD pers. comm. 2020). The number of those geese lethally removed by other entities that were resident Canada geese is unknown. For this analysis, WS will consider those Canada geese lethally removed by other entities to be resident Canada geese. Therefore, any removal by WS to alleviate damage would be occurring along with harvest during the August management take, the September hunting season, the regular hunting season for waterfowl, lethal take by NDGFD permittees, and other entities.

If hunters harvest an average of 43,836 resident Canada geese per year, other entities lethally remove 2604 Canada geese per year, and WS removes up to 1500 Canada geese per year, the cumulative take would be 47,940 resident Canada geese in the state. The cumulative take of 47,940 resident Canada geese

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<sup>5</sup>Data for Figure 3.1 provided by the NDGFD (M. Szymanski, NDGFD, pers. comm. 2020).

per year would represent 14.3% of the nesting population in North Dakota based on a breeding population of 335,118. Data collected from 2007 through 2017 during the BBS continues to show an increasing population trend for resident Canada geese in the state estimated at 12.1% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b), which indicates that cumulative take of resident Canada geese has not caused the population to decline in the state.



In addition, WS could destroy the nests and/or eggs of resident Canada geese as part of an integrated approach to managing damage. In anticipation of addressing additional requests for assistance associated with geese, WS could destroy up to 500 nests (including eggs within the nests) annually. WS’ take of active nests would only occur when permitted by the USFWS through the issuance of depredation permits and only when authorized by the NDGFD. WS’ take of nests would not exceed 500 nests annually and would not exceed the level authorized pursuant to depredation permits issued by the USFWS or authorization provided by the NDGFD.

Impacts due to nest and egg destruction would have no effect on the resident goose population in North Dakota. Geese are a long-lived species and have the ability to identify areas with regular human disturbance and low reproductive success, which may cause them to relocate and nest elsewhere when confronted with repeated nest failure. Although there may be reduced fecundity for the individual geese affected, nest/egg removal has no long-term effect on breeding adult geese. WS would not use nest and egg removal as a population management method. WS would destroy nests (and eggs within the nest) in a localized area to inhibit nesting where the nests or the presence of nesting geese were causing damage or posing a threat of damage. Treatment of 95% of all Canada goose eggs each year would result in only a 25% reduction in the population over 10 years (Allan et al. 1995).

➤ *Migratory Canada Geese*

Migratory Canada geese nest across the arctic, subarctic, and boreal regions of Canada and Alaska that migrate south to winter in the United States and Mexico (Mowbray et al. 2020). Canada goose migrations may encompass up to 3,000 miles, like that of the Richardson’s Canada goose (*B. c. hutchinsii*), which nests as far north as Baffin Island, Nunavut, Canada and winters as far south as the eastern states of Mexico. Canada geese that could occur in the state during the migration periods and during the winter are primarily from three breeding populations. Those populations include the Central Flyway Arctic Nesting

population, the Western Prairie population, and the Great Plains population (USFWS 2019).

The Central Flyway Arctic Nesting population of Canada geese consists of the West-tier subpopulation and the East-tier subpopulation. The West-tier subpopulation consists of Canada geese that nest on Victoria and Jenny Lind Islands and on the mainland from the Queen Maud Gulf west and south to the Mackenzie River in Canada. They winter in southeastern Colorado, northeastern New Mexico, and the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles (USFWS 2019). The East-tier subpopulation nest on Baffin, Southampton, and King Islands; north of the Maguse and McConnell Rivers on the Hudson Bay coast; and in the eastern Queen Maud Gulf region of Canada. They winter in Oklahoma, Texas, and northeastern Mexico (USFWS 2019). As discussed previously, the Western Prairie population nests in eastern Saskatchewan and western Manitoba while the Great Plain population consists of Canada geese that originated from restoration efforts in Saskatchewan, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas (USFWS 2019).

The USFWS (2019) estimated the Western Prairie and the Great Plains population at 1,443,000 Canada geese in 2019, which was a 7% increase to the population estimate of 1,350,000 Canada geese in 2018. Over the last 10 years, the Western Prairie and the Great Plains population increased an average of 2% per year (USFWS 2019). In 2019, the USFWS (2019) estimated the Central Flyway Arctic Nesting population at nearly 2.5 million Canada geese, which was a 1% increase from the population estimated during 2018. Over the last 10 years, the Central Flyway Arctic Nesting population declined an average of 4% per year (USFWS 2019). The number of Canada geese observed in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC has shown a general increasing trend from 1966 through 2017 (National Audubon Society 2010). The number of migratory Canada geese present in the state during the winter or during the spring and fall migration is unknown. In addition, both resident and migratory Canada geese are present in the state during those periods. From 2009 through 2018, observers have counted an average of 37,748 Canada geese in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC with a low of 2,835 Canada geese to a high of 79,019 Canada geese (National Audubon Society 2010).

Table 3.3 shows the number of migratory Canada geese that WS addressed in North Dakota from FY 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS employed several different non-lethal techniques to disperse migratory Canada geese including vehicle presence, physical actions (hands/voice), pyrotechnics, propane cannons, and the noise associated with discharging a firearm. In addition, WS employed lethal methods to take migratory Canada geese to manage damage and/or threats of damage. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS employed firearms to take migratory Canada geese in the state.

**Table 3.3 – Migratory Canada geese addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019<sup>†</sup>**

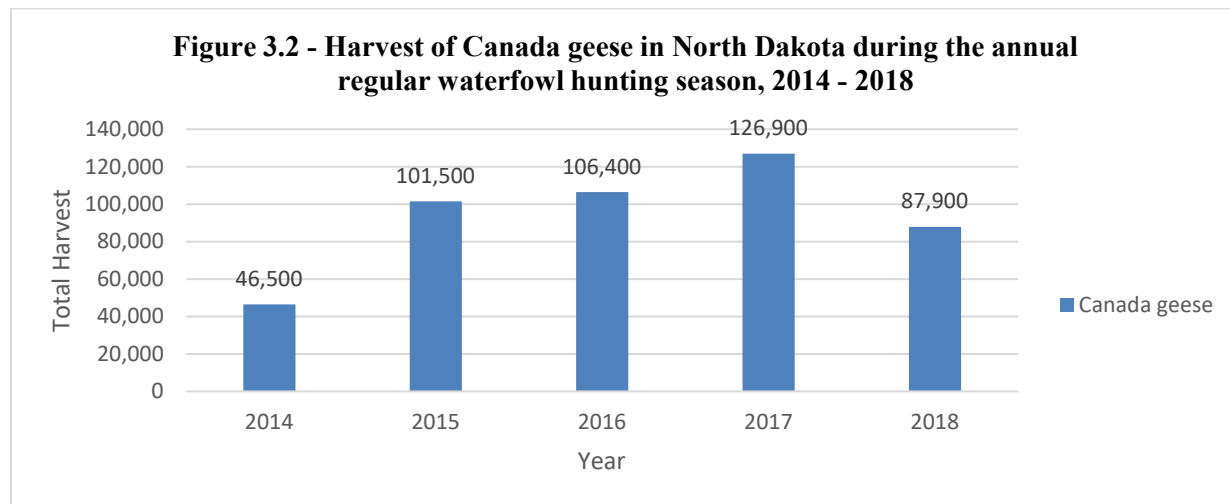
<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	4	2,653
<b>2016</b>	9	5,631
<b>2017</b>	0	16,084
<b>2018</b>	6	14,375
<b>2019</b>	6	10,853

<sup>†</sup>WS' activities conducted from September through March when migratory Canada geese are present in the state

Based on previous requests for assistance to manage Canada geese, WS may receive requests to address geese during those months when migratory geese could be present in the state. Based on the number of migratory Canada geese addressed previously and in anticipation of receiving requests for assistance during those periods when migratory Canada geese may be present in the state, WS may take up to 200 Canada geese annually during those periods when migratory geese could be present in the state. The lethal removal of up to 200 migratory Canada geese by WS would represent 0.5% of the average number

of Canada geese observed in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC from 2009 through 2018.

Hunting frameworks for Canada geese in the Central Flyway have been liberalized consistently over time, recognizing that harvest isn't keeping up with population growth. Liberalizations have occurred in special Canada goose harvest opportunities and during the regular waterfowl season. From 2014 through 2018, hunters harvested an average of 112,400 Canada geese per year in the state during the regular season when those geese present in the state could be migratory (see Figure 3.2)<sup>6</sup>. WS' take of up to 200 geese that could be migratory would represent 0.2% of the average number of Canada geese taken during the regular hunting season for waterfowl that could also be migratory. However, locally breeding birds are also around during this time. A fairly large proportion of geese harvested prior to November will be from temperate breeding areas. Even birds that migrate into the state in late-October and early November are often molt-migrants that are locally produced, but non-breeding.



Cumulative impacts of the proposed action on migratory Canada geese would occur from WS' take, take by other entities, and hunter harvest. The number of migratory geese potentially removed by WS on an annual basis in North Dakota is likely to be relatively low. The majority of WS' lethal activities would occur when migratory geese were not present in the state (*i.e.*, from April through August); therefore, the activities that WS could conduct under this alternative would primarily involve the resident Canada geese population. WS' proposed take is of low magnitude when compared with the number of geese that people harvest annually in the state. WS' limited proposed take would not limit the ability of people to harvest Canada geese in the state based on the limited portion of the overall take that could occur by WS and the locations where WS conducts activities. The take of migratory Canada geese could only occur when authorized through the issuance of depredation permits by the USFWS and when authorized by the NDGFD. The permitting of the take by the USFWS pursuant to the MBTA and the authorization of take by the NDGFD would ensure take by WS and by other entities occurred within allowable take levels to achieve the desired population objectives for Canada geese.

### ***MALLARD POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Found across most of North America, the mallard is the most abundant and one of the most recognizable waterfowl species (Drilling et al. 2020). In North Dakota, mallards occur statewide throughout the year during the spring, summer, and fall, and can occur in areas with open during the winter (Drilling et al. 2020). Mallards are often associated with wetlands, streams, ponds, and lakes; however, mallards are

<sup>6</sup>Data for Figure 3.2 adapted from Raftovich et al. (2015), Raftovich et al. (2017), and Raftovich et al (2019).

flexible and adaptable and can occur in a variety of habitats (Drilling et al. 2020). An omnivorous and opportunistic duck, mallards will consume a wide variety of invertebrates, vegetation, seeds, and human provided food (Drilling et al. 2020). With the exception of the mating season, mallards are highly social, congregating in flocks that can number in the thousands during the winter and during the spring and fall migrations (Drilling et al. 2020).

The number of mallards observed in areas of the state surveyed during the BBS has increased an estimated 2.5% each year from 1966 through 2017 with a 1.9% annual increase occurring from 2007 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). The number of mallards observed in the state during the CBC has shown a general increasing trend since 1966, with a notable amount of cyclic survey results (National Audubon Society 2010). The statewide population based on the NDGFD breeding duck survey in 2020 was 872,982 mallards (NDGFD 2020b).

Table 3.4 shows the number of mallards that WS lethally removed from FY 2015 through FY 2019 and the number dispersed using non-lethal methods. WS used pyrotechnics, physical actions (hand/voice), vehicle presence, and the noise produced from firearms to disperse mallards from areas where damage or threats of damage were occurring. WS also used firearms to remove mallards intentionally that employees identified as causing damage or the threat of damage. From the number of mallards addressed from FY 2015 through FY 2019 and in anticipation of additional efforts to manage damage, an annual take of up to 200 mallards by WS could occur under this alternative. In addition, WS could destroy up to 50 nests, including eggs in nests, per year to disperse mallards and to discourage nesting in areas where the presence of nesting mallards could pose an immediate threat to human safety such as an airport environment.

**Table 3.4 – Mallards addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019<sup>†</sup>**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	4	1,769
<b>2016</b>	8	3,989
<b>2017</b>	0	6,461
<b>2018</b>	0	14,593
<b>2019</b>	3	10,140

<sup>†</sup>Yearly totals include mallards taken intentionally by WS and mallards taken unintentionally while targeting other wildlife

Like other waterfowl species, hunters can harvest mallards during a regulated season in the state. In 2017, hunters harvested an estimated 171,745 mallards in the state. In 2018, hunters in the state harvested an estimated 157,338 mallards (Raftovich et al. 2019). In addition to the take occurring during the hunting season, other entities in the state reported to the USFWS the take of mallards from 2015 through 2018; however, the take of mallards likely occurred by WS at airports and/or military facilities where WS’ personnel were conducting activities pursuant to a depredation permit issued to the airport or military facility.

The take of up to 200 mallards in the state by WS would represent 0.1% of the estimated number of mallards harvested in North Dakota during the 2017 hunting season and 0.1% of the number of mallards people harvested in the state during the 2018 hunting season. WS anticipates the cumulative take of mallards by WS and other entities to alleviate damage or the threat of damage to be of low magnitude when compared to the number of mallards that people harvest in the state annually.

Under the proposed action, WS could also destroy the nests (including eggs in nests) of mallards as part of an integrated approach to managing damage. WS anticipates that requests for assistance could result in the destruction of up to 50 nests annually in the state, including eggs in the nests. All lethal take or



destruction of active nests/eggs by WS would occur pursuant to depredation permits issued by the USFWS and authorizations provided by the NDGFD, which would ensure the USFWS and the NDGFD have the opportunity to evaluate the cumulative take of mallards from all known sources when establishing population objectives for mallards. WS would also continue to use non-lethal harassment methods to disperse mallards to alleviate damage. In addition, annual take by WS would not limit the ability of hunters to harvest mallards in the state. WS' proposed take would continue to be a limited component of the overall harvest of mallards occurring annually in the state.

### ***ROCK PIGEON POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Rock pigeons are a non-indigenous species that European settlers first introduced to North America in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a domestic bird for sport, carrying messages, and as a source of food (Schorger 1952, Lowther and Johnston 2020). Many of those birds escaped and eventually formed the feral pigeon populations that now occur throughout the United States, southern Canada, and Mexico (Lowther and Johnston 2020).

Pigeons are non-migratory and they are closely associated with people, where human structures and activities provide them with food and sites for roosting, loafing, and nesting (Williams and Corrigan 1994, Lowther and Johnston 2020). Thus, pigeons commonly occur around city buildings, bridges, parks, farmyards, grain elevators, feed mills, and other manmade structures (Williams and Corrigan 1994, Lowther and Johnston 2020). Additionally, although pigeons are primarily grain and seed eaters, they will readily feed on garbage, livestock manure, spilled grains, insects, and any other available bits of food (Williams and Corrigan 1994, Lowther and Johnston 2020).

In North Dakota, pigeons occur statewide throughout the year (Lowther and Johnston 2020). The number of pigeons observed along routes surveyed during the BBS in the state have shown an increasing trend since 1966, which has been estimated at 2.2% annually. From 2007 through 2017, the number of rock pigeons observed in areas of the state surveyed during the BBS has shown an increasing trend estimated at 2.3% per year (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Based on data from the BBS, the Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the statewide breeding population at 570,000 pigeons. The number of pigeons observed in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC has shown a general increasing trend in the state since 1966 (National Audubon Society 2010).

Table 3.5 shows the number of rock pigeons dispersed or lethally removed by WS in North Dakota to alleviate damage and threats from FY 2015 through FY 2019. WS has employed non-lethal hazing methods to disperse rock pigeons in the state to address requests for assistance to manage damage. WS addressed rock pigeons using non-lethal hazing methods, such as vehicle activity, pyrotechnics, propane cannons, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm. WS also used lethal methods to remove rock pigeons that employees identified as causing damage or posing a threat of damage. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS lethally removed an average of 1,326 rock pigeons per year in the state to alleviate damage or threats of damage. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, the lethal take of rock pigeons by WS occurred from the use of firearms and euthanasia after WS' personnel captured pigeons in mist nets, hand nets, and cage traps.

Based on the gregarious behavior of pigeons (*i.e.*, forming large flocks) and in anticipation of the number of requests received by WS to increase, WS could annually take up to 5,000 rock pigeons and up to 200 nests annually to alleviate damage or threats throughout the state. Based on a breeding population estimated at 570,000 pigeons, take of up to 5,000 pigeons by WS would represent 0.9% of the estimated statewide breeding population.

**Table 3.5 – Rock pigeons addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	1,840	0
<b>2016</b>	405	903
<b>2017</b>	1,199	948
<b>2018</b>	2,119	0
<b>2019</b>	1,066	4,007

Because rock pigeons are a non-native species in North America, the MBTA does not afford rock pigeons protection from take. A depredation permit from the USFWS and authorization from the NDGFD is not required for people to take rock pigeons and there are no requirements to report the take of rock pigeons to the USFWS or the NDGFD; therefore, the number of rock pigeons that other entities lethally remove in the state is unknown. Activities associated with rock pigeons would occur pursuant to Executive Order 13112 and Executive Order 13751, which states that each federal agency whose actions may affect the status of invasive species shall reduce invasions of exotic species and the associated damages.

***MOURNING DOVE POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Mourning doves are migratory game birds with substantial populations throughout much of North America. They occur in all 48 contiguous states of the United States and the southern portions of Canada with the northern populations being more migratory than the southern populations (Otis et al. 2020). Mourning doves occur statewide during the spring and fall migration periods and during the nesting season but mourning doves may occur throughout the year in parts of eastern and central North Dakota (Otis et al. 2020).

According to trend data provided by the United States Geological Survey (2020b), the number of mourning doves observed on BBS routes in North Dakota has shown a decreasing trend estimated at - 0.1% annually since 1966, with an estimated annual increase of 0.5% from 2007 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Based on BBS data, the Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the statewide breeding population at 4.2 million mourning doves. Since 1966, trend data from areas of the state surveyed during the CBC shows a general declining trend for mourning doves (National Audubon Society 2010). The USFWS publishes a report on the population status of mourning doves annually based upon survey data. Seamans (2019) estimated the absolute abundance of mourning doves in the Central Management Unit<sup>7</sup> ranged from 125.2 million to 173.2 million mourning doves over the past ten years. In 2018, Seamans (2019) estimated the absolute abundance of mourning doves in the Central Management Unit at 136.8 million doves, which was an increase in abundance from the estimated 131.3 million mourning doves in the Central Management Unit during 2017.

Table 3.6 shows the number of mourning doves lethally removed or dispersed by WS to alleviate damage and threats from FY 2015 through FY 2019. Since FY 2015, WS has employed non-lethal harassment methods to disperse mourning doves in the state to address requests for assistance to manage damage. WS addressed mourning doves using non-lethal harassment methods, such as pyrotechnics, physical actions (hands/voice), vehicle activity, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm. WS also used lethal methods to remove mourning doves that employees identified as causing damage or posing a threat of damage. In FY 2019, the lethal take of mourning doves by WS occurred from the use of firearms.

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<sup>7</sup>The Central Management Unit consists of those states east of the Rocky Mountains and west of the Mississippi River and includes North Dakota.

Based on the number of requests to manage damage associated with mourning doves received previously and based on the gregarious behavior of doves in the state during the migration periods, up to 300 mourning doves could be lethally removed by WS annually in the state to address damage or threats of damage. In addition, WS could destroy up to 20 mourning dove nests annually to alleviate damage or threats of damage, including eggs in the nests. The lethal removal of up to 300 mourning doves by WS would represent 0.01% of the statewide breeding population estimated at 4.2 million mourning doves.

**Table 3.6 – Mourning doves addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	5
<b>2017</b>	0	179
<b>2018</b>	0	242
<b>2019</b>	9	637

The USFWS authorized entities other than WS to take mourning doves in the state from 2015 through 2018; however, those entities did not report any lethal take to the USFWS from 2015 through 2018. Many states have regulated annual hunting seasons for mourning doves with generous bag limits. Hunters harvested nearly 11.6 million mourning doves in the United States during the 2017 hunting season and nearly 10.4 million doves during the 2018 hunting season (Raftovich et al. 2019, Seamans 2019). Hunters in North Dakota harvested an estimated 59,400 mourning doves during the 2017 hunting season and an estimated 65,200 mourning doves in the state during the 2018 hunting season (Raftovich et al. 2019, Seamans 2019).

The take of 300 mourning doves by WS would represent 0.5% of the mourning doves that hunters harvested in the state during the 2017 and 2018 hunting season. Migrating mourning doves likely augment local populations of mourning doves in the state during the migration periods and during the winter months. WS anticipates the cumulative take of mourning doves by WS and other entities to alleviate damage or the threat of damage to be of low magnitude when compared to the statewide breeding population and the number of mourning doves that people harvest in the state annually. Like other bird species, the take of mourning doves by WS to alleviate damage would only occur when permitted by the USFWS pursuant to the MBTA through the issuance of depredation permits and only when authorized by the NDGFD. Therefore, the take of mourning doves by WS would only occur at levels authorized by USFWS and the NDGFD, which ensures the USFWS and the NDGFD have the opportunity to consider WS' take and take by all entities, including hunter harvest, to achieve the desired population management levels of doves in North Dakota.

***FRANKLIN'S GULL POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Franklin's gulls depend on prairie marshes in the interior of North America for breeding (NDGFD 2012, Burger and Gochfeld 2020). Burger and Gochfeld (2020) described the breeding range of Franklin's gulls in North America as occurring from eastern Alberta, central Saskatchewan, southwestern Manitoba, eastern North Dakota and western Minnesota south locally to east-central Oregon, southern Idaho, northwestern Utah, northwestern Wyoming, northeastern South Dakota, and northwest Iowa. Nesting colonies may also occur locally in Montana, Colorado, and California. After the nesting season, Franklin's gulls migrate southward to winter in South America (Burger and Gochfeld 2020).

In North Dakota, Franklin's gulls are present in the state during the nesting season and during the migration periods as they move between nesting areas further north and their winter areas further south (Burger and Gochfeld 2020). In North Dakota, the number of Franklin's gulls observed in areas of the

state surveyed during the BBS has shown a decreasing trend estimated at -1.9% annually from 1966 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Drilling (2015) estimated the number of adult Franklin’s gulls nesting in the state at 20,700 pairs, which equates to approximately 41,400 breeding adults. Most Franklin’s gulls have migrated through the state before the CBC occurs; therefore, observers often document no Franklin’s gulls in those areas of the state surveyed during the CBC (National Audubon Society 2010). BirdLife International (2018a) considers the Franklin’s gull to be a species of “*least concern*” with an increasing population trend. In the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, Kushlan et al. (2002) ranked the Franklin’s gull as a species of “*moderate concern*”.

Table 3.7 shows the number of Franklin’s gulls lethally removed or dispersed by WS from FY 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS addressed Franklin’s gulls using non-lethal harassment methods, such as propane cannons, vehicle activity, pyrotechnics, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm. WS also used lethal methods to remove Franklin’s gulls that employees identified as causing damage or posing a threat of damage. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, the lethal take of Franklin’s gulls by WS occurred from the use of firearms. Based on the number of requests to manage damage associated with Franklin’s gulls received previously and based on the gregarious behavior of Franklin’s gulls in the state during the migration periods, WS could lethally remove up to 2,000 Franklin’s gulls per year in the state to address damage or threats of damage. In addition, WS could destroy up to 300 Franklin’s gull nests per year in the state to alleviate damage or threats of damage.

If the breeding population were 41,400 Franklin’s gulls, the take of up to 2,000 Franklin’s gulls would represent 4.8% of the population. Drilling (2015) stated, “*The number of Franklin’s Gull breeding pairs in the state may be an order of magnitude too low because of difficulties in assessing colony size*”. In addition, Franklin’s gulls migrate through North Dakota during the fall and the spring as they move between their nesting areas and their wintering areas. The largest concentrations of gulls occur during the spring as they migrate to their nesting areas and during the fall as gulls disperse from nesting areas and migrate to wintering areas. Like all bird species, the actual number of Franklin’s gulls present in the state likely fluctuates throughout the year and varies from year to year.

**Table 3.7 – Franklin’s gulls addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	46	1,723
<b>2016</b>	60	2,899
<b>2017</b>	134	12,585
<b>2018</b>	586	117,365
<b>2019</b>	461	134,341

Other entities have also reported to the USFWS the take of Franklin’s gulls in the state. From 2015 through 2018, other entities have reported to the USFWS the lethal take of an average of 364 Franklin’s gulls per year with the highest reported take occurring in 2018 when other entities reported the take of 716 Franklin’s gulls. However, some of the reported take by other entities occurred by WS’ personnel acting as a sub-permittee under depredation permits issued to other entities. To evaluate a worst-case scenario, this analysis will consider all take reported by other entities as occurring separate from the take that could occur by WS. If other entities take 364 Franklin’s gulls per year and WS’ take reached 2,000 Franklin’s gulls, the cumulative take of 2,364 Franklin’s gulls would represent 5.7% of a breeding population estimated at 41,400 Franklin’s gulls. If the lethal take of Franklin’s gulls by other entities reached 716 Franklin’s gulls per year and WS’ take reached 2,000 Franklin’s gulls, the cumulative take would represent 6.6% of the breeding population estimated at 41,400 Franklin’s gulls. However, the take of Franklin’s gulls primarily occurs during the migration periods when the number of gulls increases in

the state. Therefore, cumulative take is likely to be a lower percentage of the statewide breeding population.

WS has not previously received requests for assistance to destroy Franklin's gull nests in North Dakota. However, WS anticipates receiving requests for assistance from federal and/or state agencies to remove nests in attempts to disperse Franklin's gulls and reduce nest site competition. WS anticipates the possibility of receiving requests for assistance to destroy up to 300 Franklin's gull nests per year for the protection of T&E species such as piping plovers or least terns. Impacts due to nest and egg destruction should have little adverse effect on the Franklin's gull population in North Dakota. Many bird species have the ability to identify areas with regular human disturbance and low reproductive success, which may cause them to relocate and nest elsewhere when confronted with repeated nest failure. Although the destruction of nests and/or eggs may reduce the number of offspring produced by the individual Franklin's gulls affected, nest/egg removal has no long-term effect on breeding adult Franklin's gulls, especially when it involves a limited number of nests/eggs and occurs with limited frequency. WS would not use nest and egg removal as a population management method. When removing nests/eggs, the intent is to disperse a target bird species. After repeated nest failures, birds are likely to begin nesting elsewhere. WS does not expect the removal of nests and the dispersal of adult Franklin's gulls to have any adverse effects on local populations based on the limited number of nests that WS could remove annually.

The take of Franklin's gulls, including the destruction of active nests, can only occur when permitted by the USFWS through the issuance of depredation permits pursuant to the MBTA. In addition, the NDGFD must also authorize the take of Franklin's gulls, including the destruction of active nests. Therefore, the take of Franklin's gulls by WS and other entities would only occur when authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. In addition, the take of Franklin's gulls by WS would only occur at levels authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. The permitting of take by the USFWS and the NDGFD would ensure the cumulative take of Franklin's gulls occurred within allowable take levels to achieve desired population objectives for the species.

### ***RING-BILLED GULL POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

In North America, the nesting range of ring-billed gulls extends across the northern United States and extends northward into southern Canada (Pollet et al. 2020). Ring-billed gulls winter in the southern and the coastal areas of the United States and across most of Mexico. Ring-billed gulls are inland, colonial ground nesters on sparsely vegetated islands in large lakes with occasional colonies on mainland peninsulas and near-shore oceanic islands. Ring-billed gulls commonly occur in large numbers at garbage dumps, parking lots, and southern coastal beaches during the winter. Ring-billed gulls are opportunistic foragers that feed primarily on fish, insects, earthworms, rodents, and grains (Pollet et al. 2020).

In North Dakota, ring-billed gulls are present in the state during the breeding season and during the migration periods (Pollet et al. 2020). In North Dakota, the number of ring-billed gulls observed in areas of the state surveyed during the BBS has shown an increasing trend estimated at 4.0% annually from 1966 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Drilling (2015) estimated the number of adult ring-billed gulls nesting in the state at 18,400 pairs, which equates to approximately 36,800 breeding adults. In addition, ring-billed gulls migrate through North Dakota during the fall and the spring as they move between their nesting areas and their wintering areas. Most ring-billed gulls have migrated through the state before the CBC occurs; therefore, observers document very few ring-billed gulls in those areas of the state surveyed during the CBC and only periodically (National Audubon Society 2010). The largest concentrations of gulls occur during the spring as they migrate to their nesting areas and during the fall as gulls disperse from nesting areas and migrate to wintering areas. Like all bird species, the actual

number of ring-billed gulls present in the state likely fluctuates throughout the year and varies from year to year.

Wires et al. (2010) estimated the ring-billed gull population in North America at 1.7 million breeding individuals. Wetlands International (2020) estimated the ring-billed gull population at nearly 2.6 million ring-billed gulls. BirdLife International (2018b) considers the ring-billed gull to be a species of “*least concern*” with an increasing population trend. In the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, Kushlan et al. (2002) ranked the ring-billed gull as a species “*not currently at risk*”.

Table 3.8 shows the number of ring-billed gulls lethally removed or dispersed by WS from FY 2015 through FY 2019. WS addressed ring-billed gulls using non-lethal harassment methods, such as propane cannons, physical actions (hand/voice), vehicle activity, pyrotechnics, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm. WS also used lethal methods to remove ring-billed gulls that employees identified as causing damage or the threat of damage. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, the lethal take of ring-billed gulls by WS occurred from the use of firearms.

**Table 3.8 – Ring-billed gulls addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	38	864
<b>2016</b>	53	989
<b>2017</b>	6	1,036
<b>2018</b>	705	43,052
<b>2019</b>	160	21,229

Based on the number of requests received to alleviate damage or the threat of damage associated with ring-billed gulls and the number of ring-billed gulls addressed previously to alleviate those requests, WS anticipates that personnel could lethally take up to 3,000 ring-billed gulls annually in the state to alleviate damage or the threat of damage. If the breeding population were 36,800 ring-billed gulls, the take of up to 3,000 ring-billed gulls would represent 8.2% of the population. Based on a population that ranges from 1.7 million to 2.6 million ring-billed gulls in North America, an annual take of up to 3,000 ring-billed gulls by WS would represent 0.1% to 0.2% of the estimated population. In addition, WS could destroy up to 700 ring-billed gull nests per year in the state to alleviate damage or threats of damage.

Other entities have also reported to the USFWS the take of ring-billed gulls in the state. From 2015 through 2018, other entities have reported to the USFWS the lethal take of an average of 875 ring-billed gulls per year with the highest reported take occurring in 2015 when other entities reported the take of 1,431 ring-billed gulls. However, some of the reported take by other entities occurred by WS’ personnel acting as a subpermittee under depredation permits issued to other entities. To evaluate a worst-case scenario, this analysis will consider all take reported by other entities as occurring separate from the take that could occur by WS. If other entities take 875 ring-billed gulls per year and WS’ take reached 3,000 ring-billed gulls, the cumulative take of 3,875 ring-billed gulls would represent 10.5% of a breeding population estimated at 36,800 ring-billed gulls. If the lethal take of ring-billed gulls by other entities reached 1,431 ring-billed gulls per year and WS’ take reached 3,000 ring-billed gulls, the cumulative take would represent 12.0% of the breeding population estimated at 36,800 ring-billed gulls. However, the take of ring-billed gulls primarily occurs during the migration periods when the number of gulls increases in the state. Therefore, cumulative take is likely to be a lower percentage of the statewide breeding population. Based on a population that ranges from 1.7 million to 2.6 million ring-billed gulls in North America, the cumulative take of up to 4,431 ring-billed gulls would represent 0.2% to 0.3% of the estimated population.

Similar to Franklin's gulls, WS has not previously received requests for assistance to remove ring-billed gull nests in North Dakota. However, WS anticipates receiving requests for assistance from federal and/or state agencies to remove nests in attempts to disperse ring-billed gulls and reduce nest site competition, particularly to alleviate impacts to piping plovers. WS anticipates receiving requests for assistance to destroy up to 700 ring-billed gull nests per year in the state. For those reasons discussed for Franklin's gulls, WS does not expect the removal of nests/eggs and the dispersal of adult ring-billed gulls to have any adverse effects on local populations based on the limited number of nests that WS could remove annually.

Like many bird species, the take of ring-billed gulls can only occur when permitted by the USFWS through the issuance of depredation permits pursuant to the MBTA. In addition, the NDGFD must also authorize the take of ring-billed gulls, including the destruction of active nests. Therefore, the take of ring-billed gulls by WS and other entities would only occur when authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. In addition, the take of ring-billed gulls by WS would only occur at levels authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. The permitting of take by the USFWS and the NDGFD would ensure the cumulative take of ring-billed gulls occurred within allowable take levels to achieve desired population objectives for the species.

### ***CALIFORNIA GULL POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

In North America, the nesting range of California gulls is scattered across the arid portions of the western United States and extends northward into southern Canada (Winkler 2020). California gulls winter in the southern regions of the western United States and parts of most of Mexico. California gulls are ground nesters with breeding colonies of California gulls occurring almost exclusively on islands located within natural lakes, rivers, or reservoirs (Winkler 2020).

In North Dakota, California gulls are present in the state during the breeding season and during the migration periods (Winkler 2020). In North Dakota, the number of California gulls observed in areas of the state surveyed during the BBS has shown a decreasing trend estimated at -3.0% annually from 1966 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Drilling (2015) estimated the number of adult California gulls nesting in the state at 2,720 pairs, which equates to approximately 5,440 breeding adults. In addition, California gulls migrate through North Dakota during the fall and the spring as they move between their nesting areas and their wintering areas. Most California gulls have migrated through the state before the CBC occurs; therefore, survey participants document very few California gulls in those areas of the state surveyed during the CBC and they do not observe California gulls every year in areas surveyed (National Audubon Society 2010). Wetlands International (2020) estimated the North American population at 621,000 California gulls. BirdLife International (2018c) considers the ring-billed gull to be a species of "*least concern*" with a decreasing population trend. In the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, Kushlan et al. (2002) ranked the California gull as a species of "*moderate concern*".

From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS did not conduct activities involving California gulls in North Dakota. WS anticipates addressing California gulls primarily to reduce predation risks on the chicks and eggs of threatened or endangered species, such as piping plovers and least terns. WS anticipates that personnel could lethally take up to 500 California gulls annually in the state to alleviate damage or the threat of damage. In addition, WS could destroy up to 500 California gull nests per year in the state to alleviate damage or threats of damage.

If the breeding population were 5,440 California gulls, the take of up to 500 California gulls would represent 9.2% of the population. Based on a population of 621,000 California gulls in North America, an annual take of up to 500 California gulls by WS would represent 0.1% of the estimated population.

Similar to the other gull species, WS has not previously received requests for assistance to remove California gull nests in North Dakota. However, WS anticipates receiving requests for assistance from federal and/or state agencies to remove nests in attempts to disperse California gulls and reduce nest site competition. WS anticipates receiving requests for assistance to destroy up to 500 California gull nests per year in the state. For those reasons discussed for Franklin's gulls, WS does not expect the removal of nests/eggs and the dispersal of adult California gulls to have any adverse effects on local populations based on the limited number of nests that WS could remove annually.

From 2015 through 2018, entities other than WS reported the take of California gulls in North Dakota pursuant to depredation permits issued by the USFWS. The highest reported take by entities other than WS was the take 520 California gulls in North Dakota during 2015. If other entities take 520 California gulls per year and WS' take reached 500 California gulls, the cumulative take of 1,020 California gulls would represent 18.8% of a breeding population estimated at 5,440 California gulls. However, the take of California gulls primarily occurs during the migration periods when the number of gulls increases in the state. Therefore, cumulative take is likely to be a lower percentage of the statewide breeding population. Based on a population of 621,000 California gulls in North America, the cumulative take of up to 1,020 California gulls would represent 0.2% of the estimated population.

The take of California gulls can only occur when permitted by the USFWS through the issuance of depredation permits and only when authorized by the NDGFD. Therefore, the take of California gulls by WS would only occur when authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. In addition, the take of California gulls by WS would only occur at levels authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. The permitting of take by the USFWS and the NDGFD would ensure the cumulative take of California gulls occurred within allowable take levels to achieve desired population objectives for the species.

### ***HERRING GULL POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Herring gulls are large white-headed gulls with a wide distribution in North America, Europe, and Central Asia (Nisbet et al. 2020). Herring gulls are the most widely distributed gull species in the Northern Hemisphere. Herring gulls breed in colonies near bodies of water, such as oceans, lakes, or rivers (Nisbet et al. 2020). Herring gulls nest across the northern and eastern parts of Canada, with breeding populations in Alaska, the Great Lakes, and along the Atlantic coast in the United States. Herring gulls will nest on natural or man-made sites, such as rooftops and break walls. Herring gulls are increasingly nesting on man-made structures, particularly on rooftops or in areas with complete perimeter fencing, such as electrical substations.

Herring gulls are present in North Dakota during the fall and spring migration periods as gulls move between breeding areas and wintering areas. In addition, non-breeding herring gulls may occur in the state during the breeding season (Nisbet et al. 2020). Herring gulls do occasionally nest in the state but generally in limited numbers and often in association with other nesting gull species. Across all routes surveyed during the BBS, the number of herring gulls observed has declined annually from 1966 through 2017 at an estimated rate of -3.8% (United States Geological Survey 2020b). The number of herring gulls that are present in the state during the migration periods or non-breeding gulls present in the state during the breeding season is unknown. The number of herring gulls present in the state likely fluctuates throughout the year but is likely highest during the migration periods. Most herring gulls have migrated through the state before the CBC occurs; therefore, the number of herring gulls observed in the state fluctuates from a few to several hundred and observations of herring gulls do not occur every year (National Audubon Society 2010).

In North America, Wires et al. (2010) estimated the herring gull population to be at least 246,000 breeding individuals. Wetlands International (2020) estimated the population in North America to range



from 370,000 to 450,000 herring gulls. BirdLife International (2019) considers the herring gull to be a species of “*least concern*” with a decreasing population trend. In the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, Kushlan et al. (2002) ranked the herring gull as a species of “*low concern*”.

Table 3.9 shows the number of herring gulls lethally removed or dispersed by WS from FY 2015 through FY 2019. WS addressed herring gulls using non-lethal harassment methods, such as physical actions (hand/voice), vehicle activity, pyrotechnics, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm. WS also used lethal methods to remove herring gulls that employees identified as causing damage or the threat of damage. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, the lethal take of herring gulls by WS occurred from the use of firearms. Due to the nature of WS’ reporting system, the number of herring gulls dispersed in Table 3.9 likely represents the harassment or dispersal of some of the same gulls multiple times and therefore the actual number of birds dispersed is likely inflated.

Based on the number of herring gulls addressed previously and in anticipation of receiving additional requests for assistance associated with herring gulls, WS anticipates that personnel could lethally take up to 500 herring gulls annually in the state while conducting activities. If the breeding population in North America ranged from 370,000 to 450,000 herring gulls, the take of up to 500 herring gulls would represent 0.1% of the population. In addition, WS could destroy up to 20 herring gull nests per year in the state to alleviate damage or threats of damage.

**Table 3.9 – Herring gulls addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	0
<b>2017</b>	0	0
<b>2018</b>	8	2
<b>2019</b>	33	49,302

Other entities have also reported to the USFWS the take of herring gulls in the state. From 2015 through 2018, other entities have reported to the USFWS the lethal take of an average of 62 herring gulls per year with the highest reported take occurring in 2017 when other entities reported the take of 119 herring gulls. However, some of the reported take by other entities occurred by WS’ personnel acting as a subpermittee under depredation permits issued to other entities. To evaluate a worst-case scenario, this analysis will consider all take reported by other entities as occurring separate from the take that could occur by WS. If other entities take 62 herring gulls per year and WS’ take reached 500 herring gulls, the cumulative take of 562 herring gulls would represent 0.2% of a breeding population in North America estimated at 370,000 herring gulls. If the lethal take of herring gulls by other entities reached 119 herring gulls per year and WS’ take reached 500 herring gulls, the cumulative take would represent 0.2% of the breeding population estimated at 370,000 herring gulls.

WS has not previously received requests for assistance to destroy herring gull nests in North Dakota. However, WS anticipates receiving requests for assistance from federal and/or state agencies to remove nests in attempts to disperse herring gulls and reduce nest site competition. The destruction of herring gull nests would likely occur in conjunction with activities involving the nests of other gull species. The number of herring gulls that nest in North Dakota annually is unknown but they likely nest in limited numbers in the state. In addition, herring gulls may have only begun nesting in the state recently. In his descriptive account of nesting birds in North Dakota, Stewart (1975) did not include herring gulls as nesting in North Dakota and indicated records of herring gulls nesting in the state during 1884, 1898, and 1901 were likely misidentifications. During a colonial and semi-colonial waterbird inventory conducted in North Dakota, Drilling (2015) did not indicate herring gulls were nesting in the state. In South Dakota,

the first record of nesting herring gulls occurred in 2007 (Olson 2008, Drilling et al. 2016). Herring gulls have expanded their nesting range in other areas of the United States. The southern limit of their nesting range along the Atlantic coast was formerly southern Nova Scotia and the northern coastal areas of Maine. During the early to mid-1900s, herring gulls expanded their nesting range southward along the Atlantic Coast to South Carolina. Today, herring gulls nest along the Atlantic Coast with the southern limit of their nesting range occurring in North Carolina (Nisbet et al. 2020).

Like other gull species, impacts due to nest and egg destruction should have little adverse effect on the herring gull population. Many bird species have the ability to identify areas with regular human disturbance and low reproductive success, which may cause them to relocate and nest elsewhere when confronted with repeated nest failure. Although the destruction of nests and/or eggs may reduce the number of offspring produced by the individual herring gulls affected, nest/egg removal has no long-term effect on breeding adult herring gulls, especially when it involves a limited number of nests/eggs and occurs with limited frequency. WS would not use nest and egg removal as a population management method. When removing nests/eggs, the intent is to disperse a target bird species. After repeated nest failures, birds are likely to begin nesting elsewhere. WS does not expect the removal of nests and the dispersal of adult herring gulls to have any adverse effects on local populations based on the limited number of nests that WS could remove annually.

The take of herring gulls, including the take of active nests, can only occur when permitted by the USFWS through the issuance of depredation permits and only when authorized by the NDGFD. Therefore, the take of herring gulls by WS would only occur when authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. In addition, the take of herring gulls by WS would only occur at levels authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. The permitting of take by the USFWS and the NDGFD would ensure the cumulative take of herring gulls occurred within allowable take levels to achieve desired population objectives for the species.

### ***GOLDEN EAGLE POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

The golden eagle is a large raptor that can occur in a wide variety of habitats throughout most of the Northern Hemisphere (Kochert et al. 2020). In North America, golden eagles nest throughout Canada, Alaska, the western lower 48 states, and northern Mexico. Although not as common, golden eagles do occasionally occur in the eastern United States, primarily during the winter (Kochert et al. 2020). Golden eagles prey upon a wide variety of mammal, bird, reptile, and fish species, with their primary food source being hares, rabbits, prairie dogs, and ground squirrels (Kochert et al. 2020). Golden eagles will occasionally prey upon livestock, including sheep, goats, calves, pigs, and poultry (Kochert et al. 2020). The golden eagle is the more predatory of the two native eagle species, preferring to hunt prey, but golden eagles are also an opportunistic species and they will feed on carrion (Kochert et al. 2020). The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources ranks the golden eagle as a species of “*least concern*” with a stable population trend (BirdLife International 2016a).

In North Dakota, golden eagles can range throughout the state during the migration periods and during the winter but are more common south and west of the Missouri River System. Golden eagles nest in the western and southwestern portions of the state (Stewart 1975, Dyke et al. 2015, Kochert et al. 2020). Dyke et al. (2015) characterized golden eagles as “*uncommon*” in the state. Key nesting locations in the state include the badlands and the Lake Sakakawea breaks (Dyke et al. 2015). From 1966 through 2017, the number of golden eagles observed in areas of the state surveyed during the BBS has shown a general increasing trend estimated at 0.4% annually. Surveys for golden eagles across the entire western U.S. from 2006-2017 also show increasing density trends (Nielsen et al. 2017). From 2007 through 2017, the number of golden eagles observed in areas of the state surveyed during the BBS has shown a general increasing trend estimated at 0.5% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). The peak-nesting

season in the state occurs from early April through July (Dyke et al. 2015). Dyke et al. (2015) reported golden eagles occupied 40 to 60 nests in the state. Since 1966, the number of golden eagles observed in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC has shown a general increasing trend (National Audubon Society 2010). Of those wildlife species of conservation priority in the state, the North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan classified golden eagles as a Level II species. Level II species are those species “...having a moderate level of conservation priority; or a high level of conservation priority but a substantial level of non-[State Wildlife Grant] funding is available to them” (Dyke et al. 2015).

WS has not previously received requests for assistance associated with golden eagles; however, WS could receive requests for assistance associated with golden eagles that are causing damage (e.g., feeding on livestock) or posing a threat of damage (e.g., posing an aircraft strike risk). WS anticipates receiving requests to manage damage or threats of damage associated with golden eagles to be infrequent. When addressing golden eagles, WS would only use non-lethal hazing methods to disperse golden eagles to alleviate damage or threats of damage. No intentional lethal take of golden eagles would occur if WS implemented Alternative 1.

Given the definition of “molest” and “disturb” under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act as described in Section 1.7, the use of hazing methods to disperse eagles causing damage or posing threats of damage could constitute “take” as defined under the Act, which would require a permit from the USFWS to conduct those types of activities. WS would work with the USFWS to determine when hazing an eagle constitutes take and requires a permit from the USFWS. When determined a permit is necessary to haze eagles, WS and/or the entity seeking assistance could apply for a permit allowing for the hazing of golden eagles that are causing damage or posing a threat of damage. If the USFWS did not issue a permit to harass eagles that were causing damage or posing a threat of damage when the USFWS and/or WS determined that take could occur, WS would not conduct activities associated with those golden eagles. WS would only conduct activities when take could occur after the USFWS issued a permit to WS or to the entity seeking assistance allowing for the harassment of golden eagles. If the USFWS issued a permit to an entity seeking assistance, WS could work as a subpermittee under the permit issued to that entity. WS would abide by all measures and stipulations provided by the USFWS in permits issued for the harassment of eagles. Conducting activities pursuant to permits issued by the USFWS would ensure any direct effects associated with dispersing golden eagles would not occur at a level that would adversely affect the golden eagle population. The USFWS has evaluated impacts on the golden eagle population associated with the issuance of permits (see USFWS 2016b).

An indirect effect could occur if WS’ activities unintentionally dispersed golden eagles that may occur in an area where activities were occurring. As discussed in Section 1.6, the USFWS has developed guidelines to minimize effects to bald eagles; however, similar guidelines do not exist for golden eagles. Although similar guidelines do not exist for golden eagles, WS would apply those guidelines when encountering golden eagles. WS does not expect indirect effects from the use of vehicle use, aircraft use, hazing methods, and the presence of WS’ personnel to agitate or bother a golden eagle to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, a decrease in its productivity or cause nest abandonment, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior. WS based this determination on its adherence to the national bald eagle management guidelines (see USFWS 2007).

Take could also occur if WS unintentionally captured or killed a golden eagle during activities to alleviate damage or threats of damage associated with other animals. In FY 2014, WS unintentionally killed a golden eagle while attempting to alleviate damage associated with coyotes (*Canis latrans*). WS also unintentionally killed a golden eagle while attempting to alleviate damage associated with coyotes during FY 2018. WS has implemented several procedures to minimize the accidental take of bald eagles when conducting activities targeting several predatory mammal species (see Section 3.4 in USDA 2017). When conducting activities associated with predatory mammal species in the state, WS would continue to

implement those operating procedures to minimize the unintentional take of bald eagles and golden eagles in the state. WS has submitted a permit application to the USFWS pursuant to 50 CFR 22.26 for limited eagle take that is associated with, but not the purpose of, an activity. WS would comply with all avoidance, minimization, or other mitigation measures specified in the terms of the permit.

The leading cause of golden eagle mortality is human activities (Kochert et al. 2020). Despite all known and unknown sources of golden eagle mortality, including previous non-purposeful take by WS, the golden eagle population continues to show a stable to slightly increasing population trend in the state (see National Audubon Society 2010, United States Geological Survey 2020b). WS would only conduct activities that result in the purposeful take of golden eagles after the USFWS issued the appropriate permit and WS would follow all permit requirements. WS would continue to implement active measures to minimize the risk of non-purposeful golden eagle take as described in Section 3.4 of USDA (2017) and by following the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (USFWS 2007). Therefore, the purposeful and non-purposeful take of golden eagles would not reach a magnitude that would cause adverse effects on the species populations.

### ***BALD EAGLE POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

The bald eagle is a large raptor often associated with aquatic habitats across North America (Buehler 2020). Bald eagles nest primarily in Alaska and Canada; however, nesting does occur throughout most of lower 48 states of the United States with a limited number of bald eagles nesting in Mexico along Baja California. During the migration period, eagles occur throughout the United States and parts of Mexico (Buehler 2020). The bald eagle has been the national emblem of the United States since 1782 and is a key symbol for many Native Americans.

Populations of bald eagles showed periods of steep declines in the lower United States during the early 1900s. The loss of nesting habitat, hunting, poisoning, and pesticide contamination likely caused those declines. To curtail steep declining trends in bald eagles, Congress passed the Bald Eagle Protection Act in 1940 prohibiting the take or possession of bald eagles or any parts of eagles. Congress amended the Bald Eagle Protection Act in 1962 to include the golden eagle and Bald Eagle Protection Act became the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (see Section 1.7). The USFWS listed certain populations of bald eagles as “*endangered*” under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966, which was extended when the modern ESA of 1973 was passed. The USFWS extended the “*endangered*” status to all populations of bald eagles in the lower 48 states, except populations of bald eagles in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Washington, and Oregon, which the USFWS listed as “*threatened*” in 1978. After nearly reaching the recovery goals for bald eagle populations in 1995, the USFWS reclassified all populations of eagles in the lower 48 states as “*threatened*”. After reaching or exceeding the recovery goals for bald eagles in 1999, the USFWS proposed to remove the eagle listing under the ESA. The USFWS officially de-listed the bald eagle from the ESA on June 28, 2007 except for the Sonora Desert Bald Eagle population, which remained classified as a threatened species. Although officially removed from the protection of the ESA across most of the range of the eagle, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act continues to afford protection to the bald eagle. The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources ranks the bald eagle as a species of “*least concern*” with an increasing population trend (BirdLife International 2016b).

In North Dakota, bald eagles are “*fairly common to uncommon*” with bald eagles occurring statewide during the migration periods. In addition, bald eagles may be present throughout the year along the major river systems and large reservoirs in the state (Dyke et al. 2015). Key nesting locations in the state include the Missouri River system including Lake Sakakawea, Heart River, Cannonball River, Sheyenne River, Souris River, and the Devils Lake basin. However, bald eagles have initiated nests in areas not considered as traditional nesting habitat, such as large stands of trees surrounded by cropland or

grassland. The number of occupied bald eagle nests in the state is also increasing with the peak-nesting season in the state occurs from early March through July (Dyke et al. 2015). In 2000, there were approximately 10 occupied bald eagle nest and in 2019 there were an estimated 294 occupied nests (S. Johnson, NDGFD, pers. comm. July 23, 2020). Since 1966, the number of bald eagles observed in areas of the state surveyed during the BBS has shown an increasing trend estimated at 13.3% per year with a 14.4% annual increase occurring from 2007 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). The number of bald eagles observed in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC has shown a general increasing trend since 1966 (National Audubon Society 2010). Of those wildlife species of conservation priority in the state, the North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan classified bald eagles as a Level II species. Level II species are those species “...having a moderate level of conservation priority; or a high level of conservation priority but a substantial level of non-[State Wildlife Grant] funding is available to them” (Dyke et al. 2015).

WS has not previously received requests for assistance associated with bald eagles; however, WS could receive requests for assistance associated with bald eagles. WS anticipates receiving requests to manage damage or threats of damage associated with bald eagles to be infrequent but could increase as the population in North Dakota continues to increase. WS would only use non-lethal hazing methods to disperse bald eagles when those eagles are causing damage or posing a threat of damage. No intentional lethal take of bald eagles would occur if WS implemented Alternative 1.

Given the definition of “molest” and “disturb” under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act as described in Section 1.7, the use of hazing methods to disperse eagles causing damage or posing threats of damage could constitute “take” as defined under the Act, which would require a permit from the USFWS to conduct those types of activities. WS would work with the USFWS to determine when hazing an eagle constitutes take and requires a permit from the USFWS. When determined a permit is necessary to haze eagles, WS and/or the entity seeking assistance could apply for a permit allowing for the hazing of bald eagles that are causing damage (e.g., feeding on livestock) or posing a threat of damage (e.g., posing an aircraft strike risk). If the USFWS did not issue a permit to harass eagles that were causing damage or posing a threat of damage when the USFWS and/or WS determined that take could occur, WS would not conduct activities associated with those bald eagles. WS would only conduct activities when take could occur after the USFWS issued a permit to WS or to the entity seeking assistance allowing for the harassment of bald eagles. If the USFWS issued a permit to an entity seeking assistance, WS could work as a subpermittee under the permit issued to that entity. WS would abide by all measures and stipulations provided by the USFWS in permits issued for the harassment of eagles. Conducting activities pursuant to permits issued by the USFWS would ensure any direct effects associated with dispersing bald eagles would not occur at a level that would adversely affect the bald eagle population. The USFWS has evaluated impacts on the bald eagle population associated with the issuance of permits (see USFWS 2016b).

An indirect effect could occur if WS’ activities targeting other bird species unintentionally dispersed bald eagles that may occur in an area where activities were occurring. To minimize indirect effects to bald eagles associated with activities targeting other bird species, WS would follow the guidelines in the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines. WS would only conduct limited activities near active eagle nests and Important Eagle Use Areas<sup>8</sup> in accordance with the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (USFWS 2007). The categories from the guidelines that would encompass most of these activities are Category D (off-road vehicle use), Category E (motorized watercraft use), Category F (non-motorized recreation and human entry), Category G (helicopters and fixed-winged aircraft), and Category

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<sup>8</sup>Pursuant to 50 CFR 22.3, the definition of an Important Eagle-use Area is “...an eagle nest, foraging area, or communal roost site that eagles rely on for breeding, sheltering, or feeding, and the landscape features surrounding such nest, foraging area, or roost site that are essential for the continued viability of the site for breeding, feeding, or sheltering eagles.”

H (blasting and other loud, intermittent noises). Those categories generally call for a buffer of 330 to 660 feet around active nests for Category D, Category E, and Category F activities, a buffer of 1,000 feet for Category G activities, and a half mile buffer for Category H activities. WS does not expect indirect effects from the use of vehicle use, aircraft use, hazing methods, and the presence of WS' personnel to agitate or bother a bald eagle to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, a decrease in its productivity or cause nest abandonment, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior. WS based this determination on its adherence to the national bald eagle management guidelines (see USFWS 2007).

Take could also occur if WS unintentionally captured or killed a bald eagle during activities to alleviate damage or threats of damage associated with other animals. In FY 2013, WS unintentionally killed a bald eagle while attempting to alleviate damage associated with coyotes. WS also unintentionally killed a bald eagle while attempting to alleviate damage associated with coyotes during FY 2019. WS has implemented several procedures to minimize the accidental take of bald eagles when conducting activities targeting several predatory mammal species (see Section 3.4 in USDA 2017). When conducting activities associated with predatory mammal species in the state, WS would continue to implement those operating procedures to minimize the unintentional take of bald eagles in the state. WS has submitted a permit application to the USFWS pursuant to 50 CFR 22.26 for limited eagle take that is associated with, but not the purpose of, an activity. WS would comply with all avoidance, minimization, or other mitigation measures specified in the terms of the permit.

The leading cause of bald eagle mortality is human activities (Buehler 2020). Despite all known and unknown sources of bald eagle mortality, including previous non-purposeful take by WS, the bald eagle population continues to show increasing population trends in the state (see Dyke et al. 2015, National Audubon Society 2010, United States Geological Survey 2020b). WS would only conduct activities that result in the purposeful take of bald eagles after the USFWS issued the appropriate permit and WS would follow all permit requirements. WS would continue to implement active measures to minimize the risk of non-purposeful bald eagle take as described in Section 3.4 of USDA (2017) and by following the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (USFWS 2007). Therefore, the purposeful and non-purposeful take of bald eagles would not reach a magnitude that would cause adverse effects on the species populations.

### ***TREE SWALLOW POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Tree swallows occur throughout North America during the nesting season (Winkler et al. 2020). Tree swallows winter along the coastal areas of the southern United States and southward into parts of Mexico and Central America. Tree swallows are secondary cavity-nesters (*i.e.*, they often use cavities created by primary cavity-nesters, such as woodpeckers). However, tree swallows will also use a variety of cavities, including broken tree limbs, hollow stumps, crevices behind bark, downed trees, cracks in rocks, artificial nest boxes, and metal bridge pieces. Tree swallow nests are often near bodies of water and they commonly feed over fields, marshes, shorelines, and wood swamps (Winkler et al. 2020).

In North Dakota, tree swallows occur statewide during the nesting season (Winkler et al. 2020). The number of tree swallows observed along routes surveyed in the state during the BBS has shown an increasing trend from 1966 through 2017 estimated at 5.3% annually, with a 3.7% annual increase occurring from 2007 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the statewide breeding population at 350,000 tree swallows. Tree swallows have left the state for their wintering areas prior to the CBC; therefore, trend data from the CBC is not available for North Dakota (National Audubon Society 2010).

Table 3.10 shows the number of tree swallows addressed by WS from FY 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS used vehicle activity and the noise associated with the discharge of a

firearm to disperse tree swallows. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, no lethal take of tree swallows occurred by WS in the state. Based on the gregarious behavior of tree swallows, WS could take up to 100 tree swallows in the state annually. The take of up to 100 tree swallows by WS would represent 0.03% of the statewide breeding population estimated at 350,000 tree swallows.

**Table 3.10 – Tree swallows addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	75
<b>2017</b>	0	75
<b>2018</b>	0	0
<b>2019</b>	0	0

Other entities have also reported to the USFWS the take of tree swallows in the state. From 2015 through 2018, other entities in the state reported to the USFWS the take of three tree swallows in 2015 and one tree swallow in 2016 with no take reported during 2017 and 2018 in the state. If other entities take three tree swallows per year and WS’ take reached 100 tree swallows, the cumulative take of 103 tree swallows would represent 0.03% of the estimated breeding population in the state.

The take of tree swallows can only occur when permitted by the USFWS through the issuance of depredation permits and only when authorized by the NDGFD. Therefore, the take of tree swallows by WS would only occur when authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. In addition, the take of tree swallows by WS would only occur at levels authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD. The permitting of take by the USFWS and the NDGFD would ensure the cumulative take of tree swallows occurred within allowable take levels to achieve desired population objectives for the species.

***BARN SWALLOW POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Barn swallows are one of the most abundant and widespread of the swallow species. Breeding populations occur throughout North America, Europe, and Asia with wintering populations present in Central and South America, southern Spain, Morocco, Egypt, Africa, the Middle East, India, Indochina, Malaysia, and Australia (Brown and Brown 2020). They feed almost exclusively on flying insects at all times of the year and are very distinguishable by their sharp turns and diving flight patterns used to catch prey (Brown and Brown 2020). They build their cup-shaped mud nests almost exclusively on human-made structures.

In North Dakota, barn swallows occur statewide during the breeding season and during the spring and fall migration periods. Along routes surveyed in the state during the BBS, the number of barn swallows observed has shown a decreasing trend estimated at -0.3% annually from 1966 through 2017. From 2007 through 2017, the number of barn swallows observed in the state during the BBS has shown a declining trend estimated at -0.8% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the breeding population in the state to be 1.2 million barn swallows. Barn swallows migrate further south after the breeding season and are not observed in those areas surveyed in the state during the CBC (National Audubon Society 2010).

Table 3.11 shows the number of barn swallows addressed by WS from FY 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS used vehicle activity, pyrotechnics, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm to disperse barn swallows. The lethal take of one barn swallow during FY 2016 occurred from the use of a firearm. Based on the gregarious behavior of barn swallows, WS could take up to 400 barn swallows in the state annually. In addition, WS could destroy up to 500 barn swallows

nests annually in the state, including eggs in the nest. An annual take by WS of up to 400 barn swallows would represent 0.03% of the statewide breeding population estimated at 1.2 million barn swallows.

**Table 3.11 – Barn swallows addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	1	25
<b>2017</b>	0	115
<b>2018</b>	0	4,000
<b>2019</b>	0	428

Impacts due to nest and egg destruction should have little adverse effect on the barn swallow population in North Dakota. Many bird species have the ability to identify areas with regular human disturbance and low reproductive success, which may cause them to relocate and nest elsewhere when confronted with repeated nest failure. Although there may be reduced fecundity for the individual barn swallows affected, nest/egg removal has no long-term effect on breeding adult barn swallows. WS would not use nest and egg removal as a population management method. In some cases, WS may be able to remove nests as barn swallows construct them. The intent of removing barn swallow nests at the onset of nest construction is to disperse the barn swallows. If dispersal occurs early, re-nesting in other areas is likely. Those barn swallows would likely disperse to other areas to nest when faced with repeated nest failures. WS does not expect the removal of nests and the dispersal of adult barn swallows to have any adverse effects on local populations based on the limited number of nests that WS could remove annually. WS' personnel would monitor for nest building activity and would remove nests with high-pressured washers and/or using hand tools. Therefore, nests would primarily be inactive (no eggs or nestlings).

Other entities have also reported to the USFWS the take of barn swallows in the state. From 2015 through 2018, other entities have reported to the USFWS the lethal take of an average of 19 barn swallows per year with the highest reported take occurring in 2017 when other entities reported the take of 37 barn swallows. If other entities take 37 barn swallows per year and WS' take reached 400 barn swallows, the cumulative take of 437 barn swallows would represent 0.04% of the estimated breeding population in the state.

Like many other bird species, the take of barn swallows by WS to alleviate damage could only occur when permitted by the USFWS pursuant to the MBTA through the issuance of depredation permits, including the removal of active nests. Similarly, the take of barns swallows can only occur when authorized by the NDGFD, including the removal of active nests. The take of barn swallows, including the take of active nests, would only occur at levels permitted by the USFWS and the NDGFD. Therefore, the USFWS and the NDGFD would have the opportunity to consider cumulative take by all entities to achieve the desired population management levels for barn swallows in the state.

***CLIFF SWALLOW POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Cliff swallows nest across most of North America, except the extreme Arctic region and the extreme southeastern United States (Brown et al. 2020). Cliff swallows build nests in colonies on cliff sides, building eaves, bridges, highway culverts, dams, or large trees. They spend their winters in South America. Historically, cliff swallows were associated with the mountain ranges in western North America. However, the construction of highway culverts, bridges, and buildings have facilitated the range expansion of cliff swallows into the eastern United States and southern Canada (Brown et al. 2020)



Cliff swallows are present in the state during the breeding season and during the migration periods (Brown et al. 2020). In North Dakota, the number of cliff swallows observed along routes surveyed during the BBS has shown an annual increase of 5.6% from 1966 through 2017 and an annual increase of 6.3% from 2007 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Using data from the BBS, Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the breeding population in North Dakota to be 5.8 million cliff swallows. In addition, cliff swallows migrate through North Dakota during the spring and fall as they move between their nesting areas and wintering areas. However, the number of cliff swallows that migrate through North Dakota is unknown. Because cliff swallows are not present in the state during those periods when people conduct the CBC, trend data for cliff swallows from the CBC is not available.

Table 3.12 shows the number of cliff swallows addressed by WS from FY 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS used vehicle activity, pyrotechnics, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm to disperse cliff swallows. The lethal take of cliff swallows during FY 2017 occurred from the use of a firearm. Based on the gregarious behavior of cliff swallows, WS could take up to 400 cliff swallows in the state annually. In addition, WS could destroy up to 700 cliff swallows nests annually in the state, including eggs in the nest.

The lethal removal of up to 400 cliff swallows would represent 0.01% of a breeding population estimated at 5.8 million cliff swallows. WS' personnel would monitor for nest building activity and would remove nests with high-pressured washers and/or using hand tools. Therefore, nests would primarily be inactive (no eggs or nestlings). The intent of removing cliff swallow nests at the onset of nest construction is to disperse the cliff swallows. If dispersal occurs early, re-nesting in other areas is likely. Those birds would likely disperse to other areas to nest when faced with repeated nest failures. WS does not expect the removal of inactive nests and the dispersal of adult cliff swallows to have any adverse effects on local populations because no lethal take from nest removal or dispersal activities would occur.

**Table 3.12 – Cliff swallows addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	65
<b>2017</b>	50	170
<b>2018</b>	0	0
<b>2019</b>	0	286

Other entities have also reported to the USFWS the take of cliff swallows in the state. From 2015 through 2018, other entities have reported to the USFWS the lethal take of an average of 17 cliff swallows per year with the highest reported take occurring in 2017 when other entities reported the take of 50 cliff swallows. However, some of the reported take by other entities occurred by WS' personnel acting as a subpermittee under depredation permits issued to other entities. To evaluate a worst-case scenario, this analysis will consider all take reported by other entities as occurring separate from the take that could occur by WS. If the lethal take of cliff swallows by other entities reached 50 cliff swallows per year and WS' take reached 400 cliff swallows, the cumulative take would represent 0.01% of the breeding population estimated at 5.8 million cliff swallows.

The take of cliff swallows by WS to alleviate damage would only occur when permitted by the USFWS pursuant to the MBTA through the issuance of depredation permits and only at levels permitted. Similarly, the take of cliff swallows would only occur when authorized by the NDGFD and only at authorized levels. Therefore, the take of cliff swallows by WS would only occur at levels authorized by the USFWS and the NDGFD, which would ensure both agencies have the opportunity to consider WS' take, and take by all entities, to achieve the desired population objectives for cliff swallows in the state.

**WESTERN MEADOWLARK POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

The western meadowlark is a widely distributed grassland species that primarily occurs in western North America from southern Canada through the western United States to northern Mexico (Davis and Lanyon 2020). Although western meadowlarks occur in a wide variety of grassland habitats, they are most common in native grasslands and grasslands that people have converted from cropland to perennial grass cover. Western meadowlarks also occur in weedy border areas of croplands, roadsides, orchards, and desert grassland (Davis and Lanyon 2020).

In North Dakota, western meadowlarks occur statewide during the nesting season and during the migration periods. The number of western meadowlarks observed along routes surveyed in the state during the BBS has shown a declining trend estimated at -1.4% annually from 1966 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). From 2007 through 2017, the number of western meadowlarks observed along BBS routes in the state have also shown a declining trend estimated at -1.1% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the current statewide breeding population at 6.1 million western meadowlarks. Due to the steady decline of meadowlarks and contracting breeding range in North Dakota, it was added to the Species of Conservation Priority list in 2015. Because western meadowlarks winter further south, observers have counted very few western meadowlarks in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC and observers infrequently observe western meadowlarks in areas surveyed during the CBC (National Audubon Society 2010).

Table 3.13 shows the number of western meadowlarks addressed by WS to alleviate damage and threats from FY 2015 through FY 2019. WS addressed western meadowlarks using non-lethal harassment methods, such as vehicle presence, pyrotechnics, and the noise produced from firearms. No lethal take of western meadowlarks occurred by WS in North Dakota from FY 2015 through FY 2019.

**Table 3.13 – Western meadowlarks addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	17
<b>2017</b>	0	18
<b>2018</b>	0	99
<b>2019</b>	0	366

Based on the number of requests received to alleviate damage associated with western meadowlarks and the number of western meadowlarks addressed previously to alleviate those requests, WS anticipates that personnel could lethally remove up to 100 western meadowlarks annually in the state and up to 20 nests could be destroyed to alleviate damage, including eggs in those nests. WS would continue to use non-lethal hazing methods to address western meadowlarks, with lethal methods employed to reinforce the use of non-lethal methods to prevent habituation. Based on the estimated breeding population of 6.1 million western meadowlarks, WS’ take of up to 100 meadowlarks would represent 0.002% of the estimated breeding population in North Dakota.

From 2015 through 2018, no other entities reported the take of western meadowlarks to the USFWS. The take of western meadowlarks to alleviate damage or threats would not likely reach a magnitude where adverse effects to the western meadowlark population would occur. The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources ranks the western meadowlark as a species of “*least concern*” (BirdLife International 2018d). The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural

Resources assigned the ranking based on the “*species...extremely large range...*”, “*...the population size is extremely large...*”, and “*the decline is not believed to be sufficiently rapid*” (BirdLife International 2018d). The permitting of the take by the USFWS through the issuance of depredation permits pursuant to the MBTA and authorization by the NDGFD ensures the USFWS and the NDGFD have the opportunity to consider the cumulative take of western meadowlarks as part of population management objectives for the species.

**HOUSE SPARROW POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

People introduced house sparrows to North America from England in the early 1850s and the species has since spread throughout the continent (Fitzwater 1994, Lowther and Cink 2020). House sparrows occur in nearly every habitat, except dense forests, alpine, and desert environments. They prefer human-altered habitats and are abundant on farms and in cities and suburbs (Lowther and Cink 2020). House sparrows are not migratory in North America and are year-round residents wherever they occur, including those sparrows found in North Dakota (Lowther and Cink 2020). Nesting locations often occur in areas of human activities and house sparrows are considered “*...fairly gregarious at all times of year*” with nesting occurring in small colonies or clumped distribution (Lowther and Cink 2020). Large flocks of sparrows can also occur in the winter as birds forage and roost together.

In North Dakota, the number of house sparrows observed in areas surveyed during the BBS has shown a downward trend estimated at -2.5% annually since 1966 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). From 2007 through 2017, the number of house sparrows observed along BBS routes in the state has shown an increasing trend estimated at 2.5% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). The Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the breeding population in the state to be 1.2 million house sparrows. Since 1966, the number of house sparrows observed annually in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC has shown an overall declining trend (National Audubon Society 2010). Robbins (1973) suggested that declines in the overall house sparrow population were occurring because of changes in farming practices, which resulted in cleaner operations with little waste grain. One aspect of changing farming practices that might have been a factor would be the considerable decline in small farms and associated disappearance of a multitude of small feedlots, stables, and barns, a primary source of food for house sparrows in the early part of the 20th century.

Table 3.14 shows the number of house sparrows lethally removed by WS to alleviate damage and threats from FY 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, the lethal take of house sparrows by WS occurred from the use of firearms and euthanasia following capture with mist nets. WS did not use non-lethal dispersal methods to address damage or threats of damage associated with house sparrows from FY 2015 through FY 2019.

**Table 3.14 – House sparrows addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	131	0
<b>2016</b>	204	0
<b>2017</b>	122	0
<b>2018</b>	118	0
<b>2019</b>	210	0

Based on the gregarious behavior of house sparrows and in anticipation of receiving additional requests for assistance, WS could take up to 1,000 house sparrows and up to 50 house sparrow nests in the state annually to alleviate damage or threats of damage. Because the MBTA does not afford house sparrows protection from take, a depredation permit from the USFWS is not required for people to take house

sparrows and there are no requirements to report the take of house sparrows to the USFWS; therefore, the number of house sparrows that other entities lethally remove in the state is unknown. Similarly, authorization to take house sparrows from the NDGFD is also not required.

If WS’ personnel lethally removed up to 1,000 house sparrows annually in the state, the take would represent 0.08% of the estimated statewide breeding population in North Dakota. As stated previously, the annual take of house sparrows by other entities is currently unknown. House sparrows are non-indigenous and often have negative effects on native birds, primarily through competition for nesting sites; therefore, many wildlife biologists and ornithologists consider sparrows to be an undesirable component of North American wild and native ecosystems. Any reduction in house sparrow populations in North America could provide some benefit to native bird species by reducing competition for resources. WS’ take of house sparrows to reduce damage and threats would comply with Executive Order 13112 and Executive Order 13751.

***BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

In North America, the black-billed magpie occurs over much of western United States and Canada (Trost 2020). Black-billed magpies prefer thickets in riparian areas that are often associated with open meadows, grasslands, or sagebrush. During the winter, black-billed magpies occupy similar habitats but often occur near habitats manipulated by people, such as livestock feedlots, barnyards, landfills, sewage lagoons, and grain elevators (Trost 2020).

In North Dakota, black-billed magpies occur statewide throughout the year (Trost 2020). In North Dakota, the number of black-billed magpies observed along routes surveyed during the BBS has shown an annual decrease of -2.4% from 1966 through 2017 and an annual increase of -1.9% from 2007 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Using data from the BBS, Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the breeding population in North Dakota to be 24,000 black-billed magpies. The number of black-billed magpies observed in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC has shown a general declining trend in the state since 1966 (National Audubon Society 2010). Black-billed magpies are showing declines across much of the north-central United States. The West Nile virus may be the main contributing factor to the decline (Brenner and Jorgensen 2020).

Table 3.15 shows the number of black-billed magpies addressed by WS from FY 2015 through FY 2019. The lethal take of black-billed magpies during FY 2017 and FY 2018 occurred from the use of a firearm. In anticipation of receiving additional requests for assistance associated with black-billed magpies, WS could take up to 50 black-billed magpies in the state annually. The take of up to 50 black-billed magpies would include black-billed magpies that WS could take unintentionally during activities targeting other animal species. The lethal removal of up to 50 black-billed magpies would represent 0.2% of a breeding population estimated at 24,000 black-billed magpies.

**Table 3.15 – Black-billed magpies addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	0
<b>2017</b>	4	0
<b>2018</b>	15	0
<b>2019</b>	0	0

Like other blackbird species, the take of black-billed magpies can occur under the blackbird depredation order, which allows people to take blackbirds, including black-billed magpies, when those species are

committing damage without the need for a depredation permit from the USFWS. Similarly, the take of black-billed magpies can occur without prior authorization from the NDGFD. Due to recent population declines, the Central Flyway Council has requested the USFWS to consider removing the black-billed magpie from the list of species included in the blackbird depredation order. If the USFWS removed the black-billed magpie from list of species included in the blackbird depredation order, all take would require a depredation permit from the USFWS and, in North Dakota, authorization from the NDGFD. Therefore, if USFWS removed black-billed magpies from the blackbird depredation order, any take by WS would occur pursuant to depredation permits issued by the USFWS and authorizations provided by the NDGFD.

Pursuant to the current blackbird depredation order, entities are required to report to the USFWS any take of species included in the depredation order, including the take of black-billed magpies. From 2015 through 2018, the USFWS did not receive reports of black-billed magpie take from entities other than WS. It is unknown whether the lack of reported take accurately reflects the actual take because it is likely that some take of black-billed magpies pursuant to the depredation order goes unreported. The number of black-billed magpies lethally removed by private individuals to alleviate damage is likely minimal because the primary method that people use to alleviate damage is shooting, which has limitations for killing black-billed magpies. Private individuals use firearms primarily as a form of harassment rather than to remove blackbirds, despite some limited take likely occurring.

#### ***AMERICAN CROW POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

American crows have a wide range, are extremely abundant, and occur across the United States (Verbeek and Caffrey 2020). American crows are found throughout the state during the nesting season and occur throughout the year in portions of the state (Verbeek and Caffrey 2020). From 1966 through 2017, trend data from the BBS indicates the number of crows observed in the state during the survey has decreased at an annual rate of -0.7%, with a -0.7% annual decline occurring from 2007 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). The Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the breeding population in North Dakota to be 190,000 American crows based on BBS data. The number of American crows observed throughout North Dakota in areas surveyed during the CBC has shown a general increasing trend since 1966 (National Audubon Society 2010).

Table 3.16 shows the number of American crows addressed by WS to reduce damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS used pyrotechnics, vehicle activity, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm to disperse American crows. In addition, WS used firearms to remove American crows in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. Based on requests for assistance received by WS previously and in anticipation of receiving additional requests for assistance, WS could lethally take up to 200 American crows annually in the state. The increased level of take analyzed when compared to the take occurring by WS from FY 2015 through FY 2019 is in anticipation requests to address threats of aircraft strikes at airports. The take of 200 American crows by WS would represent 0.1% of the estimated breeding population within North Dakota.

As discussed previously, people can lethally take American crows without a depredation permit issued by the USFWS pursuant to conditions within 50 CR 21.43. From 2015 through 2018, the USFWS did not receive reports of American crow take from entities other than WS. Some unreported take is likely to occur by private individuals to alleviate damage. It is reasonable to predict that the number of American crows lethally removed by private individuals is minimal because the primary method that people use to alleviate damage is shooting, which has limitations for killing crows. Private individuals use firearms primarily as a form of hazing rather than to remove crows, despite some limited take likely occurring.

In addition, people can harvest crows in North Dakota during a regulated season that allows people to harvest an unlimited number of crows during the length of the season. Hunters harvesting crows during the regulated hunting season are not required to report their take to the USFWS or the NDGFD. Therefore, the number of American crows harvested annually in the state is unknown.

**Table 3.16 – American crows addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 – FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	104
<b>2017</b>	8	4
<b>2018</b>	6	11
<b>2019</b>	7	173

Given the relative abundance of American crows in the state and the long-term stable to increasing population trends observed for the species, the take of American crows by other entities to alleviate damage or threats of damage and the take of American crows during the annual hunting season is likely of low magnitude. The basis for using population trends as an index of magnitude is the assumption that annual harvests do not exceed allowable harvest levels. State wildlife management agencies act to avoid over-harvests by restricting take (either through hunting season regulation and/or permitted take) to ensure that annual harvests are within allowable harvest levels. The continued take of crows under the deprecation order by other entities is likely to be a small contributor to the cumulative take of crows annually. Although some take is likely to occur, WS does not expect take to reach a high magnitude. Similarly, the take of crows during the annual hunting season is likely of low magnitude when compared to the statewide population. Given that the number of American crows observed during statewide surveys are showing stable to increasing trends (National Audubon Society 2010, United States Geological Survey 2020b), the population of American crows have not declined since those population estimates were calculated. Therefore, the American crow population has likely remained at least stable despite the take of crows by WS and other entities under the deprecation order and during the annual hunting season.

***EUROPEAN STARLING POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

European starlings are native to Europe, southwest Asia, and northern Africa. Colonization of North America by the European starling began in 1890 when a person with good intentions released 80 starlings into Central Park within New York City. The released birds were able to exploit the resources in the area and have since spread throughout the continent. By 1918, the distribution range of migrant juveniles extended from Ohio to Alabama. By 1926, the distribution of starlings in the United States had moved westward and encompassed an area from Illinois to Texas. Further westward expansion had occurred by 1941 with populations expanding from Idaho to New Mexico. By 1946, the range of starlings had expanded to California and western Canadian coasts (Miller 1975). In just 50 years, the starling had colonized the United States and expanded into Canada and Mexico. After 80 years from the initial introduction, it had become one of the most common birds in North America (Feare 1984).

As their range expansion in North America demonstrates, European starlings are highly adaptable and thrive in a wide range of habitats; however, they are most often associated with disturbed areas created by people (Homan et al. 2017, Cabe 2020). Their diet consists of insects, fruits, berries, seeds, and spilled grain (Homan et al. 2017, Cabe 2020). European starlings are highly social birds; feeding, roosting, and migrating in flocks at all times of the year (Homan et al. 2017, Cabe 2020). European starlings are aggressive cavity nesters that can evict native cavity nesting species (Homan et al. 2017, Cabe 2020). In the absence of natural cavities, European starlings will nest in manmade structures, such as exhaust vents, soffits, streetlights, mailboxes, and attics (Homan et al. 2017, Cabe 2020). Although few conclusive

studies exist, evidence suggests European starlings can have a detrimental effect on native species (Homan et al. 2017, Cabe 2020).

From 1966 through 2017, the number of starlings observed along routes surveyed during the BBS has shown a decreasing trend in North Dakota estimated at -0.4% annually. From 2007 through 2017, the number of starlings observed along routes surveyed in the state during the BBS has shown a decreasing trend estimated at -0.9% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Using data from the BBS, the Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the statewide breeding population at 660,000 European starlings. Since 1966, the number of European starlings observed in those areas of the state surveyed during the CBC is showing a general increasing trend (National Audubon Society 2010). European starlings are highly social during the fall, winter, and spring and may be present in flocks of blackbirds. Starlings can gather in roosts with blackbirds, which can number from several hundred to more than 1 million birds (Homan et al. 2017).

Table 3.17 shows the number of European starlings lethally removed or dispersed by WS to alleviate damage and threats from FY 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS addressed European starlings using non-lethal harassment methods, such as pyrotechnics, vehicle activity, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm. WS also used lethal methods to remove European starlings that employees identified as causing damage or posing a threat of damage. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, the lethal take of European starlings by WS occurred from the use of firearms and euthanasia following capture with mist nets.

**Table 3.17 – European starlings addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	76	0
<b>2016</b>	237	0
<b>2017</b>	76	2
<b>2018</b>	46	2
<b>2019</b>	298	1,905

Based on the gregarious behavior of starlings and in anticipation of receiving additional requests for assistance, WS could take up to 75,000 European starlings and up to 100 starling nests in the state annually to alleviate damage or threats of damage. Because the MBTA does not afford European starlings protection from take, a depredation permit from the USFWS is not required for people to take European starlings and there are no requirements to report the take of starlings to the USFWS; therefore, the number of European starlings that other entities lethally remove in the state is unknown. Similarly, authorization from the NDGFD is not required to take European starlings.

If WS' personnel lethally removed up to 75,000 European starlings annually in the state, the take would represent 11.4% of the estimated statewide breeding population in North Dakota. However, most requests to address large roosts would likely occur during migration periods and during the winter when the population in the state likely increases above the 660,000 starlings estimated to nest in the state. The increase in the statewide population would be the result of migrants arriving in the state and the presence of juveniles in the population. As stated previously, the annual take of European starlings by other entities is currently unknown. European starlings are non-indigenous and often have negative effects on native birds, primarily through competition for nesting sites. Any reduction in European starling populations in North Dakota could provide some benefit to native bird species by reducing competition for resources. Pursuant to Executive Order 13112, the National Invasive Species Council has designated the European starling as meeting the definition of an invasive species. Lowe et al. (2000) ranked the European starling as one of the 100 worst invasive species in the world. Activities associated with

starlings would occur pursuant to Executive Order 13112 and Executive Order 13751, which states that each federal agency whose actions may affect the status of invasive species shall reduce invasions of exotic species and the associated damages.

***YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

The breeding habitat of yellow-headed blackbirds includes deep-water, emergent wetlands within prairie and mountain meadows in the Western and Central United States, and Canada (Twedt and Crawford 2020). Wintering populations of yellow-headed blackbirds range from the southern portion of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas south through Mexico. Breeding populations of yellow-headed blackbirds migrate southward during the migration period during late August and early September and return north in spring during April and May. During the migration periods, small flocks of yellow-headed blackbirds form mixed species flocks with red-winged blackbirds and other blackbird species, congregating in staging areas (Twedt and Crawford 2020). Peer et al. (2003) calculated the breeding yellow-headed blackbird population in the northern Great Plains of North America to be over 11.6 million yellow-headed blackbirds and the fall population to be over 16.8 million yellow-headed blackbirds.

In North Dakota, yellow-headed blackbirds occur statewide during the breeding season. In addition, yellow-headed blackbirds occur statewide during the migration periods as yellow-headed blackbirds migrate between breeding areas and wintering areas (Twedt and Crawford 2020). From 1966 through 2017, the number of yellow-headed blackbirds observed in areas of the state surveyed during the BBS has shown an increasing trend estimated at 0.5% annually with a 0.6% annual increase occurring from 2007 through 2017 (United States Geological Survey 2020b). The Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the breeding population in the state at 4 million yellow-headed blackbirds. Because yellow-headed blackbirds winter further south, observers have counted very few yellow-headed blackbirds in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC and observers infrequently observe yellow-headed blackbirds during the CBC (National Audubon Society 2010).

Most requests involving yellow-headed blackbirds occur during the fall migration period as mixed species flocks of blackbirds, including yellow-headed blackbirds, migrate through the state. Table 3.18 shows the number of yellow-headed blackbirds addressed by WS to reduce damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS used pyrotechnics, vehicle activity, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm to disperse yellow-headed blackbirds. In addition, WS used firearms to remove yellow-headed blackbirds in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019.

**Table 3.18 – Yellow-headed blackbird addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	141	10,150
<b>2016</b>	0	200
<b>2017</b>	0	575
<b>2018</b>	0	58
<b>2019</b>	30	295

Based on the number of yellow-headed blackbirds addressed previously and the gregarious behavior of yellow-headed blackbirds, WS could lethally remove up to 5,000 yellow-headed blackbirds annually in the state to alleviate damage and threats of damage. Activities would continue to occur primarily during the fall migration period when yellow-headed blackbirds occur statewide and the number of yellow-headed blackbirds in the state increases. Peer et al. (2003) calculated the fall population to be over 16.8 million yellow-headed blackbirds in the northern Great Plains of North America. The lethal take of up to



5,000 yellow-headed blackbirds by WS would represent less than 0.03% of the estimated 16.8 million yellow-headed blackbirds that likely migrate along the Central Flyway, which includes the State of North Dakota.

As discussed previously, people can take blackbirds, including yellow-headed blackbirds, without a depredation permit from the USFWS under a blackbird depredation order (see 50 CFR 21.43). Similarly, authorization to take yellow-headed blackbirds from the NDGFD is also not required. Pursuant to the blackbird depredation order, the USFWS requires people that take yellow-headed blackbirds pursuant to the depredation order to report the number of yellow-headed blackbirds they take each year to the USFWS. From 2015 through 2018, no other entities reported the take of yellow-headed blackbirds to the USFWS. It is unknown whether the lack of reported take accurately reflects the actual take because it is likely that some take of yellow-headed blackbirds pursuant to the depredation order goes unreported. The number of yellow-headed blackbirds lethally removed by private individuals to alleviate damage is likely minimal because the primary method that people use to alleviate damage is shooting, which has limitations for killing yellow-headed blackbirds. Private individuals use firearms primarily as a form of harassment rather than to remove blackbirds, despite some limited take likely occurring.

WS would continue to report the take of yellow-headed blackbirds to the USFWS; therefore, the USFWS would have the opportunity to monitor take and consider take in any population objectives they establish for yellow-headed blackbirds.

### ***RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

The red-winged blackbird is one of the most abundant bird species in North America and is a commonly recognized bird that occurs in a variety of habitats (Yasukawa and Searcy 2020). The breeding habitat of red-winged blackbirds includes marshes and upland habitats from southern Alaska and Canada southward to Costa Rica extending from the Pacific to the Atlantic Coast along with the Caribbean Islands (Yasukawa and Searcy 2020). Red-winged blackbirds are primarily associated with emergent vegetation in freshwater wetlands and upland habitats during the breeding season and will nest in marsh vegetation, roadside ditches, saltwater marshes, rice paddies, hay fields, pastureland, fallow fields, suburban habitats, and urban parks (Yasukawa and Searcy 2020). Northern breeding populations of red-winged blackbirds migrate southward during the migration periods, but red-winged blackbirds are common throughout the year in most of the United States (Yasukawa and Searcy 2020). During the migration periods, red-winged blackbirds often form mixed species flocks with other blackbird species.

In North Dakota, red-winged blackbirds nest statewide and are present in most of the state throughout the year (Yasukawa and Searcy 2020) with a breeding population estimated at 13 million red-winged blackbirds (Partners in Flight 2019). Trend data from the BBS indicates the number of red-winged blackbirds observed in the state during the breeding season has shown an increasing trend since 1966 estimated at 0.2% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Trend data from 2007 through 2017 also indicates an increasing trend estimated at 1.6% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Since 1966, the number of red-winged blackbirds observed in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC has shown a highly cyclical pattern but a general increasing trend (National Audubon Society 2010).

Considerable information exists on the agricultural damage caused by blackbirds; however, little information exists on the beneficial feeding habits of blackbirds (Dolbeer 1980, Woronecki and Dolbeer 1980). Dolbeer (1980) estimated that 8 million breeding red-winged blackbirds and their nestlings consumed 12 million pounds of insects, which was an average of 300 pounds of insects per square mile in Ohio. Despite documenting red-winged blackbirds often fed on earworms (*Heliothis zea*) in sweet corn fields found in Idaho, Mott and Stone (1973) was not able to find substantial reductions in earworm

damage to corn because of the blackbird feeding. Other studies have also been unable to show a substantial reduction in insect damage to corn despite blackbirds feeding on those insects in the fields where the insect damage occurred (Woronecki and Dolbeer 1980).

WS identified a concern relating to the use of lethal methods and the potential effects of reducing blackbird populations on the ability of the blackbird population to reduce weed seeds and insects. A concern would be that people would have to rely more on chemicals to control the potential increase in weeds and insects because the use of lethal methods reduced the blackbird population. Blackbird species are generally omnivorous, but their diet can vary depending on habitat and season (Dolbeer 1994, Dolbeer and Linz 2016). In general, the diet of blackbirds consists primarily of insects during the breeding season and transitions to grain and weed seeds during the fall and winter (Linz et al. 1984, Dolbeer 1994, Dolbeer and Linz 2016).

Several studies have indicated that insect populations within sunflowers and cornfields can serve as an attractant to blackbirds and thus have an important influence on subsequent bird damage (Mott and Stone 1973, Stickley and Ingram 1976, Woronecki and Dolbeer 1980, Okurut-Akol et al. 1990). Fields with large numbers of weeds were also the fields with a higher percentage of blackbird damage (Kopp et al. 1980, Linz et al. 1984). The studies have shown that even though blackbirds readily feed on insects, research was unable to show any substantial reduction in insect populations (Mott and Stone 1973, Woronecki and Dolbeer 1980). Therefore, the cumulative take of blackbirds in North Dakota would not occur at a level where weed and/or insect populations would increase to the point of requiring the use of more chemical control than occurs normally.

Table 3.19 shows the number of red-winged blackbirds addressed by WS to reduce damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. WS used pyrotechnics, propane cannons, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm to disperse red-winged blackbirds. In addition, WS used firearms to remove red-winged blackbirds in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. Based on the gregarious behavior of red-winged blackbirds and the number of red-winged blackbirds addressed previously, WS could take up to 50,000 red-winged blackbirds in the state annually to alleviate damage or threats of damage. Most requests involving red-winged blackbirds occur during the fall migration period as mixed species flocks of blackbirds, including red-winged blackbirds, migrate through the state.

**Table 3.19 – Red-winged blackbirds addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	3,895	328,260
<b>2016</b>	1,936	175,624
<b>2017</b>	2,235	368,085
<b>2018</b>	12,140	135,331
<b>2019</b>	18,911	369,117

Peer et al. (2003) calculated the breeding red-winged blackbird population in the northern Great Plains of North America to be over 27 million red-winged blackbirds and the fall population to be over 39 million red-winged blackbirds. Peer et al. (2003) calculated the fall blackbird population in the northern Great Plains of North America by multiplying the breeding population in the region by 1.45 based on work Stehn (1989) conducted. Using this technique, the fall population in North Dakota could be nearly 19 million red-winged blackbirds based on a breeding population estimated at 13 million red-winged blackbirds. The take of 50,000 red-winged blackbirds by WS would represent 0.3% of a fall population of 19 million red-winged blackbirds in North Dakota. The number of red-winged blackbirds that migrate through North Dakota is likely much higher than 19 million red-winged blackbirds because red-winged

blackbirds that nest further north in Saskatchewan and Manitoba likely migrate through North Dakota during the fall (Stehn 1989).

In addition, damage management activities that could possibly involve the use of lethal methods to reduce damage generally occur during those periods when blackbirds roost and feed in large flocks, which occurs in the fall and winter. Those birds that form large flocks in North Dakota likely originate from breeding populations across a wide geographical area (Peer et al. 2003). Therefore, any lethal removal would not represent a large portion of the blackbird breeding population in any one specific area. Only 50% to 60% of blackbirds survive annually (Dolbeer 1994, Dolbeer and Linz 2016). The lethal removal in the fall is likely a substitute for natural mortality and does not add to the mortality that occurs annually. Therefore, the use of lethal methods to alleviate damage would not likely represent a large portion of a local blackbird population and those blackbirds lethally removed would likely represent blackbirds that would have died annually despite damage management activities.

The USFWS did not receive reports of other entities taking red-winged blackbirds in the state. WS expects the take of red-winged blackbirds by other entities to be of low magnitude when compared to the statewide estimated population. Like other blackbird species, take of red-winged blackbirds is likely to occur during the migration periods when large numbers of red-winged blackbirds are present in the state. The numbers of blackbirds present in the state likely increases as migratory blackbirds begin arriving in the state during the fall and winter.

#### ***BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS***

Brown-headed cowbirds occur throughout much of western Canada and throughout the United States and Mexico (Lowther 2020). Brown-headed cowbirds occur primarily in habitats containing low or scattered trees among grassland vegetation, including woodland edges, brushy thickets, prairies, fields, pastures, orchards, and residential areas. Nesting populations of brown-headed cowbirds in the northern portion of their breeding range are migratory with cowbirds present throughout the year in much of the eastern United States, along the West Coast of the United States, and most of Mexico (Lowther 2020). Brown-headed cowbirds expanded their breeding range as people began clearing forests for agricultural practices (Lowther 2020). Brown-headed cowbirds are another species commonly found in mixed-species flocks of blackbirds during migration periods.

In North Dakota, brown-headed cowbirds occur statewide during the nesting season (Lowther 2020). The number of brown-headed cowbirds observed in areas of the state surveyed during the BBS has shown an increasing trend estimated at 0.4% annually since 1966, with the number of brown-headed cowbirds observed from 2007 through 2017 showing an increasing trend estimated at 0.3% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the statewide breeding population at 13 million brown-headed cowbirds based on data from the BBS. Because brown-headed cowbirds winter further south, observers have counted very few brown-headed cowbirds in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC and observers infrequently observe brown-headed cowbirds in areas surveyed during the CBC (National Audubon Society 2010).

Table 3.20 shows the number of brown-headed cowbirds addressed by WS to reduce damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. WS used pyrotechnics and vehicle activity to disperse brown-headed cowbirds. No lethal take of brown-headed cowbirds occurred by WS in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. Based on the gregarious behavior of brown-headed cowbirds and their occurrence in mixed species blackbird flocks, WS could take up to 500 brown-headed cowbirds in the state annually to alleviate damage or threats of damage. Most requests involving brown-headed cowbirds occur during the

fall migration period as mixed species flocks of blackbirds, including brown-headed cowbirds, migrate through the state.

**Table 3.20 – Brown-headed cowbirds addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	33
<b>2017</b>	0	0
<b>2018</b>	0	50
<b>2019</b>	0	211

With an estimated statewide breeding population of 13 million brown-headed cowbirds, the take of 500 brown-headed cowbirds annually by WS would represent 0.004% of the breeding brown-headed cowbird population in North Dakota. However, most activities associated with brown-headed cowbirds occur when large concentrations of cowbirds are present in the winter. Therefore, the take up of up 500 brown-headed cowbirds would likely represent a much smaller percentage of the statewide breeding population. The number of brown-headed cowbirds that migrate through the state is unknown and likely fluctuates throughout the year and from year to year.

Similar to red-winged blackbirds, the USFWS did not receive reports of other entities taking brown-headed cowbirds in the state. WS expects the take of brown-headed cowbirds by other entities to be of low magnitude when compared to the statewide estimated breeding population for North Dakota. Like other blackbird species, take of brown-headed cowbirds is likely to occur during the migration periods when large numbers of brown-headed cowbirds are present in the state. The numbers of blackbirds present in the state likely increases as migratory blackbirds begin arriving in the state during the fall and winter.

***COMMON GRACKLE POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECT***

The breeding range of the common grackle includes Canada and the United States east of the Rocky Mountains, with grackles found throughout the year in the United States except for the far northern and western portion of the species range in the United States (Peer and Bollinger 2020). Common grackles are a conspicuous bird species found in urban and residential environments. Common grackles have likely benefited from human activities, such as the clearing of forests in the eastern United States, which has provided suitable nesting habitat for grackles. The planting of trees in residential areas has also likely led to an expansion of the species range into the western United States (Peer and Bollinger 2020).

The common grackle has an extremely varied diet, which includes insects, crayfish, frogs, other small aquatic life, mice, nestling birds, eggs, sprouting and ripened grains, seeds, and fruits (Bull and Farrand 1977, Peer and Bollinger 2020). During the migration periods, common grackles can occur in mixed species flocks of blackbirds and are commonly seen foraging and roosting in flocks with other blackbird species (Peer and Bollinger 2020).

In North Dakota, common grackles are present statewide during the nesting period and during the migration periods but may occur in areas of eastern North Dakota during the winter (Peer and Bollinger 2020). Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the breeding population in the state at 4.3 million common grackles. The number of common grackles observed along BBS routes surveyed in the state has shown an increasing trend from 1966 through 2017 estimated at 1.4% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). From 2007 through 2017, the number of common grackles observed during the BBS has also shown an increasing trend in the state estimated at 1.6% annually (United States Geological Survey

2020b). The number of common grackles observed in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC has shown cyclical trend since 1966 (National Audubon Society 2010). However, observers have counted very few common grackles in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC (National Audubon Society 2010).

Table 3.21 shows the number of common grackles addressed by WS to reduce damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. WS used pyrotechnics, vehicle activity, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm to disperse common grackles. In addition, WS used firearms to remove common grackles in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. Based on the gregarious behavior of common grackles and their occurrence in mixed species blackbird flocks, WS could take up to 5,000 common grackles in the state annually to alleviate damage or threats of damage. Most requests involving common grackles occur during the fall migration period as mixed species flocks of blackbirds, including common grackles, migrate through the state.

**Table 3.21 – Common grackles addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	554	29,800
<b>2016</b>	259	6,533
<b>2017</b>	185	5,080
<b>2018</b>	415	5,730
<b>2019</b>	99	2,100

The take of up to 5,000 common grackles would represent 0.1% of the estimated breeding population in North Dakota. Peer et al. (2003) calculated the breeding population in the northern Great Plains of North America to be 13 million common grackles and the fall population to be nearly 19 million common grackles. The take of up to 5,000 common grackles would represent 0.03% of the estimated fall population in the northern Great Plains of North America.

Other entities have also reported to the USFWS the take of common grackles in the state. From 2015 through 2018, other entities reported to the USFWS the take of 22 common grackles during 2015 and one common grackle during 2016. Other entities did not report take during 2017 and 2018. If other entities take 22 common grackles per year and WS' take reached 5,000 common grackles, the cumulative take of 5,022 common grackles would represent 0.1% of a breeding population estimated at 4.3 million common grackles in the state.

WS expects the take of common grackles by other entities to be of low magnitude when compared to the statewide estimated breeding population for North Dakota. Like other blackbird species, take of common grackles is likely to occur during the migration periods when large numbers of common grackles are present in the state. The numbers of blackbirds present in the state likely increases as migratory blackbirds begin arriving in the state during the fall and winter.

***BREWER'S BLACKBIRD POPULATION - DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECT***

The breeding range of the Brewer's blackbird includes Canada and the United States east of the Rocky Mountains consisting primarily of the northern tier states from Montana to Michigan. Brewer's blackbirds are found throughout the year primarily in the northwestern United States with non-breeding and migratory populations found in the southern and Midwestern states (Martin 2020). Brewer's blackbirds are conspicuous social species breeding in open habitats, farmsteads and suburban areas. Prior to 1914, the species had not been reported nesting east of western Minnesota but at about that time, the species took advantage of forest clearing and land conversion to agriculture to rapidly expand its range.

The species expanded its breeding range east to encompass most of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan while also expanding north and west in Canada (Martin 2020).

Brewer’s blackbird has a varied diet, which includes insects, other invertebrates, grains, weed seeds, and small fruits (Martin 2020). During migration and winter, Brewer’s blackbirds feed primarily on waste grains, weed and grass seeds and stockyard spillage. The species primarily forages in open areas and bare ground habitats but will occasionally feed perched on rigid vegetation such as the upper rim of sunflower (*Helianthus* spp.) heads (Avery and DeHaven 1984, Martin 2020).

In North Dakota, Brewer’s blackbirds are present statewide during the nesting period and during the migration periods. Partners in Flight (2019) estimated the breeding population in the state at 780,000 Brewer’s blackbirds. The number of Brewer’s blackbirds observed along BBS routes has shown a decreasing trend from 1966 through 2017 estimated at 2.2% annually (United States Geological Survey 2020b). The number of Brewer’s blackbirds observed in areas of the state surveyed during the CBC has also shown a declining trend of 4.6% in North Dakota (National Audubon Society 2010).

Table 3.22 shows the number of Brewer’s blackbirds addressed by WS to reduce damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. In FY 2019, WS used pyrotechnics, vehicle activity, and the noise associated with the discharge of a firearm to disperse Brewer’s blackbirds. In addition, WS used firearms to remove Brewer’s blackbirds in FY 2019. Based on the gregarious behavior of Brewer’s blackbirds and their occurrence in mixed species blackbird flocks, WS could take up to 500 Brewer’s blackbirds in the state annually to alleviate damage or threats of damage. Most requests involving Brewer’s blackbirds occur during the fall migration period as mixed species flocks of blackbirds.

**Table 3.22 – Brewer blackbirds addressed by WS in North Dakota, FY 2015 - FY 2019**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Lethal Take</b>	<b>Dispersed</b>
<b>2015</b>	0	0
<b>2016</b>	0	0
<b>2017</b>	0	0
<b>2018</b>	0	0
<b>2019</b>	135	1,850

The take of up to 500 Brewer’s blackbirds would represent 0.06% of the estimated breeding population in North Dakota. Partners in Flight (2019) estimate the continental population of Brewer’s blackbird to be approximately 23 million birds. The take of up to 500 Brewer’s blackbirds would represent 0.002% of the estimated population.

WS expects the take of Brewer’s blackbirds to be of low magnitude when compared to the statewide estimated breeding population for North Dakota. Like other blackbird species, take of Brewer’s blackbirds is likely to occur during the migration periods when large numbers of Brewer’s blackbirds are present in the state. The numbers of blackbirds present in the state likely increases as migratory blackbirds begin arriving in the state during the fall and winter.

***ADDITIONAL TARGET BIRD SPECIES***

WS has addressed limited numbers of additional target bird species previously or WS anticipates addressing a limited number of additional bird species if WS implements Alternative 1. WS would primarily address those species to alleviate aircraft strike risks at airports in the state. Requests for assistance associated with those species would often occur infrequently or would involve only a few individuals. WS anticipates addressing those requests for assistance using primarily non-lethal dispersal

methods. If WS implements Alternative 1, WS could receive requests for assistance to use lethal methods to remove some of those bird species when non-lethal methods were ineffective or were determined to be inappropriate using the WS Decision model. An example could include birds that pose an immediate strike threat at an airport where attempts to disperse the birds were ineffective. The target bird species that WS could address in limited numbers, after receiving a request for assistance associated with those species, would include those bird species identified in Appendix D<sup>9</sup>. Appendix D also addresses the potential impacts associated with implementing Alternative 1 on the populations of those species.

### ***AVIAN DISEASE SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING***

As part of disease monitoring and surveillance, WS could collect samples from birds. Examples of strategies for collecting samples in birds that WS could implement include investigating sick/dead birds, conducting surveillance in live wild birds, conducting surveillance of hunter-harvested birds, and/or conducting environmental sampling. Implementation of those sampling strategies to detect or monitor avian diseases would not adversely affect avian populations in the state. For example, the sampling (*e.g.*, drawing blood, feather sample, fecal sample) and the subsequent release of live-captured birds would not result in adverse effects because WS' personnel would release those birds unharmed on site. In addition, collecting samples from birds that were sick, dying, or harvested by hunters would not result in the additive lethal take of birds that would not have already occurred in the absence of sampling. Therefore, sampling birds for pathogens would not adversely affect the populations of any of the birds addressed in this EA nor would sampling result in any take of birds that would not have already occurred in the absence of sampling (*e.g.*, hunter harvest).

### ***EFFECTS ON THE PUBLIC'S ESTHETIC ENJOYMENT OF BIRDS***

Public opinion about the best ways to reduce conflicts between people and animals is highly variable, making the implementation and conduct of damage management programs extremely complex. Some people express concerns that proposed activities could interfere with their enjoyment of recreational activities and their esthetic enjoyment of birds. Another concern is WS' activities would result in the loss of esthetic benefits of birds to the public.

People generally regard animals as providing economic, recreational, and esthetic benefits (Decker and Goff 1987), and the mere knowledge that animals exist is a positive benefit to many people. Esthetics is the philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, or the appreciation of beauty. Therefore, esthetics is truly subjective in nature, dependent on what an observer regards as beautiful. The human attraction to animals likely started when people began domesticating animals. The public today share a similar bond with animals and/or wildlife in general and in modern societies, a large percentage of households have indoor or outdoor pets. However, some people may consider individual wild animals as "*pets*" or exhibit affection toward those animals, especially people who enjoy viewing animals. Therefore, the public reaction can be variable and mixed to animal damage management because there are numerous philosophical, esthetic, and personal attitudes, values, and opinions about the best ways to manage conflicts/problems between people and animals.

Animal populations provide a wide range of social and economic benefits (Decker and Goff 1987). Those benefits include direct benefits related to consumptive and non-consumptive uses, indirect benefits derived from vicarious wildlife related experiences, and the personal enjoyment of knowing animals exist and contribute to the stability of natural ecosystems (Bishop 1987). Direct benefits are derived from a personal relationship with animals and may take the form of direct consumptive use (*e.g.*, using parts of or the entire animal) or non-consumptive use (*e.g.*, viewing the animal in nature or in a zoo,

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<sup>9</sup>Appendix D contains a list of the common and scientific names of those bird species that WS could address infrequently and/or in low numbers.

photographing) (Decker and Goff 1987). Birds may provide similar benefits to people that enjoy viewing certain bird species and knowing they are part of natural ecosystems.

Indirect benefits or indirect exercised values arise without the user being in direct contact with the animal and originate from experiences, such as looking at photographs and films of animals, reading about animals, or benefiting from activities or contributions of animals (*e.g.*, their use in research) (Decker and Goff 1987). Indirect benefits come in two forms: bequest and pure existence (Decker and Goff 1987). Bequest is providing for future generations and pure existence is merely knowledge that the animals exist (Decker and Goff 1987).

In 2006, the USFWS and the United States Department of Commerce (2006) found 279,000 people participated in wildlife-associated recreation in North Dakota, including people that participated in hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching. In total, people spent \$269 million on wildlife recreation in North Dakota during 2006 (USFWS and the United States Department of Commerce 2006)<sup>10</sup>.

Public attitudes toward animals vary considerably. Some people believe that WS should capture and translocate all animals to another area to alleviate damage or threats those animals pose. In some cases, people directly affected by animals strongly support removal. Individuals not directly affected by the harm or damage may be supportive, neutral, or totally opposed to any removal of animals from specific locations or sites. Some people totally opposed to animal damage management want WS to teach tolerance for damage and threats caused by animals, and that people should never kill animals. Some of the people who oppose removal of animals do so because of human-affectionate bonds with individual animals. Those human-affectionate bonds are similar to attitudes of a pet owner and result in esthetic enjoyment.

In some cases, the presence of overabundant bird species offends people, such as starlings, pigeons, or feral species, such as domestic waterfowl. To such people, those species represent pests that are nuisances, which upset the natural order in ecosystems, and are carriers of diseases transmissible to people or other animals. In those situations, the presence of overabundant species can diminish their overall enjoyment of other animals by what they view as a destructive presence of such species. They are offended because they feel that those species proliferate in such numbers and appear to remain unbalanced.

In the wild, few animals in the United States have life spans approaching that of people. Mortality is high among wildlife populations and specific individuals among a species may experience death early in life. Mortality in wildlife populations is a natural occurrence and people who form affectionate bonds with animals experience loss of those animals over time in most instances. A number of professionals in the field of psychology have studied human behavior in response to attachment to pet animals (Gerwolls and Labott 1994, Marks et al. 1994, Zasloff 1996, Ross and Baron-Sorensen 1998, Archer 1999, Meyers 2000). Similar observations are probably applicable to close bonds that could exist between people and wild animals. As observed by researchers in human behavior, normal human responses to loss of loved ones proceed through phases of shock or emotional numbness, sense of loss, grief, acceptance of the loss or what cannot be changed, healing, and acceptance and rebuilding, which leads to resumption of normal lives (Lefrancois 1999). Those people who lose companion animals, or animals for which they may have developed a bond and affection, can proceed through the same phases as with the loss of human companions (Gerwolls and Labott 1994, Boyce 1998, Meyers 2000). However, they usually establish a bond with other individual animals after such losses. Although they may lose the sense of enjoyment and

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<sup>10</sup>Although the USFWS and U.S. Department of Commerce (2011) conducted a similar survey in 2011, the report did not release data for North Dakota due to concerns expressed regarding the estimates for North Dakota (Southwick Associates 2012). However, the Southwick Associates (2012) report included data on the economic contributions from all hunting in North Dakota from the 2011 survey but expressed a need to use the data with caution.



meaning from the association with those animals that die or are no longer accessible, they usually find establishing an association with new individual animals or through other relational activities to be similarly meaningful (Weisman 1991). Through this process of coping with the loss and establishing new affectionate bonds, people may avoid compounding emotional effects resulting from such losses (Lefrancois 1999).

WS only conducts activities on properties where the property owner or property manager signs a work initiation document allowing WS' personnel to conduct activities and personnel would only target those birds identified as causing damage or posing a threat of damage. In addition, other birds of the same species would likely continue to be present in the affected area and people would tend to establish new bonds with those remaining birds. In addition, human behavior processes usually result in individuals ultimately returning to normalcy after experiencing the loss of association with a wild animal that an entity removed from a specific location.

Even in the absence of any involvement by WS, other entities could conduct activities to alleviate damage or threats of damage. Because other entities could remove birds causing damage or posing a threat of damage, the involvement of WS in removing those birds would not likely be additive to the number of birds that could be removed in the absence of involvement by WS. In addition, activities that could occur under the alternatives by WS would occur on a relatively limited portion of the total area in North Dakota, and the portion of various bird species' populations removed would typically be low (see preceding discussion). In localized areas where WS removes a bird or birds, dispersal of birds from adjacent areas typically contributes to repopulation of the area. The amount of time required to repopulate an area would vary and would depend on the level of removal and bird population levels in nearby areas. Those target species addressed in this EA are relatively abundant. As discussed previously, the effects on target bird populations from damage management activities would be relatively low if WS implemented Alternative 1, and opportunities to view, hear, or see evidence of birds would still be available over the majority of land area of the state.

***Alternative 2 - WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota using only non-lethal methods***

If WS implements Alternative 2, WS would only use non-lethal methods to resolve damage or threats of damage associated with target bird species in North Dakota. No intentional lethal removal of target bird species would occur by WS. Non-lethal methods generally disperse, exclude, or live-capture birds. Methods intended to disperse birds from areas where they are causing damage or posing a threat of damage are generally visual or auditory deterrents, such as lights, lasers, pyrotechnics, propane cannons, or air horns. Exclusion methods would prevent target bird species from accessing a resource and could disperse those birds to other areas where resources are unprotected. Exclusion methods could include overhead wires, fencing, and netting. WS could also live-capture target bird species and then translocate those birds to appropriate habitat for release. WS could continue to use aircraft and UAVs to survey, monitor, and track birds in North Dakota. In addition, WS could use UAVs to haze birds.

***DIRECT EFFECTS ON BIRD POPULATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE 2***

As discussed for Alternative 1, WS has used non-lethal methods to disperse target bird species. For example, from FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS used non-lethal methods to disperse an average of 275,283 red-winged blackbirds per year in the state to alleviate damage or threats of damage (Table 3.19). The intent associated with the use of auditory and visual deterrents is to elicit a flight response by scaring birds from an area where damage is occurring or where damage could occur. Of concern are the possible negative physiological and/or behavioral effects that negative stimuli could cause, which could reduce the

fitness of individual birds or the ability of a bird to survive, especially if the exposure to the stressor was chronic. If stress occurs to a bird from the scaring associated with hazing, the negative effects associated with causing a flight response could be exacerbated by other deleterious stressors already occurring (e.g., disease, food availability). The stress from hazing could negatively affect the health of a bird, interfere with the raising of young, and/or increase energy needs. A similar concern would occur when using exclusion methods, which could prevent birds from accessing a resource (e.g., food source, nesting locations). When using methods to live-capture a bird or birds, injuries or death could occur during the process of capturing a bird. Constantly monitoring and addressing captured birds immediately after capture can reduce the likelihood of injuries and death. In addition, making appropriate modification to live-capture methods can reduce injuries.

However, the use of non-lethal methods to capture, disperse, or exclude birds would generally have minimal effects on the overall population of a bird species because those methods would not harm individual birds. WS' personnel would not employ non-lethal methods over large geographical areas or apply those methods at such an intensity that birds would be unable to access essential resources (e.g., food sources, habitat) for extended durations. Similarly, the use of aircraft and UAVs by WS to survey, monitor, and track birds and the use of UAVs to haze birds would not occur at such frequency or at an intensity level that would adversely affect bird populations. Aircraft and UAVs used by WS would spend a very small amount of time at any location.

WS could also live-capture a limited number of birds and translocate them to appropriate habitat for release. Translocation often occurs during the migration periods when birds are moving between nesting areas and wintering areas. Translocating birds for release into appropriate habitat would generally have no impacts on a species population. WS could also attach leg bands or other identifying markers (e.g., patagial tags) for identification purposes to birds after live-capture. Live-capturing and attaching identifying markers would only occur after WS or another entity received the appropriate permits from the USFWS and the United States Geological Survey to attach those identifying markers on birds. In addition, authorization from the NDGFD is required to use leg bands or other markers. When using leg bands, WS would use those band sizes indicated in the North American Bird Banding Manual developed by the United States Geological Survey. Because the intent of using identifying markers is to monitor natural movement patterns and to identify individual birds, researchers have designed those methods to allow for natural movements and limit adverse effects on the bird species. Fair et al. (2010) stated “[w]hen appropriate [leg] band sizes are used, the occurrence and rate of adverse effects on the subjects is ordinarily very low”.

WS anticipates using leg bands and other identifying markers on a very limited basis because of the time and cost required to live-capture birds. WS would primarily use leg bands in conjunction with the use of translocation. Attaching a leg band to a bird that WS translocated would aid in identifying the bird if it returned to the area where damage was occurring. WS anticipates attaching identifying markers on a limited number of birds.

Overall, the use of non-lethal methods by WS in North Dakota to exclude, capture, or haze birds would have no effect on the population of a bird species. WS would not employ non-lethal methods over large geographical areas at such intensity levels that resources (e.g., food sources, habitat) would be unavailable for extended durations or over a wide geographical scope. Therefore, direct effects that relate to a bird population would not occur by WS from implementation of Alternative 2. WS does not anticipate any cumulative effects to occur associated with WS' use of non-lethal methods even when considered with the use of non-lethal by other entities. Although non-lethal methods can elicit a flight response or exclude birds, the cumulative use of non-lethal methods by all entities is not likely to rise to a level that would have any effect on the populations of target bird species.

## ***INDIRECT EFFECTS ON BIRD POPULATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE 2***

As discussed previously, the use of non-lethal methods by WS in North Dakota to exclude, capture, or haze target bird species would have no effect on the populations of target bird species. WS would not employ non-lethal methods over large geographical areas at such intensity levels that resources (*e.g.*, food sources, habitat) would be unavailable for extended durations or over a wide geographical scope. Therefore, indirect effects that relate to the population of a target bird species would not occur by WS from implementation of Alternative 2.

Implementation of Alternative 2 by WS would not prevent other entities from using many of the lethal methods identified in Appendix B to take birds in North Dakota. WS anticipates the lethal take of birds would continue to occur by other entities if WS implements Alternative 2 and would likely occur at levels similar to the take that would occur if WS implemented Alternative 1. Therefore, WS anticipates the indirect effects associated with implementing Alternative 2 would be similar to those indirect effects discussed for Alternative 1 because the lethal take of birds in the state would continue to occur by other entities.

## ***CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ON BIRD POPULATIONS FROM IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE 2***

WS does not anticipate any cumulative effects to occur associated with WS' use of non-lethal methods even when considered with the use of non-lethal by other entities. Although non-lethal methods would likely elicit a flight response, the cumulative use of non-lethal methods by all entities is not likely to rise to a level that would have an effect on the population of a bird species.

Although implementation of this alternative would limit WS to using only non-lethal methods, entities other than WS could continue to use lethal methods. Implementation of Alternative 2 by WS would not prevent the USFWS and/or the NDGFD from continuing to issue depredation permits or other authorizations for the take of birds in North Dakota and would not limit the ability to take non-native bird species. The continued use of many non-lethal methods can often lead to the habituation of birds to those methods (*i.e.*, showing no response or limited movements), which can decrease the effectiveness of those methods (Conover 2002, Seamans and Gosser 2016).

As discussed previously for Alternative 1, the take of many of the target bird species has occurred by other entities previously. Therefore, the lethal take of bird species by other entities would likely continue if WS implemented Alternative 2. For example, the USFWS and/or the NDGFD could continue to issue a depredation permit or authorizations that allow the recipient to use lethal methods when non-lethal methods become less effective at excluding and/or dispersing birds. In addition, people could lethally take some bird species without the need for a depredation permit from the USFWS when the MBTA does not protect those species, such as house sparrows, rock pigeons, and European starlings. People can lethally take certain species pursuant to depredation/control orders without the need for a depredation permit from the USFWS, such as red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, black-billed magpies, and American crows. Similarly, people can take blackbirds, black-billed magpies, house sparrows, and European starlings without the need for prior authorization from the NDGFD. People could continue to take waterfowl and other harvestable species (*e.g.*, crows, mourning doves) during annual hunting seasons in the state.

WS anticipates the lethal take of birds would continue to occur by other entities if WS implements Alternative 2 and would likely occur at levels similar to the take that would occur if WS implemented Alternative 1. Therefore, WS anticipates the cumulative effects associated with implementing Alternative 2 would be similar to those cumulative effects discussed for Alternative 1 because the lethal take of birds

in the state would continue to occur by other entities.

***Alternative 3 - WS would recommend an integrated methods approach to managing bird damage in North Dakota through technical assistance only***

Under a technical assistance only alternative, WS would recommend an integrated methods approach similar to Alternative 1 and Alternative 2; however, WS would not provide direct operational assistance under this alternative. Using information that a requester provides or from a site visit by an employee, WS' personnel would recommend methods and techniques based on their use of the WS Decision Model. In some instances, information provided to the requester by WS could result in tolerance/acceptance of the situation. In other instances, WS would discuss and recommend damage management options. In addition, WS' personnel could assist people with the process for applying for their own depredation permit from the USFWS and authorizations from the NDGFD. In accordance with WS Directive 2.301, WS' personnel could assist people with applying for a depredation permit from the USFWS by completing a USFWS Migratory Bird Permit Application or Review form (WS Form 37).

***DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ON BIRD POPULATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE 3***

When discussing damage management options with the person requesting assistance, WS' personnel could recommend and demonstrate the use of both non-lethal and lethal methods that were legally available for use to alleviate damage. Those people receiving technical assistance from WS could implement those methods recommended by WS, could employ other methods not recommended by WS, could seek assistance from other entities, or take no further action. If WS implements Alternative 3, WS would have no direct effect on bird populations because WS' personnel would not provide direct operational assistance.

Despite WS not providing direct operational assistance to resolve damage and threats associated with birds, those people experiencing damage caused by birds could alleviate damage by employing those methods legally available or by seeking assistance from other entities. Implementation of Alternative 3 by WS would not prevent other entities from using lethal and non-lethal methods and would not prevent the USFWS and/or the NDGFD from authorizing the lethal take of birds in the state. The take of red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, black-billed magpies, and American crows could occur pursuant to the blackbird depredation order without the need for a depredation permit. The take of Muscovy ducks could occur under the control order and the take of non-native bird species could occur without the need for a depredation permit from the USFWS. People can take blackbirds, black-billed magpies, house sparrows, and European starlings without the need for prior authorization from the NDGFD. Take of certain harvestable bird species would continue to occur during the hunting season for those species (e.g., doves, crows, waterfowl, turkeys).

WS anticipates the lethal take of birds would continue to occur by other entities if WS implements Alternative 3 and would likely occur at levels similar to the take that would occur if WS implemented Alternative 1 or Alternative 2. Therefore, WS anticipates the indirect and cumulative effects associated with implementing Alternative 3 would be similar to those indirect and cumulative effects discussed for Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 because the exclusion, dispersal, and lethal take of birds in the state would continue to occur by other entities. As discussed for Alternative 1, the lethal take of birds to alleviate damage in North Dakota has occurred and would continue to occur by entities other than WS.

With the oversight of the USFWS and the NDGFD, it is unlikely that implementation of Alternative 3 by WS would adversely affect bird populations. However, if direct operational assistance is not available

from WS or other entities, it is possible that frustration caused by the inability to reduce damage and associated losses could lead to an increase in the illegal use of methods and take. People have resorted to the illegal use of chemicals and methods to resolve wildlife damage issues (e.g., see White et al. 1989, USFWS 2001, United States Food and Drug Administration 2003).

***Alternative 4 - WS would not provide any assistance with managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota***

If WS implements Alternative 4, WS would have no direct involvement with any aspect of addressing damage caused by those bird species addressed in this EA and would provide no technical assistance. When contacted about damage or the threat of damage associated with those bird species addressed in this EA, WS would refer those people to other entities, such as the USFWS, NDGFD, and/or private entities.

***DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ON BIRD POPULATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE 4***

If WS implemented Alternative 4, WS would not have direct effects on target bird populations because WS would not provide any assistance involving those bird species addressed in this EA. However, like the other alternatives, other entities could continue to use non-lethal and lethal methods to address damage caused by birds. Implementation of Alternative 4 by WS would not prevent the USFWS and/or the NDGFD from continuing to authorize the take of birds in North Dakota. The take of red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, black-billed magpies, and American crows could occur under the blackbird depredation order without the need for a depredation permit. The take of Muscovy ducks could occur under the control order and the take of non-native bird species could occur without the need for a depredation permit from the USFWS. People can take blackbirds, black-billed magpies, house sparrows, and European starlings without the need for prior authorization from the NDGFD. Take of certain harvestable bird species would continue to occur during the hunting season for those species. Therefore, WS anticipates the indirect and cumulative effects associated with implementing Alternative 4 would be similar to those indirect and cumulative effects discussed for the other alternatives because other entities would continue to use non-lethal and lethal methods to alleviate bird damage.

**3.1.2 Issue 2 - Effects on the Populations of Non-target Wildlife Species, Including T&E Species**

As discussed previously, a concern would be the potential impacts to non-target species, including T&E species, from the use of methods to resolve damage caused by birds. When using methods, WS could unintentionally live-capture, disperse, or kill non-target animals. Discussion on the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the alternative approaches on the populations of non-target animal species, including T&E species, occurs below for each of the alternative approaches identified in Section 2.4.1.

***Alternative 1 - WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota (Proposed Action/No Action)***

If WS implements Alternative 1, WS could provide both technical assistance and direct operational assistance to those persons requesting assistance. When providing direct operational assistance, WS' employees could use lethal and/or non-lethal methods in an integrated methods approach to reduce damage and alleviate risks of damage associated with those target bird species addressed in this EA.

## ***DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ANALYSIS ON NON-TARGET POPULATIONS***

WS' personnel have experience and receive training in wildlife identification, which allows them to identify individual species and to identify damage or recognize damage threats associated with birds. In addition, WS' personnel have knowledge in the use patterns of methods available to resolve animal damage, which allows them to select the most appropriate method(s) to address animal damage and minimize impacts on non-target species. WS' personnel use a decision-making process for evaluating and responding to requests for assistance detailed in the WS Decision Model (see WS Directive 2.201), which Slate et al. (1992) describes in more detail. Using the WS Decision Model, WS' personnel would formulate a management strategy, which would include the method or methods the employee determines to be practical for use to alleviate damage or reduce risks caused by the target bird species. When determining the appropriate method or methods, WS' personnel would consider risks to non-target animals from the use of a method or methods. Despite WS' efforts to reduce risks to non-target animals, the use of a method or methods could exclude, disperse, capture, or kill non-target animals unintentionally. A discussion of the risks to non-target animals and the potential effects on the populations of non-target animals if WS implements Alternative 1 occurs below.

### *Risks to non-target animals associated with available methods*

The risks to non-target animals associated with WS providing technical assistance during the implementation of Alternative 1 would be similar to those risks to non-target animals discussed for Alternative 3. Therefore, to reduce redundancy, the effects associated with WS providing technical assistance that would occur if WS implements Alternative 1 occur in the discussion for Alternative 3. Similarly, the risks to non-target animals from the use of non-lethal methods during the implementation of Alternative 1 would be similar to those risks to non-target animals discussed for Alternative 2. To reduce redundancy, the risks to non-target animals from the use of non-lethal methods if WS implements Alternative 1 occur in the discussion for Alternative 2.

In regard to risks to non-target animals, the primary risk would be associated with lethal methods because the use of lethal methods could result in the death of a non-target animal. Lethal methods that WS' employees could use and/or recommend would include the use of a firearm, egg destruction (*i.e.*, puncturing, breaking, oiling, or shaking an egg), euthanasia after live-capture, Avitrol, and the avicide DRC-1339.

#### ➤ *Firearms*

The use of firearms is essentially selective for target species because WS' personnel would identify target bird species prior to application. There is a slight risk of misidentifying bird species, especially when target and non-target species have a similar appearance. There is also a slight risk of unintentional take of non-target animals if a projectile strikes a non-target animal after passing through a target bird, if misses occur, or if a non-target animal is near a target bird when using a shotgun. WS' personnel can minimize risks by using appropriate firearms, by being aware of what is near or beyond the target bird, and by training to be proficient with the use of a firearm.

Although the use of firearms can reduce the number of birds using a location (similar to dispersing birds), the use of a firearm is most often used to supplement and reinforce the noise associated with non-lethal methods. The noise produced when discharging a firearm could disperse non-target animals from an area. In those cases, non-target species nearby could temporarily leave the immediate vicinity, but would most likely return after conclusion of the action. Additionally, when appropriate, WS would use suppressed firearms to minimize noise and the associated dispersal effect that could occur from the discharge of a

firearm. WS' personnel would not employ firearms over large geographical areas or use firearms at such an intensity level that WS would cause harm to a non-target animal by dispersing and preventing them from accessing essential resources (e.g., food sources, habitat).

➤ *Egg Destruction*

WS' personnel could make eggs of certain target bird species unviable by puncturing the egg, breaking the egg, shaking the egg, or oiling the egg. The destruction of eggs would essentially be selective for target species because WS' personnel would identify the eggs of target bird species prior to application. The EPA has ruled that use of corn oil to oil eggs is exempt from registration requirements under the FIFRA. Therefore, WS does not anticipate direct or indirect effects to occur from destroying eggs of target bird species.

➤ *Euthanasia after Live-capture*

Because live-capture of birds using other methods would occur prior to using euthanasia methods, WS' personnel would identify target bird species prior to using euthanasia methods. WS could euthanize target bird species using carbon dioxide or cervical dislocation. WS' personnel would use euthanasia methods in accordance with WS Directive 2.505. Therefore, WS does not anticipate effects to occur from the use of euthanasia methods following live-capture.

➤ *Snap Traps*

WS could occasionally use snap traps when targeting a cavity nesting bird species, such as a European starling. WS' personnel would place snap traps inside a nest box so as the target bird species enters the nest box, they trigger the trap. The opening of the nest box would limit access to bird species of similar size to the target species or smaller. WS could use snap traps on the sides of residences or other buildings in residential areas and commercial sites where cavity-nesting birds may be entering into a structure to nest. WS would place the nest box containing the snap trap over the existing opening in the structure. Therefore, WS does not anticipate direct or indirect effects to occur from the use of snap traps because of the locations where WS could use them.

➤ *4-Aminopyridine (Avitrol)*

As discussed in Appendix B, Avitrol is the commercial product name of a flock dispersal method available for public use to manage damage associated with some bird species. The active ingredient of Avitrol is 4-Aminopyridine. Although Avitrol is a flock dispersing method, birds that ingest a treated particle often die. When ingested in sufficient doses, Avitrol is acutely toxic to all vertebrate species; therefore, a concern does exist from exposure of non-target animals to 4-Aminopyridine (EPA 2007). The primary risks would occur from non-target species that also consume the different bait types, such as granivorous birds (De Grazio et al. 1971, De Grazio et al. 1972, Schafer et al. 1974, Schafer and Marking 1975, Stickley et al. 1976, Somer et al. 1981). Several label requirements of Avitrol products address risks to non-target animals, such as pre-baiting a site using untreated bait to monitor for the presence of non-target animals and diluting treated bait with untreated bait. When using Avitrol, WS' personnel would follow all label requirements to minimize the risk to non-target animals consuming the treated bait.

If WS' personnel observe non-target animals feeding on untreated bait during pre-treatment observations, WS' personnel would not use bait treated with Avitrol at those locations. In addition, product labels require diluting treated bait with untreated bait to minimize non-target hazards and to avoid bait aversion by target species. Mixing treated bait with untreated bait minimizes the likelihood of non-target animals finding and consuming treated bait.

The bait type selected can also limit the likelihood that non-target species would consume treated bait because non-target species may not prefer some bait types, or the bait is too large for a non-target animal to consume. For example, the applicator may use bait formulated on whole kernel corn, which pigeons will consume but the corn kernel is too big for smaller bird species to ingest. Once WS' personnel place treated bait at a location, WS would continue to monitor the location for the presence of non-target animals in accordance with label requirements. If WS' personnel observe non-target animals feeding on bait, WS would abandon those locations. In addition, when pre-baiting a potential location, WS can acclimate target birds to a feeding schedule; therefore, baiting can occur at specific times to ensure target bird species quickly consume bait, especially when large flocks of target species are present. The acclimation period allows treated bait to be present only when WS' personnel have conditioned target birds to be present at the site and provides a higher likelihood that target bird species consume treated bait, which would make the treated bait unavailable to non-target species. In addition, WS' personnel would follow label requirements regarding picking up uneaten bait at the end of each day. The baiting directions for products containing 4-Aminopyridine generally require that in areas where uneaten bait might be a hazard to other animals, the applicator must pick up uneaten bait at the end of each day.

During the re-registration process for 4-Aminopyridine, the EPA (2007) concluded there was a chronic exposure risk to birds and mammals that may consume a sublethal dose of treated bait over several days. The EPA (2007) stated that feeding on sublethal doses of treated bait may not necessarily result in the death of a non-target animal but death could occur because the effects of ingesting a sublethal dose could reduce feeding or make the animal more vulnerable to predation by predators. However, the EPA (2007) concluded the amount of treated bait eaten would likely result in quick mortality; thus, providing minimal opportunities for chronic exposure. Bait treated with 4-Aminopyridine does not appear to have cumulative effects in birds (Schafer and Marking 1975, EPA 2007).

An additional concern would be secondary toxicity risks associated with predators and scavengers feeding on birds that ingested Avitrol. Secondary risks appear to be low because birds rapidly metabolize 4-Aminopyridine and 4-Aminopyridine does not bioaccumulate in the tissue of birds (Schafer et al. 1974, Holler and Schafer 1982, Schafer 1991). Some hazards may occur to predatory species consuming unabsorbed chemical in the gastrointestinal tract of affected or dead birds (Schafer 1981, Holler and Schafer 1982). In a laboratory study, Schafer et al. (1974) fed red-winged blackbirds killed by 4-Aminopyridine to canines, Norway rats (*Rattus norvegicus*), black-billed magpies, and three species of raptors for up to 20 days. None of the animals were adversely affected by consuming red-winged blackbirds killed by 4-Aminopyridine (Schafer et al. 1974). However, there are some secondary risks to scavengers and predators with some reported deaths of predatory birds (EPA 2007). In accordance with the label requirements of 4-Aminopyridine, WS would retrieve carcasses to the extent possible following treatment with 4-Aminopyridine to minimize secondary hazards associated with scavengers feeding on carcasses.

Because 4-Aminopyridine is toxic to fish, WS would not apply bait treated with 4-Aminopyridine directly to water. In addition, WS would not apply bait treated with 4-Aminopyridine in areas where surface water was present and to intertidal areas below the mean high-water mark. WS would not contaminate water by cleaning equipment used to prepare, handle, or apply bait treated with 4-Aminopyridine and would not contaminate water when disposing of waste associated with preparing, handling, or applying bait. Most formulations of 4-Aminopyridine prohibit the use of treated bait within 25 feet of permanent bodies of water.

WS would only use those formulations of 4-Aminopyridine that the EPA has approved for use in accordance with the FIFRA and that the NDDA has approved for use in North Dakota. WS will reduce risks to non-target species by following the label requirements of the products WS' personnel use in



North Dakota. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS did not use 4-Aminopyridine in North Dakota. WS anticipates using 4-Aminopyridine infrequently.

➤ *DRC-1339 Avicide*

If WS implements Alternative 1, another chemical method that WS could use to manage damage associated with certain bird species is the avicide DRC-1339. WS is proposing the use of the avicide DRC-1339 because of its high toxicity to certain bird species that cause damage (*e.g.*, pigeons, crows, blackbirds, starlings, gulls) (DeCino et al. 1966, Besser et al. 1967, West et al. 1967, Schafer 1972). In addition, WS is proposing the continued use of the avicide DRC-1339 because of its low toxicity to many mammals, sparrows, and finches (Schafer and Cunningham 1966, Apostolou 1969, Schafer 1972, Schafer et al. 1977, Matteson 1978, Cunningham et al. 1979, Schafer 1981, Schafer 1991, Cummings et al. 1992, Sterner et al. 1992, Johnston et al. 1999). Despite the low toxicity of DRC-1339 to many mammals, sparrows, and finches, a common concern regarding the use of DRC-1339 is the potential risks to non-target animals.

WS has registered two formulations of DRC-1339 with the EPA that could be available for WS to use. Those formulations restrict the use of DRC-1339 to certain areas where target bird species are causing damage or posing a threat of damage. The Livestock, Nest, and Fodder Depredations label (EPA Reg. #56228-29) would be available to manage American crows, common ravens, and black-billed magpies causing damage to livestock, causing damage to silage/fodder bags, and feeding on the eggs or young of federally designated threatened or endangered species. WS can only use DRC-1339 formulated under the Livestock, Nest, and Fodder Depredations label in rangeland and pastureland areas where American crows, common ravens, and black-billed magpies prey upon newborn livestock. WS could also use the Livestock, Nest, and Fodder Depredations label on refuges or other areas where American crows, common ravens, and black-billed magpies prey upon the eggs and/or young of federally designated threatened or endangered species or other species of designated to be in need of special protection. In addition, WS could use the Livestock, Nest, and Fodder Depredations label within 25 feet of silage/fodder bags that American crows, common ravens, and black-billed magpies have damaged or they are likely to damage. WS has not registered the Livestock, Nest, and Fodder Depredations formulation of DRC-1339 for use in the state. Therefore, WS would not use the Livestock, Nest, and Fodder Depredations formulation of DRC-1339 until WS submitted an application to the NDDA to register the formulation in the state and the NDDA has approved the formulation for use by WS in the state. WS anticipates using the Livestock, Nest, and Fodder Depredations formulation of DRC-1339 infrequently in the future.

The Bird Control label (EPA Reg. #56228-63) could be available to manage Brewer's blackbirds, red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, European starlings, common ravens, American crows, black-billed magpies, rock pigeons, and Eurasian collared-doves at commercial animal operations and staging areas along with gulls at gull colonies and gull feeding or loafing sites. The Bird Control label defines commercial animal operations as areas where people confine cattle, swine, sheep, goats, poultry, game birds, or furbearers primarily for the purpose of production for commercial markets. The Bird Control label defines staging areas as non-crop areas where target birds gather to feed, loaf, or roost such as stubble fields, harvested dormant hay fields, open grassy or bare-grounded noncrop areas, non-crop borders of crop areas, roads, roadsides, paved or concrete surfaces, secured parking areas, rooftops, power utilities, airports, dumps, landfills, and other industrial and commercial structures or sites. The Bird Control label defines gull feeding and loafing sites as areas where target gull species feed or loaf at airports, industrial sites, dumps, or landfills, or other non-crop areas if the target gull species pose immediate threats to threatened or endangered species or pose immediate human health or safety hazards that WS or the entity requesting assistance cannot readily resolve by other means. WS has registered the Bird Control formulation of DRC-1339 with the NDDA for use in the state. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, WS did not use DRC-1339 in the state. However,

WS did use the Bird Control label of DRC-1339 in FY 2020 to manage damage associated with European starlings that were roosting in a building housing livestock.

**DRC-1339 Primary Hazard Profile:** The primary risk to non-target animals would be ingesting bait treated with DRC-1339. The likelihood of a non-target animal obtaining a lethal dose of DRC-1339 would be dependent on: (1) frequency of encountering the bait, (2) length of feeding bout, (3) the bait dilution rate, (4) an animal's propensity to select against the treated bait, and (5) the susceptibility of the non-target species to DRC-1339.

As discussed previously, some bird species that cause damage to agricultural and other resources, such as blackbirds, crows, starlings, and pigeons, are highly sensitive to the avicide DRC-1339 (*i.e.*, toxic effects occur at very small doses). However, some bird and mammal species are less sensitive to the avicide DRC-1339 (*i.e.*, toxic effects occur at very high doses). For example, the median acute lethal dose (LD<sub>50</sub>)<sup>11</sup> values for starlings, blackbirds, and magpies (Corvidae) range from one to five mg/kg (Eisemann et al. 2003). For American crows, the median acute lethal dose is approximately 1.33 mg/kg (DeCino et al. 1966). In comparison, the median lethal dose (LD<sub>50</sub>) of DRC-1339 for horned larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) is 232 mg/kg and more than 320 mg/kg for white-crowned sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) (Eisemann et al. 2003).

In a cage study, Cummings et al. (1992) found that 75 (79%) of 95 red-winged blackbirds and brown-headed cowbirds allowed to feed for one hour on rice treated with DRC-1339 and diluted 1:27 with untreated rice (*i.e.*, one particle of rice treated with DRC-1339 mixed with 27 particles of untreated rice) died. However, under the same conditions, none of the 42 savannah sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), song sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*), chipping sparrows (*Spizella passerina*), and white-crowned sparrows died when allowed to feed for one hour on rice treated with DRC-1339 and diluted 1:27 with untreated rice. Similarly, Cummings et al. (1992) found that 80 (94%) of 85 red-winged blackbirds and brown-headed cowbirds allowed to feed for 12 hours on rice treated with DRC-1339 and diluted 1:27 with untreated rice died. Under the same conditions, none of the 30 savannah sparrows, field sparrows (*Spizella pusilla*), and white-crowned sparrows died when allowed to feed for 12 hours on rice treated with DRC-1339 and diluted 1:27 with untreated rice.

However, DRC-1339 can be highly toxic to some non-target species, such as mourning doves, northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*), American robins (*Turdus migratorius*), and northern cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*). Estimates of the LD<sub>50</sub> of DRC-1339 are available for over 55 species of birds (Eisemann et al. 2003). The ingestion of DRC-1339 does not appear to impact avian reproduction until a bird ingests enough DRC-1339 that toxicity occurs (USDA 2001).

There have been concerns expressed about the study designs used to derive acute lethal doses of DRC-1339 for some bird species (Gamble et al. 2003). The appropriateness of study designs used to determine acute toxicity to pesticides has many views (Lipnick et al. 1995). The use of small sample sizes was the preferred method of screening for toxicity beginning as early as 1948 to minimize the number of animals involved (Dixon and Mood 1948). In 1982, the EPA established standardized methods for testing for acute toxicity that favored larger sample sizes (EPA 1982). More recently, regulatory agencies have again begun to debate the appropriate level of sample sizes in determining acute toxicity based on a growing public concern for the number of animals used for scientific purposes.

Based on those concerns, the Ecological Committee on FIFRA Risk Assessment was established by the EPA to provide guidance on ecological risk assessment methods (EPA 1999). The committee report recommended to the EPA that only one definitive LD<sub>50</sub> be used in toxicity screening either on the mallard

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<sup>11</sup>An LD<sub>50</sub> is the dosage in milligrams of material per kilogram of body weight required to cause death in 50% of a test population of a species.

or northern bobwhite and recommended further testing be conducted using the up-and-down method (EPA 1999). Many of the screening methods used for DRC-1339 prior to the establishment of EPA guidelines in 1982 used the up-and-down method of screening (Eisemann et al. 2003). A review of the literature shows that LD<sub>50</sub> research using smaller sample sizes conducted prior to EPA established guidelines are good indicators of LD<sub>50</sub> derived from study designs that were more rigorous (Bruce 1985, Bruce 1987, Lipnick et al. 1995). Therefore, acute and chronic toxicity data gathered prior to EPA guidance remain valid and to ignore the data would be inappropriate and wasteful of animal life (Eisemann et al. 2003).

To minimize risks to non-target species, WS' personnel would follow label requirements when using bait treated with DRC-1339. Many of the label requirements of the avicide DRC-1339 would reduce the risk of non-target animals finding and ingesting bait treated with DRC-1339. Before using bait treated with DRC-1339, WS' personnel must use untreated pre-bait at a potential location to monitor for target bird species use of the location, the acceptance of the target bird species to the potential bait-type, and to monitor for non-target use of the location. In addition, label requirements of DRC-1339 may restrict where WS' personnel could apply treated bait. For example, the label may prohibit the use of bait treated with DRC-1339 within 50 feet of permanent manmade or natural bodies of water to minimize risks of runoff and water contamination. In addition, the label may restrict the use of bait treated with DRC-1339 to specific locations, such as at commercial animal operations.

As required by the label, WS' personnel would pre-bait and monitor all potential bait sites for use by non-target animals as outlined in the pre-treatment observations section of the label. If WS' personnel observe non-target animals feeding on the pre-bait, WS' personnel would abandon those plots and no baiting would occur at those locations. Similarly, if the target species does not readily accept the pre-bait, WS would abandon that location. Once WS' personnel determine a location to be appropriate to place treated baits based on pre-treatment observations, they would place bait at the location.

Through pre-baiting, applicators can acclimate target birds to feed at certain locations at certain times. By acclimating target bird species to a feeding schedule, baiting can occur at specific times to ensure target bird species quickly consume bait placed, especially when large flocks of target species are present. The acclimation period conditions target bird species to be present at a location shortly after the applicator places treated bait. Therefore, acclimating target birds to a feeding schedule provides a higher likelihood that target bird species consume treated bait quickly after placing the bait at a location, which makes it unavailable to non-target animals. In addition, with many blackbird species, including crows, when present in large numbers, those species tend to exclude non-target animals from a feeding area due to their aggressive behavior and by the large number of conspecifics present at the location (Glahn et al. 1990). Therefore, risks to non-target species from consuming treated bait only occurs when treated bait is present at a bait location.

WS' personnel would mix treated bait with untreated bait per label requirements when placing bait at sites to minimize the likelihood of non-target animals finding and consuming treated bait. The bait type selected can also limit the likelihood that non-target species would consume treated bait because non-target species may not prefer some bait types. WS would not apply treated bait in areas where threatened or endangered species may consume the bait. Once WS' personnel place treated bait at sites, they would continue to monitor those sites daily to observe for non-target feeding activity. If WS' personnel observe non-target animals feeding on bait, WS' personnel would abandon those sites.

***DRC-1339 Secondary Hazards:*** Secondary risks associated with the use of DRC-1339 would primarily be associated with scavengers and predators feeding on birds that had died after ingesting DRC-1339. When ingested, studies show that target bird species rapidly metabolize and excrete DRC-1339. In European starlings administered DRC-1339 dosages well above the LD<sub>50</sub> for starlings, Cunningham et al.

(1979) found that European starlings had metabolized or excreted nearly 90% of the DRC-1339 dosage amount within 30 minutes of applying the dosage. Within 2.5 hours, Peoples and Apostolou (1967) detected more than 98% of a DRC-1339 dose delivered to starlings in their feces. Similar results may occur in other bird species (Eisemann et al. 2003). Once death occurs, DRC-1339 concentrations appear to be highest in the gastrointestinal tract of birds but other tissue of carcasses may also contain residues (Giri et al. 1976, Cunningham et al. 1979, Johnston et al. 1999) with residues diminishing more slowly in the kidneys (Eisemann et al. 2003). Kreps (1974) noted three American crows were found dead following the use of DRC-1339 to manage a local rock pigeon population that apparently died after ingesting treated bait from the crop of dead pigeons.

Most residue tests to detect DRC-1339 in tissues of birds that have died after ingesting DRC-1339 used dosages that far exceeded the known acute lethal oral dose for those species tested and the dosages far exceeded the level of DRC-1339 dosage that a target bird could ingest from treated bait. For example, Johnston et al. (1999) found DRC-1339 residues in the breast tissue of boat-tailed grackles using acute DRC-1339 doses ranging from 40 to 863 mg/kg. The acute lethal oral dose of DRC-1339 for boat-tailed grackles is  $\leq 1$  mg/kg (Eisemann et al. 2003). In those boat-tailed grackles consuming a trace of DRC-1339 up to 22 mg/kg, no DRC-1339 residues were found in the gastrointestinal track nor found in breast tissue (Johnston et al. 1999). Cunningham et al. (1979) fed carcasses of birds that died from DRC-1339 to raptors and scavenger mammals for 30 to 200 days with no symptoms of secondary poisoning observed. Cunningham et al. (1979) concluded that cats, owls, and magpies would be at risk only after exclusively eating starlings killed with DRC-1339 for 30 continuous days. Similarly, the risk to mammalian predators from feeding on birds killed with DRC-1339 appears to be low (Johnston et al. 1999). WS would retrieve all dead birds to the extent possible following treatment with DRC-1339 to minimize secondary hazards associated with scavengers feeding on bird carcasses.

The risks associated with non-target animal exposure to DRC-1339 baits have been evaluated in rice fields in Louisiana (Glahn et al. 1990, Cummings et al. 1992, Glahn and Wilson 1992), poultry and cattle feedlots in several western states (Besser 1964, Ford 1967, Royall et al. 1967), ripening sunflower fields in North Dakota (Linz et al. 2000), and around blackbird staging areas in east-central South Dakota (Knutson 1998, Smith 1999, Custer et al. 2003). Smith (1999) used field personnel and dogs to search for dead non-target animals but did not find any non-target animal carcasses that exhibited histological signs consistent with DRC-1339 poisoning. However, DRC-1339 is a slow-acting avicide and thus, some birds could have moved to areas not searched by the study participants before dying.

DRC-1339 is highly toxic to aquatic invertebrates. Therefore, the DRC-1339 label prohibits applying bait treated with DRC-1339 within 50 feet of permanent manmade or natural bodies of water. In addition, WS would not use bait treated with DRC-1339 when water runoff is likely to occur. WS would not apply treated bait directly to water, to areas where surface water was present, or to intertidal areas below the mean high-water mark. WS would not contaminate water by the cleaning of equipment or disposal of waste.

***DRC-1339 Environmental Degradation:*** DRC-1339 is typically very unstable in the environment and degrades quickly when exposed to sunlight, heat, and ultraviolet radiation. The half-life of DRC-1339 in biologically active soil is approximately 25 hours with the identified metabolites having a low toxicity (EPA 1995). DRC-1339 is also highly soluble in water, does not hydrolyze, and photodegrades quickly in water with a half-life estimated at 6.3 hours in summer, 9.2 hours in spring sunlight, and 41 hours during winter (EPA 1995). DRC-1339 binds tightly with soil and has low mobility (EPA 1995).

***Risks of Crows Caching Bait Treated with DRC-1339:*** Additional concerns occur regarding the risks to non-target wildlife associated with crows caching bait treated with DRC-1339. Crows may cache surplus food. Crows generally cache surplus food by making a small hole in the soil using their bill, by pushing

the food item under the substrate, or by covering food items with debris (Verbeek and Caffrey 2020). Distances traveled from where crows gather a food item to where they cache the item varies. Kilham (1989) found that crows could travel up to 100 meters to cache food while Cristol (2001, 2005) found that crows could travel up to 2 kilometers to cache food. Caching activities appear to occur throughout the year but may increase when food supplies are low. Therefore, the potential for crows to carry treated baits from a bait site to surrounding areas exists as part of their food caching behavior.

For risks to occur from non-target animals finding bait treated with DRC-1339 that a crow cached a non-target animal would have to locate the cached bait and the bait-type used would have to be palatable or selected for by the non-target wildlife. In addition, the non-target animal consuming the treated bait would have to consume a lethal dose from a single bait. If the non-target animal did not ingest a lethal dose by eating a single treated cached bait, the non-target animal would have to ingest several treated baits (either from cached bait or from the bait site) to obtain a lethal dose.

Given the best environmental fate information available and the unlikelihood of a non-target animal locating enough treated bait(s) sufficient to produce lethal effects, the risks to non-target animals from crows caching treated bait would be low. When baiting, WS' personnel would mix treated baits with untreated bait to minimize non-target hazards directly at the bait site and to minimize the likelihood of target species developing bait aversion. Because WS' personnel would dilute treated bait, often times up to one treated bait for every 25 untreated baits, the likelihood of a crow selecting treated bait and then caching the bait is further reduced.

#### *Effects on non-target animal populations from unintentional take*

As discussed previously, the potential effects on non-target animal populations associated with the use of non-lethal methods would be similar to those potential effects discussed for Alternative 2. Similarly, the potential effects associated with WS providing technical assistance would be similar to those potential effects discussed for Alternative 3. Of primary concern would be WS' use of lethal methods because those methods could result in the unintentional death of a non-target animal, which could potentially affect the populations of non-target animals.

However, WS does not anticipate the unintentional lethal removal of non-target animals to occur at such a frequency or intensity that would affect the population of a non-target species. No lethal removal of non-target animals has occurred by WS during prior activities to manage bird damage in the state. If WS' implements Alternative 1, WS' anticipates the unintentional lethal removal of non-target animals during activities to reduce damage or threats to human safety associated with birds in North Dakota to be extremely low to non-existent. WS would continue to monitor the activities conducted to ensure those activities or methodologies used in bird damage management do not adversely affect the populations of non-target animals. Methods available to resolve and prevent bird damage or threats when employed by trained, knowledgeable personnel can be selective for target species. WS would annually report to the USFWS and/or the NDGFD any non-target bird take to ensure those agencies have the opportunity to consider take by WS as part of management objectives.

#### *WS' impact on biodiversity*

WS does not attempt to eradicate any species of native wildlife in the state. WS operates in accordance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations enacted to ensure species viability. WS' personnel would use or recommend the use of methods that target individual birds or groups of birds identified as causing damage or posing a threat of damage. Any reduction of a local population is frequently temporary because immigration from adjacent areas or natural reproduction replaces those birds that an entity removes. WS operates on a small percentage of the land area in North Dakota and would only

target those birds identified as causing damage or posing a threat. Therefore, bird damage management activities conducted pursuant to any of the alternatives would not adversely affect biodiversity in the state.

Implementation of Alternative 1 would also provide WS with the widest range of methods to address requests for assistance associated with reducing risks of certain target bird species feeding on other wildlife or competing with other wildlife for resources. For example, American crows often feed on the eggs, nestlings, and fledglings of other bird species, including threatened or endangered species. Thus, WS could receive requests for assistance to manage predation risks on threatened or endangered species associated with American crows or other predatory bird species.

#### *Analysis of risks to threatened and endangered species*

WS would make special efforts to avoid jeopardizing threatened or endangered species through biological evaluations of potential effects and the establishment of special restrictions or minimization measures through consultation with the USFWS and/or the National Marine Fisheries Service. The ESA states that all federal agencies “...shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened species and shall utilize their authorities in furtherance of the purposes of the Act” [Sec. 7(a)(1)]. WS conducts consultations with the USFWS and/or the National Marine Fisheries Service pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA to ensure compliance. WS also conducts consultations to ensure that “any action authorized, funded or carried out by such an agency...is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species...Each agency shall use the best scientific and commercial data available” [Sec. 7(a)(2)].

Some of the bird species addressed in this EA occur statewide in North Dakota and are present in the state throughout the year. If WS implements Alternative 1, WS could conduct activities to manage damage caused by those bird species when an entity requests such assistance. Therefore, WS could conduct activities to manage damage in areas where threatened or endangered species occur. However, no take of threatened or endangered species by WS has occurred previously in the state during the implementation of activities and the use of methods to manage the damage that birds cause. During the development of this EA, WS reviewed the current list of species designated as threatened or endangered in North Dakota as determined by the USFWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service. WS conducted a review of potential impacts of implementing Alternative 1 on each of those species designated as threatened or endangered in the state by the USFWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service (see Table C.1 in Appendix C). The evaluation took into consideration the direct and indirect effects of implementing Alternative 1 to alleviate damage caused by birds. WS reviewed the status, critical habitats designations, and current known locations of those species. As part of the review process, WS prepared and submitted a biological evaluation to the USFWS as part of the consultation process pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA.

Based on the use pattern of the methods and the locations where WS could implement damage management activities, the implementation of Alternative 1 would have no effect on those threatened or endangered species in North Dakota under the jurisdiction of the National Marine Fisheries Service, including any designated critical habitat. In addition, based on the use patterns of methods currently available and based on current life history information for those species under the jurisdiction of the USFWS, WS has made a no effect determination for several species currently listed in the state (see Table C.1 in Appendix C). For several species listed within the state, WS has determined that the proposed activities “may affect” those species but those effects would be solely beneficial, insignificant, or discountable, which would warrant a “not likely to adversely affect” determination. Based on those determinations, WS initiated informal consultation with the USFWS for those species that a “may affect, not likely to adversely affect” determination was made (see Table C.1 in Appendix C). The USFWS concurred with WS’ determination that activities conducted pursuant to the proposed action would not likely adversely affect those species (D. Becker, USFWS, pers. comm. 2020).

The USFWS has also designated critical habitat in North Dakota for some of the species listed as threatened or endangered. Table C.2 in Appendix C provides a list of those species with critical habitat designated in North Dakota along with WS' effects determination. WS has determined implementation of Alternative 1 would have no effect on any critical habitat designated in North Dakota. WS' based the effects determinations on a review of the activities that WS could conduct if WS implemented Alternative 1. The USFWS concurred with WS' effects determination for critical habitats designated in North Dakota (D. Becker, USFWS pers. comm. 2020). WS would continue to review the species listed as threatened or endangered by the USFWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service and would continue to consult with the USFWS and/or the National Marine Fisheries Service as appropriate. North Dakota does not designate threatened or endangered species separate from those species listed as threatened or endangered in North Dakota pursuant to the ESA.

***Alternative 2 – WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota using only non-lethal methods***

Implementation of Alternative 2 would require WS to only recommend and use non-lethal methods to manage and prevent damage associated with target bird species. WS would provide technical assistance and direct operational assistance by recommending and/or using only non-lethal methods. Using the WS Decision Model, WS' personnel would consider the potential effects to non-target animals from the potential use of non-lethal methods when formulating a management strategy for each request for assistance. Non-lethal methods have the potential to cause adverse effects to non-target animals primarily through live-capture, exclusion, and dispersal.

If WS implemented Alternative 2, the possible negative physiological and/or behavioral effects that negative stimuli could cause are a concern, which could reduce the fitness of a non-target animal, or the ability of a non-target animal to survive, especially if the exposure to the stressor were chronic. The stress caused during the use of non-lethal methods could negatively affect the health of an animal, interfere with the raising of young, and/or increase energy needs.

***DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ON NON-TARGET ANIMAL POPULATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE 2***

In general, the use of non-lethal methods to disperse, exclude, or capture target birds from areas would have no effect on the populations of non-target animals because those methods generally would not occur with such frequency and would not occur at an intensity level that would cause adverse effects. Therefore, WS does not anticipate direct or indirect effects to occur to any non-target species. Based on the use pattern of methods and the activities that WS could conduct to manage damage or threats of damage caused by target bird species, WS does not anticipate cumulative effects to occur to any non-target species. Activities conducted by WS would not occur with such frequency and would not occur at an intensity level that would cause cumulative adverse effects. WS has received no reports or documented any cumulative effects associated with the use of non-lethal methods from previous activities associated with managing damage caused by target bird species in the state that WS conducted.

***Risks to non-target animals associated with available methods***

Section I in Appendix B describes the non-lethal methods that would be available for WS' personnel to use if WS implemented Alternative 2. The potential effects associated with specific methods or a category of methods occurs below.

➤ *Human Presence*

For the effects analysis, human presence will include physical actions that WS could use to haze target bird species and consideration of WS' employees conducting activities to manage bird damage in the state. Like the intent of many non-lethal methods, the presence of people and the physical actions of clapping, waving, or yelling can disperse birds from an area through auditory and visual cues. With many visual and auditory methods intended to disperse animals from a location, the primary concern would be the possible negative physiological and/or behavioral effects that negative stimuli could cause, which could reduce the fitness of a non-target animal or the ability of a non-target animal to survive, especially if the exposure to the stressor was chronic. Activities conducted by WS can involve repeated visits to the same area until WS and/or another entity reduces damage or threats of damage. In some cases, such as airports, WS' employees may be present in areas multiple times a day and on a regular basis. However, like other visual and auditory stimuli, non-target animals often habituate to the presence of people, especially in areas where non-target animals frequently encounter people, such as urban areas. In addition, non-target animals are likely to return to the area once WS' personnel are no longer present. The presence of WS' personnel would not occur at a magnitude or intensity level that would cause harm to a non-target animal by preventing them from accessing essential resources (e.g., food sources, habitat).

➤ *Modifying Cultural Practices*

When providing technical assistance, WS could recommend that people requesting assistance modify behaviors that may be contributing to bird damage or threats of damage. However, in those cases, the entity experiencing damage or the threat of damage would be responsible for implementing the recommendations made by WS' personnel.

➤ *Limited Habitat Modification*

WS could also recommend limited modification of habitat in some situations, such as pruning trees to make them less attractive to roosting blackbird species. In those cases, the entity experiencing damage or the threat of damage would be responsible for implementing the recommendations made by WS' personnel. WS' employees would recommend habitat modifications in limited circumstances where modifications could result in the dispersal of target bird species from an area or make an area less attractive to those species. WS' employees would not recommend habitat modifications over large areas and would not recommend modifications to the extent that would result in the removal or modification of large areas of habitat. The use of habitat modifications would generally be restricted to urban areas, airports, industrial parks, office complexes, and other areas where human activities are high. WS' personnel would not recommend habitat modification at a magnitude or intensity level that would cause harm to non-target animals by reducing available habitat.

➤ *Supplemental Feeding and Lure Crops*

Providing a supplemental food source and/or planting and maintaining lure crops could be methods that WS recommends to entities experiencing damage or the threat of damage associated with birds. Similar to other recommendations that WS could make when providing technical assistance, the entity requesting assistance would be responsible for providing a supplemental food source and/or planting and maintaining lure crops. WS' employees would not recommend the use of supplemental feeding or the use of lure crops over large areas and would not recommend modifying habitat to plant lure crops to the extent that would result in the removal or modification of large areas of habitat. The use of lure crops are likely to occur in areas already modified for agriculture production.



➤ *Exclusion Devices*

Exclusionary devices can be effective in preventing access to resources in certain circumstances. The primary exclusionary methods are netting and overhead lines but could include surface coverings and fencing. The use of exclusionary methods may include floating plastic balls or wire grids across water retention ponds to prevent birds from using the ponds because they pose a threat to aircraft from a bird strike. Exclusion methods could include using overhead wires in outdoor eating areas at a restaurant to discourage birds from attempting to take food from customers. The use of exclusionary methods is primarily associated with areas modified by people because birds are posing a threat to human health and safety or causing damage to a resource valued by people, such as buildings, infrastructure, turf, and agricultural commodities. Given the expense of excluding birds from large areas, exclusion methods are often restricted to small areas around high value resources (e.g., netting over a small grain research plot). Therefore, purchase and installation of exclusion devices would primarily occur by the entity experiencing damage or threats of damage. In addition, exclusion methods may also have limited application because their use could restrict people's access to the resource. For example, netting erected to prevent birds from nesting on a bridge could prevent access to people that inspect the safety of the bridge. Any exclusionary device erected to prevent access of target species also potentially excludes other non-target species. However, WS' personnel and other entities would not employ exclusionary devices over large geographical areas or use those devices at such an intensity level that essential resources (e.g., food sources, habitat) would be unavailable for extended durations or over such a wide geographical scope that long-term adverse effects would occur to a species' population.

➤ *Visual Scaring Techniques*

Several visual scaring methods would be available for WS' personnel to recommend and/or use to manage damage. The intent associated with the use of visual dispersal methods would be to elicit a flight response by scaring target birds from an area where damage was occurring or where damage could occur. Of concern are the possible negative physiological and/or behavioral effects that negative stimuli could cause, which could reduce the fitness of non-target animals, or the ability of non-target animals to survive, especially if the exposure to the stressor was chronic. The stress from dispersal methods could negatively affect the health of an animal, interfere with the raising of young, and/or increase energy needs. However, for effects to occur a non-target animal would have to encounter a visual dispersal method and the resulting visual stimuli would have to elicit a negative response. Like other non-lethal methods, WS' personnel would not employ visual dispersal methods over large geographical areas or use those devices at such an intensity level that essential resources (e.g., food sources, habitat) would be unavailable for extended durations or over such a wide geographical scope that long-term adverse effects would occur to a species' population.

➤ *Trained Dogs*

WS could use and/or recommend the use of trained dogs to disperse waterfowl in areas where they are causing damage or posing a threat of damage. Only authorized WS' personnel can use trained dogs and personnel can only use trained dogs to conduct specific functions. Pursuant to WS Directive 2.445, "*WS personnel shall control and monitor their trained dogs at all times. A trained dog is considered controlled when the dog responds to the command(s) of WS personnel by exhibiting the desired or intended behavior as directed.*" Therefore, WS' personnel would use dogs that are proficient in the skills necessary to disperse waterfowl in a manner that was responsive to the handler's commands. To ensure proper monitoring and control, WS' personnel use various methods and equipment, such as muzzles, electronic training collars, harnesses, leashes, voice commands, global positioning system collars, and telemetry collars. Because WS' personnel would only use trained dogs that are responsive to commands, WS' personnel can call back dogs if WS' personnel determine the dogs begin approaching a non-target

species. Therefore, the use of trained dogs would not have adverse effects on the populations of non-target species.

➤ *Electronic Hazing Devices, Pyrotechnics, Propane Cannons*

Like the use of visual dispersal methods, the intent with the use of auditory dispersal methods, such as electronic hazing devices, pyrotechnics, and propane cannons, is to illicit a flight response in target bird species by mimicking distress calls, producing a novel noise, or producing an adverse noise. Of concern are the possible negative physiological and/or behavioral effects that negative stimuli could cause, which could reduce the fitness of non-target animals, or the ability of non-target animals to survive, especially if the exposure to the stressor was chronic. The stress from dispersal methods could negatively affect the health of an animal, interfere with the raising of young, and/or increase energy needs. However, for effects to occur, non-target animals would have to be within hearing distance at the time WS' personnel used an auditory method and the resulting noise stimuli would have to elicit a negative response. Like other non-lethal methods, WS' personnel would not use those methods over large geographical areas or use those methods at such an intensity level that essential resources (*e.g.*, food sources, habitat) would be unavailable for extended durations or over such a wide geographical scope that long-term adverse effects would occur to a species' population.

➤ *Paintballs*

As described on product labeling and Safety Data Sheets, paintballs are non-toxic to people and do not pose an environmental hazard. However, consumption may cause toxicosis in dogs, which is potentially fatal without supportive veterinary treatment (Donaldson 2003). Although unknown, Donaldson (2003) speculated there is an osmotic diuretic effect resulting in an abnormal electrolyte and fluid balance in dogs that consume paintballs. Most affected dogs recovered within 24 hours (Donaldson 2003).

➤ *High-pressure Water Spray*

WS would primarily use high-pressure water spray to remove inactive nests on bridges, buildings, and other structures. WS could occasionally use high-pressure water spray to disperse roosts of birds in urban settings. WS would use high-pressure water spray in situations where other methods were ineffective or where the noise produced by other methods was prohibited or of concern. Requests for assistance associated with roosting birds often occur in areas where the fecal droppings of birds are posing a threat to human health and safety, causing property damage, and are esthetically displeasing. Those roosting areas are often associated with residential and commercial areas. Some concern could arise from water runoff during activities. During activities, water would soak into the soil, runoff into nearby streams, enter a municipal sewer system, and/or enter into a municipal storm water system.

WS does not anticipate effects to non-target animals would occur from removing inactive nests because nests or parts of nests are likely to fall after birds abandon the nests at the end of the nesting season as nests deteriorate from weather and other natural processes. In addition, WS often attempts to remove nests as a bird is constructing the nest, which would also limit the amount of debris falling under the location of the nest or nests. WS does not anticipate removing nests using high-pressure water spray with any frequency or intensity that would result in effects. WS does not anticipate effects to non-target animals would occur because WS would not introduce anything other than water and nesting materials into the soil, streams, sewer systems, and/or storm water systems, which is a process that occurs normally during rain events and from the natural deterioration of nests.

➤ *Live traps*

Live traps (*e.g.*, cage traps, pigeon traps, decoy traps) generally allow a target bird species to enter inside the trap but prevent the bird from exiting the trap. When using live-traps, WS' personnel generally use bait and/or a lure to attract target bird species and to encourage a target bird or birds to enter the trap. Live traps have the potential to capture non-target species if they enter inside the trap. The placement of live-traps in areas where target species are active and the use of target-specific attractants would likely minimize the capture of non-target animals. WS' personnel would attend live-traps appropriately, which would allow them to release any non-target animals captured unharmed. For example, under the blackbird depredation order, when using a live-trap to capture blackbirds, WS' personnel would check live-traps at least once every day (see 50 CFR 21.43(f)). Therefore, WS' personnel could release any non-target animals captured in live-traps.

➤ *Nets*

Nets (*e.g.*, cannon nets, mist nets, bow nets, dipping nets) restrain birds once captured and are live-capture methods. Nets have the potential to capture non-target species. Net placement in areas where target species are active and the use of target-specific attractants would likely minimize the capture of non-target animals. WS' personnel would attend nets appropriately, which would allow them to release any non-target animals captured unharmed.

Nets could include the use of net guns, net launchers, cannon/rocket nets, drop nets, hand nets, bow nets, and mist nets. Nets are virtually selective for target individuals because application would occur by attending personnel or WS' personnel would check nets frequently to address any live-captured animals. Therefore, WS' personnel could release any non-target animals captured using nets on site. WS' personnel would handle any non-target animals captured using in such a manner as to ensure the survivability of the animal if released. Even though live-capture does occur from those methods, the potential for death of a target or non-target animal while being restrained or released does exist, primarily from being struck by cannon or rocket assemblies during deployment. The likelihood of cannon or rocket assemblies striking a non-target animal is extremely low. The risk is likely extremely low because a non-target animal must be present when WS' personnel activate the net and the non-target animal must be in a position where the assemblies strike the animal. WS' personnel would position nets so the net envelops target birds upon deployment, which would minimize the risk of assemblies striking a non-target animal. When using nets, WS' personnel would often use a bait to attract target species and to concentrate target species in a specific area to ensure the net completely envelops target birds. Therefore, WS' personnel could abandon sites if non-target use of the area was high or could refrain from firing the net at a time when non-target animals were present.

➤ *Modified Padded Foothold Trap*

As discussed in Appendix B, WS would primarily use modified padded foothold traps on top of poles at airport and military facilities to live-capture raptors that were posing an aircraft strike risk. Elevating modified padded foothold traps on poles to live-capture raptors at airports would limit risk of exposure for many non-target animals. WS could occasionally place modified padded foothold traps on the ground or submerge the trap in shallow water to live-capture larger bird species, such as white pelicans. WS would place modified padded foothold traps in areas frequently used by the target bird species. When using modified padded foothold traps, WS' personnel would monitor the traps frequently. WS' personnel would remove the modified padded foothold trap or disengage the trap to prevent capture when not in use. Elevating a trap on a pole, placing traps in areas frequently used by a target bird species, and monitoring the trap would minimize risks of non-target animals encountering and triggering a trap.

➤ *Nest Destruction*

WS' personnel would remove nests by hand, hand tools, or by high-power water spray, which would allow WS' personnel to identify the nest to bird species prior to removal. WS' personnel have experience and receive training in wildlife identification, which allows them to identify individual species. WS' personnel would be familiar with the nests of a target species before destroying a nest; therefore, it is highly unlikely WS' personnel would inadvertently destroy the nest of a non-target species.

➤ *Translocation*

WS often uses translocation when damage or threats of damage occur during the migratory periods when many bird species do not have well defined territories as birds migrate to and/or through the state. WS would primarily translocate raptor species and primarily when those species present an aircraft strike risk at airports. WS does not anticipate live capturing and releasing target species to have any effect on non-target species. Although raptor species translocated to other areas could feed on prey species, Schafer et al. (2002) found that the majority of translocated red-tailed hawks dispersed from the release site within five days of translocation indicating that inundation of discharged species in a release area is not a likely consequence.

➤ *Aircraft*

Low-level flights, including the use of UAVs, have the potential to disturb wildlife. Aerial operations could be an important method for surveying, monitoring, and tracking birds in North Dakota. Aircraft play an important role in the management of various wildlife species for many agencies. Resource management agencies rely on low flying aircraft to monitor the status of many animal populations, including large mammals (Lancia et al. 2000), birds of prey (Fuller and Mosher 1987), waterfowl (USFWS 2019), and colonial waterbirds (Speich 1986). Low-level flights also occur when entities use aircraft to track animal movements by radio telemetry (Gilmer et al. 1981, Samuel and Fuller 1996).

A number of studies have looked at responses of various wildlife species to aircraft overflights. The National Park Service (1995) reviewed the effects of aircraft overflights on wildlife and suggested that adverse effects could occur to certain species. Some species will frequently or at least occasionally show an adverse response to even minor overflights. However, it appears that the more serious potential adverse effects occur when overflights are chronic (*i.e.*, they occur daily or more often over long periods). Chronic exposures often involve areas near commercial airports and military flight training facilities. Aerial operations conducted by WS rarely occur in the same areas on a daily basis, and aircraft used by WS actually spend little time flying over those particular areas.

The effects on wildlife from military-type aircraft have been studied extensively (Air National Guard 1997) and were found to have no expected adverse effects on wildlife. In general, the greatest potential for impacts to occur exists when overflights are frequent, such as hourly and over many days that could represent “*chronic*” exposure. Chronic exposure situations generally involve areas near commercial airports and military flight training facilities. Even then, many wildlife species often habituate to overflights, which would naturally minimize any potential adverse effects where such flights occur on a regular basis. Therefore, aircraft used by WS should have far less potential to cause any disturbance to wildlife than military aircraft because the military aircraft produce much louder noise and would be flown over certain training areas many more times per year, and yet were found to have no expected adverse effects on wildlife (Air National Guard 1997).

Examples of species or species groups that people have studied with regard to the issue of aircraft-generated disturbance are as follows:

**WATERBIRDS AND WATERFOWL:** Low-level overflights of two to three minutes in duration by a fixed-wing airplane and a helicopter produced no “drastic” disturbance of tree-nesting colonial waterbirds, and, in 90% of the observations, the individual birds either showed no reaction or merely looked up (Kushlan 1979). Belanger and Bedard (1989, 1990) observed responses of greater snow geese (*Anser caerulescens atlantica*) to human disturbance on a sanctuary area and estimated the energetic cost of such disturbance. Belanger and Bedard (1989, 1990) observed that disturbance rates exceeding two per hour reduced goose use of the sanctuary by 50% the following day. They also observed that about 40% of the disturbances caused interruptions in feeding that would require an estimated 32% increase in nighttime feeding to compensate for the energy lost. They concluded that managers should strictly regulate overflights of sanctuary areas to avoid adverse effects. Conomy et al. (1998) quantified behavioral responses of wintering American black ducks (*Anas rubripes*), American wigeon (*Mareca americana*), gadwall, and American green-winged teal (*A. crecca carolinensis*) exposed to low-level military aircraft and found that only a small percentage (2%) of the birds reacted to the disturbance. They concluded that such disturbance was not adversely affecting the daily activities of the species. Thus, there is little to no potential for any adverse effects on waterbirds and waterfowl.

**RAPTORS:** The Air National Guard analyzed and summarized the effects of overflight studies conducted by numerous federal and state government agencies and private organizations (Air National Guard 1997). Those studies determined that military aircraft noise initially startled raptors, but negative responses were brief and did not have an observed effect on productivity (see Ellis 1981, Fraser et al. 1985, Lamp 1989, United States Forest Service 1992 as cited in Air National Guard 1997). A study conducted on the impacts of overflights to bald eagles suggested that the eagles were not sensitive to this type of disturbance (Fraser et al. 1985). During the study, observations were made of more than 850 overflights of active eagle nests. Only two eagles rose out of either their incubation or brooding postures. This study also showed that perched adults were flushed only 10% of the time during aircraft overflights. Evidence also suggested that golden eagles were not highly sensitive to noise or other aircraft disturbances (Ellis 1981, Holthuijzen et al. 1990). Finally, one other study found that eagles were particularly resistant to disturbances flushing them from their nests (see Awbrey and Bowles 1990 as cited in Air National Guard 1997). Therefore, there is considerable evidence that overflights during aerial operations would not adversely affect eagles.

Mexican spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) (Delaney et al. 1999) did not flush when chain saws and helicopters were greater than 110 yards away; however, owls flushed to these disturbances at closer distances and were more prone to flush from chain saws than helicopters. Owls returned to their pre-disturbance behavior 10 to 15 minutes following the event and researchers observed no differences in nest or nestling success (Delaney et al. 1999), which indicates that aircraft flights did not result in adverse effects on owl reproduction or survival.

Andersen et al. (1989) conducted low-level helicopter overflights directly at 35 red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) nests and concluded their observations supported the hypothesis that red-tailed hawks habituate to low level flights during the nesting period because results showed similar nesting success between hawks subjected to overflights and those that were not. White and Thurow (1985) did not evaluate the effects of aircraft overflights but found that ferruginous hawks (*B. regalis*) were sensitive to certain types of ground-based human disturbance to the point that reproductive success may be adversely affected. However, military jets that flew low over the study area during training exercises did not appear to bother the hawks, nor did the hawks become alarmed when the researchers flew within 100 feet in a small fixed-wing aircraft (White and Thurow 1985). White and Sherrod (1973) suggested that disturbance of raptors by aerial surveys with helicopters may be less than that caused by approaching nests on foot. Ellis (1981) reported that five species of hawks, two falcons (*Falco* spp.), and golden

eagles were “*incredibly tolerant*” of overflights by military fighter jets, and observed that, although birds frequently exhibited alarm, negative responses were brief and the overflights never limited productivity.

Grubb et al. (2010) evaluated golden eagle response to civilian and military (Apache AH-64) helicopter flights in northern Utah. Study results indicated that golden eagles exposed to flights ranging from 100 to 800 meters along, towards, and from behind occupied cliff nests did not adversely affect eagle courtship, nesting, and fledglings, indicating that no special management restrictions were required in the study location.

The above studies indicate raptors were relatively unaffected by aircraft overflights, including those by military aircraft that produce much higher noise levels. Therefore, aerial operations would have little or no potential to affect raptors adversely.

**PASSERINES:** Reproductive losses have been reported in one study of small territorial passerines (“*perching*” birds that included sparrows, blackbirds) after exposure to low altitude overflights (see Mancini et al. 1988 as cited in Air National Guard 1997), but natural mortality rates of both adults and young are high and variable for most species. The research review indicated passerine birds cannot be driven any great distance from a favored food source by a non-specific disturbance, such as military aircraft noise, which indicated quieter noise would have even less effect. Passerines avoid intermittent or unpredictable sources of disturbance more than predictable ones but return rapidly to feed or roost once the disturbance ceases (Gladwin et al. 1988, United States Forest Service 1992). Those studies and reviews indicated there is little or no potential for aerial operations to cause adverse effects on passerine bird species.

**DOMESTIC ANIMALS AND SMALL MAMMALS:** A number of studies with laboratory animals (*e.g.*, rodents [Borg 1979]) and domestic animals (*e.g.*, sheep [Ames and Arehart 1972]) have demonstrated that they can habituate to noise. Long-term lab studies of small mammals exposed intermittently to high levels of noise demonstrate no changes in longevity. The physiological “*fight or flight*” response, while marked, does not appear to have any long-term health consequences on small mammals (Air National Guard 1997). Small mammals habituate, although with difficulty, to sound levels greater than 100 dbA (United States Forest Service 1992).

Information on the effects of aerial overflights demonstrates the relative tolerance most wildlife species have of overflights, even those that involve noise at high decibels, such as from military aircraft. In general, the greatest potential for impacts to occur exists when overflights are frequent, such as hourly and over many days that could represent “*chronic*” exposure. Chronic exposure situations generally involve areas near commercial airports and military flight training facilities. Even then, many wildlife species often habituate to overflights, which would naturally minimize any potential adverse effects where such flights occur on a regular basis. Therefore, aircraft used by WS should have far less potential to cause any disturbance to wildlife than military aircraft because the military aircraft produce much louder noise and would be flown over certain training areas many more times per year, and yet were found to have no expected adverse effects on wildlife (Air National Guard 1997).

WS would only conduct aerial activities on a very small percentage of the land area of the state, which indicates that WS would not even expose most wildlife to aerial overflights. Further lessening the potential for any adverse effects would be that such flights occur infrequently throughout the year.

#### ➤ *Unmanned Aerial Vehicles*

WS could use UAVs (*e.g.*, drones) to locate and haze target bird species. WS could use UAVs to elicit a flight response by scaring target birds from an area where damage was occurring or where damage could occur. WS could also use UAVs with the intent of locating or monitoring individuals or groups of birds

and their associated nests or eggs. Of concern are the possible negative physiological and/or behavioral effects that negative stimuli could cause, which could reduce the fitness of non-target animals, or the ability of non-target animals to survive, especially if the exposure to the stressor was chronic. The stress from dispersal methods could negatively affect the health of an animal, interfere with the raising of young, and/or increase energy needs. However, for effects to occur non-target animals would have to visually encounter UAVs and/or be within hearing distance at the time WS' personnel used UAVs and the resulting visual and/or auditory stimuli would have to elicit a negative response. Like other non-lethal methods, WS' personnel would not employ UAVs over large geographical areas or use UAVs at such an intensity level that essential resources (e.g., food sources, habitat) would be unavailable for extended durations or over such a wide geographical scope that long-term adverse effects would occur to a species' population.

➤ *Anthraquinone and Methyl Anthranilate*

Anthraquinone and methyl anthranilate are available as chemical repellents to discourage or disrupt particular behaviors of wildlife. Anthraquinone naturally occurs in some plant species, such as aloe. Methyl anthranilate naturally occurs in grapes and often occurs as a flavor additive in food, candy, and soft drinks. Taste repellents containing anthraquinone or methyl anthranilate are commercially available and available for use by the public. Products containing anthraquinone or methyl anthranilate are liquids that people apply directly to susceptible resources and require target bird species to ingest the product. Applying products containing anthraquinone or methyl anthranilate to a food source, such as turf, often makes the food source unpalatable to a target bird species, such as waterfowl. Some commercially available products allow the use of methyl anthranilate in fogging applications that act as an olfactory repellent. The use of methyl anthranilate in fogging applications can disperse target bird species in areas where they congregate in large numbers, such as a blackbird roost at an industrial company. When inhaled, the methyl anthranilate fog acts as a mild irritant to birds (see further discussion in Appendix B). Methyl anthranilate is slightly toxic to fish and aquatic invertebrates. The EPA (2015) stated, “*No risk to the environment are expected when [anthraquinone and methyl anthranilate] are used according to the label instructions*”.

Because repellents containing anthraquinone and methyl anthranilate are general use pesticides that the public can purchase and use, WS may recommend their use to people when providing technical assistance. WS would infrequently use repellents containing anthraquinone or methyl anthranilate when providing direct operational assistance. WS' personnel would only recommend and/or use those chemical repellents registered with the EPA pursuant to the FIFRA and registered with the NDDA for use in the state. People, including WS' personnel, are required to follow the product label when using repellents. Product labels for the repellents have use restrictions to limit exposure of non-target wildlife. WS would follow label requirements when using repellents containing anthraquinone or methyl anthranilate. WS does not anticipate using repellents containing anthraquinone or methyl anthranilate with any frequency or at an intensity level that their use would affect threatened or endangered species.

➤ *Mesurool*

Mesurool is the commercial name of a product that contains the active ingredient methiocarb. The EPA has approved the use of mesurool to condition crows not to feed on the eggs of threatened or endangered species or other species designated to be in need of special protection. However, WS has not registered mesurool with the NDDA for use in North Dakota. WS would not use mesurool until and unless the NDDA approved the use of mesurool in the state.

Mesurool is a powder that WS' personnel would mix with water and the liquid contents of eggs. Once mixed, WS' personnel would inject the mixture inside raw eggs that are similar in size and appearance to

the eggs of the threatened or endangered species that WS is trying to protect from predation by crows. WS' personnel would place treated eggs inside "dummy" nests (*i.e.*, nests created by WS' personnel or others that are similar in appearance to nests constructed by the threatened or endangered species). WS would place treated eggs in the area where the protected species nests approximately three weeks prior to the onset of egg laying to condition crows to avoid feeding on eggs.

Mesurool has a high acute toxicity to birds, mammals, fish, and aquatic invertebrates. Applying mesurool directly inside eggs that are of a similar appearance to eggs that crows are feeding on would primarily restrict risks to non-target animals that select for the egg baits. Use requirements of mesurool limit the number of treated eggs per acre that WS could use. WS' personnel must check treated eggs at intervals of 24 hours or less and WS' personnel must periodically observe the treated area to monitor for responses of target crow species, nesting birds, and non-target species. WS' personnel would set up an observation blind and/or video monitoring equipment near each treatment area to monitor the responses of target crow species, nesting birds, and non-target species. In addition, WS' personnel would follow the removal and disposal process for unconsumed or unused treated eggs. Adherence to the label requirements of mesurool would ensure threats to non-target animals would be minimal.

➤ *Nicarbazin*

Commercial products are available that contain the active ingredient nicarbazin that, when ingested by target bird species, can reduce the hatchability of eggs laid. Nicarbazin is the only reproductive inhibitor currently registered with the EPA for certain bird species and the only reproductive inhibitor approved for use in North Dakota by the NDDA. In North Dakota, nicarbazin is currently only available to inhibit egg hatching in localized populations of rock pigeons, European starlings, red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, common grackles, and brown-headed cowbirds, which is available as a general use commercial product available to the general public under the trade name OvoControl® P. Use restrictions of OvoControl® P limit its use to rooftops or other flat paved or concrete surfaces and limited to use in secured areas with limited public access. Nicarbazin is available for use on rooftops or other flat paved or concrete surfaces in non-food areas of manufacturing facilities, power utilities, hospitals, food processing plants, distribution centers, oil refineries and processing centers, chemical plants, rail yards, schools, campuses, military bases, seaports, hotels, apartments, condominiums, maintenance yards, shopping malls, feed mills, airports and other commercial or industrial locations. In addition, applicators must ensure that children and pets do not come in contact with the bait and applicators cannot apply the product within 20 feet of any body of water, including lakes, ponds, or rivers. Commercial products containing the active ingredient nicarbazin were also available for Canada geese and domestic waterfowl in the past; however, those products are no longer available and the manufacturer has not registered those products with the NDDA for use in North Dakota.

Exposure of non-target wildlife to nicarbazin could occur from direct ingestion of the bait by non-target wildlife or from secondary hazards associated with wildlife consuming birds that have eaten treated bait. Several label restrictions of nicarbazin would reduce risks to non-target wildlife from direct consumption of treated bait (EPA 2005). The current label for nicarbazin requires applicators condition target birds to a daily feeding routine using untreated bait. Conditioning would occur when target birds habituate to a daily feeding routine. If the applicator cannot condition target bird species to feed on the untreated bait within 30-days, then the applicator must abandon the site. In addition, applicators can only apply nicarbazin using an automatic wildlife feeder that the applicator has programmed to release bait once a day. Applicators must monitor baiting locations periodically for non-target animal activity. The label also requires applicator ensure the target birds consume a daily dose of bait within 15 minutes. The locations of application can further minimize risks to non-target animals (*e.g.*, on rooftops).



When consumed by birds, ncarbazine is broken down into the two base components of 4,4'-dinitrocarbanilide (DNC) and 2-hydroxy-4,6-dimethylpyrimidine (HDP), which are then rapidly excreted. Ncarbazine is only effective in reducing the hatchability of eggs when blood levels of DNC are sufficiently elevated in a bird species. To maintain the high blood levels required to reduce egg hatch, birds must consume ncarbazine daily at a sufficient dosage that appears to be variable depending on the bird species (Yoder et al. 2005, Avery et al. 2006). For example, to reduce egg hatch in Canada geese, geese must consume ncarbazine at 2,500 ppm compared to 5,000 ppm required to reduce egg hatch in pigeons (Avery et al. 2006, Avery et al. 2008b). In pigeons, consuming ncarbazine at a rate that would reduce egg hatch in Canada geese did not reduce the hatchability of eggs in pigeons (Avery et al. 2006). With the rapid excretion of the two components of ncarbazine (DNC and HDP) in birds, non-target birds would have to consume ncarbazine daily at sufficient doses to reduce the rate of egg hatching.

Secondary hazards also exist from wildlife consuming target birds that have ingested ncarbazine. As mentioned previously, once consumed, ncarbazine is rapidly broken down into the two base components of DNC and HDP. DNC is the component of ncarbazine that limits egg hatchability while HDP only aids in absorption of DNC into the bloodstream. DNC is not readily absorbed into the bloodstream and requires the presence of HDP to aid in absorption of appropriate levels of DNC. Therefore, to pose a secondary hazard to wildlife, ingestion of both DNC and HDP from the carcass would have to occur and a non-target animal would have to consume HDP at a level to allow for absorption of DNC into the bloodstream. In addition, a non-target animal would have to consume an appropriate level of DNC and HDP from a carcass daily to produce any negative reproductive effects because current evidence indicates a single dose does not limit reproduction. To be effective, a target bird must consume ncarbazine (both DNC and HDP) daily during the duration of the reproductive season to limit the hatchability of eggs. Therefore, to experience the reproductive effects of ncarbazine, a non-target animal would need to consume the carcass of a target bird species daily and a high enough level of DNC and HDP would have to be available in the carcass and consumed for ncarbazine to affect the reproduction of a non-target animal. Based on the risks and likelihood of non-target wildlife consuming a treated carcass daily and receiving the appropriate levels of DNC and HDP daily to negatively impact reproduction, secondary hazards to wildlife from the use of ncarbazine would be extremely low (EPA 2005).

Although some risks to non-target species occurs from the use of products containing ncarbazine, those risks would likely be minimal given the label restriction on where and how an applicator can use products containing ncarbazine. Although limited toxicological information for ncarbazine exists for wildlife species besides certain bird species, available toxicology data indicates ncarbazine is relatively non-toxic to other wildlife species (World Health Organization 1998, EPA 2005, California Department of Pesticide Regulation 2007). Given the use restriction of ncarbazine products and the limited locations where WS could apply bait, the risks of exposure to non-target animals would be extremely low.

#### *Potential effects of implementing alternative 2 on eagles*

If WS implemented Alternative 2, WS would only conduct limited activities near active eagle nests and Important Eagle Use Areas in accordance with the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (USFWS 2007). The categories from the guidelines that would encompass most of these activities are Category D (off-road vehicle use), Category E (motorized watercraft use), Category F (non-motorized recreation and human entry), and Category H (blasting and other loud, intermittent noises). Those categories generally call for a buffer of 330 to 660 feet around active nests for Category D, Category E, and Category F activities, and a half mile buffer for Category H activities. Although similar guidelines do not exist for golden eagles, WS would apply those guidelines when encountering golden eagles. WS does not expect the use of non-lethal methods to agitate or bother a bald eagle or golden eagle to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, a decrease in its productivity or cause nest abandonment, by substantially interfering

with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior. WS based this determination on its adherence to the national bald eagle management guidelines (see USFWS 2007).

***Alternative 3 - WS would recommend an integrated methods approach to managing bird damage in North Dakota through technical assistance only***

Under a technical assistance alternative, WS would have no direct impact on non-target species, including T&E species. Those persons requesting assistance could employ methods that WS' personnel recommend or provide through loaning of equipment. Using the WS Decision Model, WS' personnel would base recommendations from information provided by the person requesting assistance or through site visits. Recommendations would include methods or techniques to minimize impacts on non-target animals associated with the methods that personnel recommend or loan. Methods recommended could include non-lethal and lethal methods as deemed appropriate by the WS Decision Model and as permitted by laws and regulations. The only methods that would not be available under a technical assistance only alternative would include some formulations of DRC-1339 and mesurol, which are only available for use by WS' employees.

The potential impacts to non-target animals under this alternative would be variable and based on several factors. If people employed methods as recommended by WS, the potential impacts to non-target animals would likely be similar to Alternative 1. If people provided technical assistance did not use the recommended methods and techniques correctly or people used methods that WS did not recommend, the potential impacts on non-target species, including T&E species, would likely be higher when compared to Alternative 1.

The potential impacts of hazing and exclusion methods on non-target species would be similar to those described for Alternative 1. Hazing and exclusion methods would be easily obtainable and simple to employ. Because identification of targets would occur when employing shooting as a method, the potential impacts to non-target species would likely be low under this alternative. However, the knowledge and experience of the person could influence their ability to distinguish between similar bird species correctly.

Those people experiencing damage from birds may implement methods and techniques based on the recommendations of WS. The knowledge and skill of those persons implementing recommended methods would determine the potential for impacts to occur. If those persons experiencing damage do not implement methods or techniques correctly, the potential impacts from providing only technical assistance could be greater than Alternative 1. The incorrect implementation of methods or techniques recommended by WS could lead to an increase in non-target animal removal when compared to the non-target animal removal that could occur by WS under Alternative 1.

If WS provided technical assistance to people but those people did not implement any of the recommended actions and conducted no further action, the potential to remove non-target animals would be lower when compared to Alternative 1. If those persons requesting assistance implemented recommended methods appropriately and as instructed or demonstrated, the potential impacts to non-target animals would be similar to Alternative 1. If WS made recommendations on the use of methods to alleviate damage but people did not implement those methods as recommended by WS or if people used those methods recommended by WS inappropriately, the potential for lethal removal of non-target animals would likely increase under a technical assistance only alternative. Therefore, the potential impacts to non-target animals, including T&E species, would be variable under a technical assistance only alternative. It is possible that frustration caused by the inability to reduce damage and associated losses could lead to illegal killing of birds, which could lead to unknown effects on local non-target species populations, including some T&E species.

When the damage caused by wildlife reaches a level where assistance does not adequately reduce damage or where no assistance is available, people sometimes resort to using chemical toxicants that are illegal for use on the intended target species that often results in loss of both target and non-target wildlife (e.g., see White et al. 1989, USFWS 2001, United States Food and Drug Administration 2003). The use of illegal toxicants by people frustrated with the lack of assistance or assistance that inadequately reduces damage to an acceptable level can often result in the indiscriminate take of wildlife species.

People requesting assistance are likely to use lethal methods because a damage threshold has been met for that person that has triggered them to seek assistance to reduce damage. The potential impacts on non-target animals by those persons experiencing damage would be highly variable. People whose bird damage problems that were not effectively resolved by non-lethal control methods would likely resort to other means of legal or illegal lethal control. This could result in less experienced persons implementing control methods and could lead to greater take of non-target wildlife than the proposed action.

WS' recommendation that birds be harvested during the regulated season by private entities to alleviate damage would not increase risks to non-target animals. Shooting would essentially be selective for target species and the unintentional lethal removal of non-target animals would not likely increase based on WS' recommendation of the method.

The ability to reduce negative effects caused by birds to wildlife species and their habitats, including T&E species, would be variable under this alternative. The skills and abilities of the person implementing damage management actions would determine the risks to non-target animals.

#### ***Alternative 4 – WS would not provide any assistance with managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota***

Under this alternative, WS would not provide any assistance with managing damage associated with birds in the state. Therefore, no direct impacts to non-target animals or T&E species would occur by WS under this alternative. Risks to non-target animals and T&E species would continue to occur from those people who implement damage management activities on their own or through recommendations by other federal, state, and private entities. Although some risks could occur from those people that use methods in the absence of any involvement by WS, those risks would likely be low, and would be similar to those risks under the other alternatives.

The ability to reduce damage and threats of damage caused by birds would be variable based upon the skills and abilities of the person implementing damage management actions under this alternative. The risks to non-target animals and T&E species would be similar across the alternatives because most of those methods described in Appendix B would be available to use by people if WS implements this alternative. If people apply those methods available as intended, risks to non-target animals would be minimal to non-existent. If people apply those methods available incorrectly or without knowledge of animal behavior, risks to non-target animals could be higher if WS implements this alternative. If frustration from the lack of available assistance causes those persons experiencing bird damage to use methods that are not legally available for use, risks to non-target animals could be higher if WS implements this alternative. People have resorted to the use of illegal methods to resolve wildlife damage that have resulted in the lethal take of non-target animals (e.g., see White et al. 1989, USFWS 2001, United States Food and Drug Administration 2003).

### **3.1.3 Issue 3 - Effects of Damage Management Methods on Human Health and Safety**

A common concern is the potential adverse effects methods available could have on human health and safety. An evaluation of the threats to human health and safety associated with methods available under the alternatives occurs below for each of the four alternatives carried forward for further analysis.

#### ***Alternative 1 - WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota (Proposed Action/No Action)***

If WS implements Alternative 1, WS' personnel would assess the damage or threat occurring, would evaluate the management methods available, and would formulate a management strategy to alleviate damage or reduce the risk of damage. A WS' employee would formulate a management strategy by selecting from those methods described in Appendix B that the employee determines to be practical for use. WS' employees who conduct activities to alleviate bird damage would be knowledgeable in the use of methods, the wildlife species responsible for causing damage or threats, and WS' directives. WS' personnel would incorporate that knowledge into the decision-making process inherent with the WS' Decision Model, which they would apply when addressing threats and damage caused by birds. Therefore, when evaluating management methods and formulating a management strategy for each request for assistance, WS' employees would consider risks to human health and safety associated with methods.

For example, WS' personnel would consider the location where activities could occur. Risks to human safety from the use of methods would likely be greater in highly populated urban areas in comparison to rural areas that are less densely populated. If WS' personnel conducted activities on rural private property, where the property owner or manager could control and monitor access to the property, the risks to human safety from the use of methods would likely be lower. If damage management activities occurred at or near public use areas, then risks of the public encountering damage management methods and the corresponding risk to human safety would increase. In general, WS' personnel would conduct activities when human activity was minimal (*e.g.*, early mornings, at night) or in areas where human activity was minimal (*e.g.*, in areas closed to the public).

WS' personnel receive training in the safe use of methods and would follow the safety and health guidelines required by WS' directives (*e.g.*, see WS Directive 2.601, WS Directive 2.605, WS Directive 2.615, WS Directive 2.620, WS Directive 2.625, WS Directive 2.627, WS Directive 2.630, WS Directive 2.635, WS Directive 2.640). For example, WS' employees would adhere to safety requirements and use appropriate personal protective equipment pursuant to WS Directive 2.601. In addition, WS' personnel would also follow WS Directive 2.635 that establishes guidelines and standard training requirement for health, safety, and personal protection from zoonotic diseases. When responding to oil spills and other hazardous materials operations, WS' personnel would follow WS Directive 2.640. When using watercraft, WS' employees would follow the guidelines in WS Directive 2.630. In addition, WS' use of methods would comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations (see WS Directive 2.210).

Before providing direct operational assistance, WS and the entity requesting assistance would sign a work initiation document that would indicate the methods the cooperating entity agrees to allow WS to use on the property they own or property they manage. Thus, the cooperating entity would be aware of the methods that WS could use on property they own or manage, which would help identify any risks to human safety associated with the use of those methods. WS' personnel would also make the cooperator requesting assistance aware of threats to human safety associated with the use of methods.

Besides direct operational assistance, WS could also recommend methods to people when providing technical assistance. As described previously, technical assistance would consist of WS' personnel providing recommendations on methods the requester could use themselves to resolve damage or threats of damage without any direct involvement by WS. Technical assistance could also consist of occasionally providing methods to a requester that might have limited availability, such as propane cannons. If people receiving technical assistance use methods according to recommendations and as demonstrated by WS, the potential risks to human safety would be similar to those risks if WS' personnel were using those methods. If people use methods without guidance from WS or apply those methods inappropriately, the risks to human safety could increase. The extent of the increased risk would be unknown and variable. However, methods inherently pose minimal risks to human safety given the design and the extent of the use of those methods. If WS implements Alternative 1, risks to human health and safety associated with WS' personnel providing technical assistance would be identical to those risks discussed if WS implemented Alternative 3. A discussion of threats to human health and safety for the methods discussed in Appendix B occurs below.

### ***SAFETY OF NON-CHEMICAL METHODS EMPLOYED***

Section I and Section II in Appendix B discuss several non-chemical methods that would be available for use by WS. When using non-chemical lethal methods, WS' personnel would dispose of carcasses in accordance with WS Directive 2.515 and would comply with requirements in depredation orders, control orders, depredation permits, and/or authorizations issued by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD for activities associated with birds. WS' personnel would also notify the cooperator requesting assistance of threats to human safety associated with the use of methods. Risks to human safety from activities and methods would be similar to the other alternatives because the same methods would be available. If people misuse or apply those methods inappropriately, any of the methods available to alleviate bird damage could threaten human safety. However, when used appropriately, methods available to alleviate damage would not threaten human safety.

No adverse effects to human safety have occurred from WS' use of non-chemical methods to alleviate bird damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. The risks to human safety from the use of non-chemical methods, when used appropriately and by trained personnel, would be low. Based on the use patterns of methods available to address damage caused by birds, the use of non-chemical would comply with Executive Order 12898 and Executive Order 13045.

#### ➤ *Human presence*

As discussed previously, human presence may consist of physical actions of people or the presence of people and/or a vehicle. If WS implements Alternative 1, WS' activities would comply with relevant laws, regulations, policies, orders, and procedures. WS' personnel would follow the safety and health guidelines required by WS' directives (*e.g.*, see WS Directive 2.601, WS Directive 2.605, WS Directive 2.615, WS Directive 2.620, WS Directive 2.625, WS Directive 2.627, WS Directive 2.630, WS Directive 2.635). Therefore, the physical actions of WS' employees, including the presence of employees and vehicles would not pose threat to human health and safety.

#### ➤ *Changes in cultural practices and exclusion methods*

Based on their use profile for alleviating damage associated with wildlife, WS considers risks to human safety associated with changes in cultural practices and exclusion methods to be low. The use of fencing, surface coverings, overhead lines/wires, and netting to exclude birds would not pose risks to human health and safety. WS would not use electrified fencing in areas where risks to human safety would

occur. For example, restricting the use of electrified fencing to agricultural areas where waterfowl are feeding on crops. Altering cultural practices would not pose a threat to human health and safety.

➤ *Auditory deterrents*

Auditory deterrents that WS could use and/or recommend would include electronic hazing devices, pyrotechnics, and propane cannons. Risks to human health and safety would primarily occur from the noise produced by those methods, such as hearing loss from repeated and/or prolonged exposure to the noise produced by those methods. Other risks could include fire risks and bodily harm associated with the use of pyrotechnics and propane cannons. Although hazards to human safety from the use of auditory deterrents do occur, those methods are generally safe when used by trained individuals who have experience in their use. For example, although some risk of fire and bodily harm exists from the use of pyrotechnics, when used appropriately and in consideration of those risks, WS' personnel can use those methods with a high degree of safety. WS' employees would adhere to safety requirements and use appropriate personal protective equipment pursuant to WS Directive 2.601. WS' personnel who use pyrotechnics would follow the guidelines for using pyrotechnics in accordance with WS Directive 2.627.

➤ *Visual deterrents*

Visual deterrents that WS' personnel could use and/or recommend would include Mylar tape, eyespot balloons, flags, effigies, lasers, and lights. Lasers and lights would pose minimal risks to the public because application occurs directly to target species by trained personnel, which limits the exposure of the public to misuse of the method. Similarly, the use of Mylar tape, eyespot balloons, flags, and effigies would not pose risks to human safety.

➤ *Trained dogs*

WS could use and/or recommend the use of trained dogs to disperse waterfowl in areas where they are causing damage or posing a threat of damage. The use of trained dogs would primarily occur at parks, airports, industrial complexes, and residential areas where waterfowl may congregate. WS would only use trained dogs that are responsive to their handler, which would minimize risks to the public.

➤ *Live-capture methods and translocation*

Live-capture methods that would be available for WS' personnel to use and/or recommend would include bow nets, hand nets, drop nets, mist nets, net guns, cannon nets, cage traps, nest box traps, raptor traps, corral traps, and modified padded foothold traps. Live-capture methods are typically set in situations where human activity would be minimal to ensure public safety. Traps rarely cause serious injury because live-capture traps available for birds are typically walk-in style traps where birds enter but are unable to exit or require a target bird species to trigger the trap. Therefore, human safety concerns associated with live traps used to capture birds require direct contact to cause bodily harm. If left undisturbed, risks to human safety would be minimal. In addition, WS' personnel would be on site during the use of modified padded foothold traps and would monitor the traps. Other live-capture devices, such as cannon nets, pose minor safety hazards to the public because activation of the device occurs by trained personnel that are present on site and personnel would only activate the method after they observe target species in the capture area of the net. Personnel employing nets are present at the site during application to ensure the safety of the public and operators.

Although some fire and explosive hazards exist with cannon nets during ignition and storage of the explosive charges, safety precautions associated with the use of the method, when adhered to, pose minimal risks to human safety and primarily occur to the handler. WS would not use cannon nets in areas

where public activity was high, which further reduces the risks to the public. WS would use nets in areas with restricted public access whenever possible to reduce risks to human safety. WS' personnel employing hand nets would also be present at the site during application to ensure the safety of the public. Through programmatic risk assessments, WS has determined the use of cage traps (USDA 2019*d*), foothold traps (USDA 2019*e*) and nets (USDA 2020*b*) to manage wildlife damage pose a low risk to human health and safety.

After using live-capture methods to capture birds, WS could translocate those birds to other areas. WS would primarily translocate raptor species when those species present an aircraft strike risk at airports. The translocation of birds would not pose a risk to the public. WS' personnel would wear gloves and other personal protective equipment to minimize the risks associated with handling and transporting translocated birds. Therefore, the release of birds after live-capture would not pose a risk to human health and safety.

➤ *Unmanned Aerial Vehicles*

When using UAVs, WS' personnel would adhere to all federal, state, and local laws. All WS' personnel who use UAVs are required to have a commercial Remote Pilot Certificate from the Federal Aviation Administration. To help ensure safe use and awareness, WS' employees who use UAVs receive training from an approved UAV training course and to remain certified to use UAVs, WS' employees must operate an UAV every 90 days to maintain proficiency. WS' personnel who use UAVs are also required to follow the guidelines established in the WS' Small Unmanned Aircraft System Flight Operations Procedures manual. When possible, there would be a minimum of two WS' personnel present: a Pilot-in-Command, who is remotely controlling the UAV, and a Visual Observer, who alerts the Pilot-in-Command of any dangers while the UAV is being flown. The UAV must always remain in the visual line-of-sight of either the Pilot-in-Command and/or the Visual Observer. Additionally, UAVs are not operated over any person that is not directly involved with flight operations. By following the safety precautions outlined by the WS' Small Unmanned Aircraft System Flight Operations Procedures manual, UAVs pose minimal risks to human safety.

➤ *Nest destruction*

WS could use nest destruction to discourage birds from nesting in areas by removing nesting material. Removal of nesting material by WS' personnel would occur by hand, hand tools, and/or high-pressure water spray. Birds generally build nests using sticks, vegetation, and similar debris. The removal of nesting material by WS' personnel would not pose risks to the public and would pose a very low risk to WS' employees. Minor injuries could occur to WS' employees related to bending to remove nesting material on the ground or from falling debris from removing nests in trees or other structures, such as bridges.

➤ *High-pressure water spray*

WS expects the use of high-pressure water spray to pose minimal risks to human health and safety. WS' personnel would not direct water toward people and would be present on site to prevent people from access areas where WS' personnel use this method.

➤ *Snap traps*

WS' personnel generally place snap traps in areas where damage is occurring to the side of a building or areas associated with cavity nesting birds, which are areas elevated above the ground. Like other traps,

human safety concerns associated with snap traps used to capture birds require direct contact to cause bodily harm. If left undisturbed, risks to human safety would be minimal.

➤ *Sport hunting*

The recommendation by WS that people harvest birds or allow other people to harvest birds during the annual hunting seasons would not increase risks to human safety above those risks already inherent with hunting birds. Recommendations of allowing hunting on property owned or managed by a cooperater to reduce a localized bird population that could then reduce bird damage or threats would not increase risks to human safety. Safety requirements established by the NDGFD for annual hunting seasons would further minimize risks associated with hunting. Although hunting accidents do occur, the recommendation of allowing hunting to reduce localized bird populations would not increase those risks.

➤ *Aircraft*

WS could also use fixed-winged aircraft and/or helicopters to monitor and survey birds in the state. For example, WS could use fixed-winged aircraft to locate and count the number of American white pelicans using aquaculture facilities in the state. WS could also use unmanned aircraft to survey and locate birds. A concern when using aircraft would be the potential risks to human safety associated with aircraft accidents, which would include risks to the pilot, crewmembers, and the public.

The use of aircraft by WS would be quite different from general aviation use. The environment in which WS would conduct aerial operations would be inherently a higher risk environment than that for general aviation. Low-level flights introduce hazards, such as power lines and trees, and the safety margin for error during maneuvers is higher when comparing the safety margins associated with high-level flights. WS has established an Aviation Training and Operations Center to support aerial activities and WS recognizes that an aggressive overall safety and training program is the best way to prevent accidents.

While the goal of the aviation program is to have no accidents, accidents may still occur. All WS' personnel associated with aerial operations would follow the policies and directives set forth in WS Directive 2.620, the WS' Aviation Operations and Safety Manual and its amendments, Title 14 CFR, and Federal Aviation Regulations, Part 43, 61, 91, 119, 133, 135, and 137. Because of the remote locations in which WS conducts aerial operations, the risk to the public from aviation operations or accidents would be minimal. WS' aircraft-use policy helps ensure the use of aircraft occurs in a safe and environmentally sound manner in accordance with federal and state laws. Through programmatic risk assessments, WS has determined the use of aircraft to manage wildlife damage pose a low risk to human health and safety (USDA 2019f).

➤ *Firearms*

Certain safety issues can arise related to misusing firearms and the potential human hazards associated with the use of firearms to reduce damage and threats of damage. All WS' personnel who use firearms would follow the guidelines in WS Directive 2.615. To help ensure safe use and awareness, WS' employees who use firearms to conduct official duties receive training from an approved firearm safety-training course and to remain certified for firearm use, WS' employees must attend a re-certification safety-training course in accordance with WS Directive 2.615. WS' employees who carry and use firearms as a condition of employment are subject to the Lautenberg Domestic Confiscation Law and are required to inform their supervisor if they can no longer comply with the Lautenberg Domestic Confiscation Law (see WS Directive 2.615). Through programmatic risk assessments, WS has determined the use of firearms to manage wildlife damage pose a low risk to human health and safety (USDA 2019g).



WS would work closely with cooperators requesting assistance to ensure that WS' personnel consider all safety issues before deeming the use of firearms to be appropriate. Whether a person contacted WS or consulted with WS, the use of firearms to alleviate bird damage would be available if WS implements any of the alternatives unless otherwise prohibited by the USFWS in a depredation permit, depredation order, or a control order, or when prohibited by the NDGFD. People can use any methods legally available to remove those bird species afforded no protection from take under the MBTA, such as pigeons, starlings, and house sparrows. Because the use of firearms to alleviate bird damage would be available under any of the alternatives and the use of firearms by those persons experiencing bird damage could occur whether they contacted or consulted WS, the risks to human safety from the use of firearms would be similar among all the alternatives.

If WS' personnel use firearms to remove birds lethally, WS would retrieve the carcasses to the extent possible. WS' personnel would dispose of the carcasses retrieved in accordance with WS Directive 2.515 and would comply with requirements in depredation orders, control orders, depredation permits, and/or authorizations issued by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD for activities associated with birds.

➤ *Egg destruction*

Egg destruction would involve puncturing, breaking, shaking, or oiling an egg. Risks to human health and safety associated with egg destruction would be minimal. Egg oiling involves the use of corn oil to coat bird eggs in the nest, which renders the egg unviable. WS' personnel generally apply the corn oil by hand (rubbing oil over eggs), dipping eggs in corn oil, or spraying corn oil from a pump-type (non-aerosol) container. WS' personnel use commercially available, food-grade corn oil when oiling eggs. Egg oiling is generally a method used to treat the eggs of bird species that nest on the ground, such as waterfowl. WS' personnel coat each egg with a light to moderate amount of corn oil. WS only uses food-grade corn oil that people use every day when preparing food and uses a small amount of corn oil to treat each egg; therefore, risks to human safety associated with the use of corn oil to coat eggs would be extremely low.

➤ *Cervical Dislocation for Euthanasia*

After WS live-captured a bird, WS could euthanize the bird by cervical dislocation. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) guidelines on euthanasia consider cervical dislocation as a conditionally acceptable method of euthanasia for birds (AVMA 2020). Risks would primarily occur to the person handling the bird and primarily from the bird scratching or biting the handler. In general, WS' personnel would perform cervical dislocation outside of public view, which would minimize risks to the public. WS would dispose of carcasses euthanized in accordance with WS Directive 2.515 and would comply with requirements in depredation orders, control orders, depredation permits, and/or authorizations issued by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD for activities associated with birds.

### ***SAFETY OF CHEMICAL METHODS EMPLOYED***

In addition to non-chemical methods, chemical methods could also be available for WS' personnel to use (see Appendix B). Many of the chemical methods would only be available to target certain bird species and/or to manage damage or threats of damage in specific situations. Those chemical methods that WS could use as part of an integrated methods approach include mesurol (crows only), nicarbazin (pigeons, starlings, blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds only), carbon dioxide for euthanasia, egg oiling, Avitrol (pigeons, crows, blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds, starlings, house sparrows only), the avicide DRC-1339 (pigeons, crows, ravens, magpies, blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds, starlings, Eurasian collared-doves, gulls only), commercially available chemical repellents, and paintballs.

WS' personnel would use the WS' Decision Model to determine when chemical methods were appropriate to alleviate damage. WS' personnel would adhere to WS' directives when using chemical methods, including WS Directive 2.401, WS Directive 2.405, WS Directive 2.430, and WS Directive 2.465. All WS' personnel who handle and administered chemical methods would receive appropriate training to use those methods. WS would dispose of carcasses in accordance with WS Directive 2.515.

No adverse effects to human safety have occurred from WS' use of chemical methods to alleviate bird damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. The risks to human safety from the use of chemical methods, when used appropriately and by trained personnel, would be low. Therefore, WS does not expect any direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to occur from WS' use of those chemical methods discussed below and described further in Appendix B. Based on the use patterns of methods available to address damage caused by birds, the use of chemical methods would comply with Executive Order 12898 and Executive Order 13045.

➤ *Mesurool*

The EPA has approved the use of mesurool to condition crows not to feed on the eggs of threatened or endangered species. Mesurool is a powder that WS' personnel would mix with water and the liquid contents of eggs. Once mixed, WS' personnel would inject the mixture inside raw eggs that are similar in size and appearance to the eggs of the threatened or endangered species that WS is trying to protect from predation by crows. WS' personnel would mark each treated egg with the word "*POISON*" according to label requirements. WS' personnel would place treated eggs inside "*dummy*" nests (*i.e.*, nests created by WS' personnel or others that are similar in appearance to nests constructed by the threatened or endangered species).

In accordance with label requirements, WS would post all treated areas with warning signs requiring exclusion of children, pets, and livestock from these areas. WS would post signs at logical points of access and far enough away from nesting sites so that signs are noticeable and remote to minimize unauthorized approaches to nesting areas. Therefore, human safety risks associated with the use of mesurool occur primarily to the mixer and handler during preparation and application. WS' personnel would follow all label requirements, including the personal protective equipment required to handle and mix bait. When used according to label requirements, the risks to human safety from the use of mesurool would be minimal. As discussed previously, WS has not registered mesurool for use in North Dakota; however, this EA evaluates the use of mesurool as a repellent that WS could employ if WS implements this alternative. WS would not use mesurool until and unless the NDDA approved the use of mesurool in the state.

➤ *Nicarbazin*

In North Dakota, nicarbazin is currently only available to inhibit egg hatching in localized populations of rock pigeons, European starlings, red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, common grackles, and brown-headed cowbirds, which is available as a general use commercial product available to the public. A general use pesticide is a pesticide that, when applied in accordance with its directions for use, would not generally cause unreasonable adverse effects on people or the environment. Use restrictions of nicarbazin for pigeons limit its use to rooftops or other flat paved or concrete surfaces and limited to use in secured areas with limited public access. In addition, applicators must ensure that children and pets do not come in contact with the bait and applicators cannot apply the product within 20 feet of any body of water, including lakes, ponds, or rivers. Commercial products containing the active ingredient nicarbazin were also available for Canada geese and domestic waterfowl in the past; however,

those products are no longer available and the manufacturer has not registered those products with the NDDA for use in North Dakota.

Threats to human safety from the use of nicarbazin would likely be minimal if applicators follow label directions. The use pattern of nicarbazin would also ensure threats to public safety were minimal. The label requires an acclimation period, which assists with identifying risks. In addition, the label requires the presence of the applicator at the location until target birds consume all of the bait or requires the applicator to retrieve any unconsumed bait. The EPA has characterized nicarbazin as a moderate eye irritant. The United States Food and Drug Administration has established a tolerance of nicarbazin residues of four parts per million allowed in uncooked chicken muscle, skin, liver, and kidney (21 CFR 556.445). The EPA characterized the risks of human exposure as low when used to reduce egg hatch in Canada geese. The EPA also concluded that if human consumption occurred, people would have to eat a prohibitively large amount of nicarbazin to produce toxic effects (EPA 2005). Based on the use pattern of the nicarbazin and by following label instructions, risks to human safety would be low with the primary exposure occurring to those handling and applying the product. Safety procedures required by the label, when followed, would minimize risks to handlers and applicators.

➤ *Carbon Dioxide for Euthanasia*

After target bird species were live-captured, WS could euthanize those birds by placing the birds into a sealed chamber and releasing compressed carbon dioxide inside the chamber. The AVMA (2020) guidelines on euthanasia list carbon dioxide as conditionally acceptable methods of euthanasia for free-ranging birds that can lead to a humane death. As with many chemical methods, risks to human health and safety primarily occur to the applicator. The carbon dioxide released into the sealed chamber would diffuse into the atmosphere once WS' personnel opened the chamber to dispose of the animal. The use of carbon dioxide for euthanasia would occur in ventilated areas where exposure of the applicator or the public to large concentrations of carbon dioxide from the release of carbon dioxide would not occur. Based on the use patterns from the use of carbon dioxide in sealed chamber to euthanize animals, the risks to human safety is extremely low.

➤ *Egg Oiling*

Egg oiling involves the use of corn oil to coat the eggs in the nest of a target bird species, which renders the egg unviable. WS' personnel generally apply the corn oil by hand (rubbing oil over eggs), dipping eggs in corn oil, or spraying corn oil from a pump-type (non-aerosol) container. WS' personnel use commercially available, food-grade corn oil when oiling eggs. Egg oiling is generally a method used to treat the eggs of bird species that nest on the ground, such as Canada geese. WS' personnel coat each egg with a light to moderate amount of corn oil. WS only uses food-grade corn oil that people use every day when preparing food and uses a small amount of corn oil to treat each egg; therefore, risks to human safety associated with the use of corn oil to coat eggs would be extremely low. The EPA has ruled that use of corn oil for this purpose is exempt from registration requirements under the FIFRA.

➤ *4-Aminopyridine (Avitrol)*

Several label requirements of Avitrol address threats to human health and safety risks associated with the use of the different formulations of Avitrol. For example, label requirements stipulate that applicators cannot place treated baits within a certain distance of water. Other requirements may stipulate that applicators must place treated bait on elevated sites in populated areas and areas open to the public or the applicator must continuously monitor the site during the entire application period and retrieve any unused bait. Applicators must pre-bait potential locations to monitor for target and non-target activity at the location, which allows applicators to monitor risks to human safety.

When re-evaluating the registration of 4-Aminopyridine (*i.e.*, Avitrol) for use, the EPA (2007) stated, “...*long-term environmental exposure of [4-Aminopyridine] is expected to [be] minimal, and no drinking water exposure is expected.*” Further, the EPA (2007) stated, “*Because [4-Aminopyridine] is no longer registered on any food commodities, nor is exposure expected from drinking water sources, the [EPA] only assessed potential exposures in occupational and residential settings*”. When handling and applying Avitrol, WS’ personnel would follow label requirements for personnel protective equipment to minimize their exposure to treated bait. The EPA (2007) further stated, “*Since all [4-Aminopyridine] products are restricted use products, no residential handler exposure scenario is expected.*” However, the EPA (2007) further stated, “*Post-application residential exposures to [4-Aminopyridine] may result from application in residential settings*” but “*It is unlikely that adults will be exposed to the bait through dermal exposure, inhalation exposure, or through incidental oral exposure.*” The primary concern of the EPA (2007) from the use of Avitrol in residential areas and public areas was the potential for children to encounter and accidentally ingest treated bait. Although children could accidentally ingest treated bait, the EPA (2007) “...*does not believe that children will be routinely exposed to [4-Aminopyridine]*”. To minimize risks from children encountering and accidentally ingesting treated bait, the EPA (2007) required several minimization measures as part of label requirements for products containing 4-Aminopyridine. Those requirements include:

- not applying treated bait in areas accessible to children
- in populated areas and areas open to the public, baiting must occur at elevated sites where feasible
- if baiting at elevated sites cannot be accomplished, the applicator must ensure children do not come in contact with treated bait and the applicator must not leave the site until all dead/dying birds and unused bait are retrieved from the site
- Products cannot be stored or temporarily placed in locations accessible to children

The EPA (2007) has required the applicator implement several minimization measures when handling and applying Avitrol to reduce risks to applicators and the public, including children. By following label requirements of Avitrol, risks to human health and safety associated with the use of Avitrol should be minimal.

#### ➤ DRC-1339

Risks to human safety from the use of DRC-1339 could occur either through direct exposure to the chemical (*e.g.*, handling treated bait) or exposure to the chemical from birds that have ingested treated bait and died. Depending on the label, WS can use a variety of bait types depending on the target bird species to alleviate damage or threats of damage.

For all uses, WS must mix technical DRC-1339 (powder) with water and in some cases, a binding agent (required by the label for specific bait types). Once the technical DRC-1339, water, and binding agent, if required, are mixed, the liquid is poured over the bait and mixed until the liquid is absorbed and evenly distributed. After mixing, the handler allows the treated bait to air dry. The mixing, drying, and storage of DRC-1339 treated bait occurs in controlled areas that are not accessible by the public. Therefore, risks to public safety from the preparation of DRC-1339 are minimal. Some risks do occur to the handlers during the mixing process from inhalation and direct exposure on the skin and eyes. WS’ personnel that prepare, mix, and handle technical DRC-1339 and treated bait would adhere to label requirements, including the use of personal protective equipment to ensure the safety of WS’ personnel. Therefore, risks to handlers and mixers that adhere to the personal protective equipment requirements of the label are

low. Before application at bait locations, applicators would mix treated bait with untreated bait at ratios required by the product label to minimize non-target hazards and to avoid bait aversion by target species.

WS' personnel would determine where to potentially apply treated bait based on product label requirements (*e.g.*, distance from water, specific location restrictions). Other factors would also require consideration on appropriate locations to apply treated bait, such as the target bird species use of the site (determined through pre-baiting), on non-target animal use of the area (areas with non-target animal activity are not used or abandoned), and based on human safety (*e.g.*, in areas restricted or inaccessible by the public). Once WS' personnel determine a location to be appropriate to place treated baits, they would place bait in feeding stations, would broadcast the bait using mechanical methods (ground-based equipment or hand spreaders), or would distribute bait by manual broadcast (distributed by hand) per label requirements. Once baited using the diluted mixture (treated bait and untreated bait), when required by the label, WS' personnel or people under the direct supervision would monitor locations for activity by non-target animals and to ensure the safety of the public.

WS' personnel and persons under their direct supervision would follow the post-treatment clean-up requirements of an applicable label when using DRC-1339. For example, when using a bait dispenser, a label may require the retrieval of all baits. When broadcasting baits, a label may require the retrieval of as much bait as possible. For applications on bare ground, a label may require burying uneaten bait via mechanical methods (*e.g.*, discing under) or, if using manual methods (*e.g.*, shoveling under), burying uneaten bait under a minimum of two inches of soil. Through pre-baiting, applicators can acclimate target birds to feed at certain locations at certain times. By acclimating birds to a feeding schedule, baiting can occur at specific times to ensure that target birds quickly consume bait shortly after the applicator places the bait, especially when addressing large flocks of target species. For example, an applicator could condition target birds to feed at a specific location by placing pre-bait early each morning near a roost so as target birds leave the roost, they fly to the location knowing that food is available. Therefore, the acclimation period allows applicators to place treated bait at a location after conditioning the target birds to be present at the site at a certain time of day and provides a higher likelihood that target birds consume treated bait shortly after applicators place the bait. Conditioning target birds to feed at certain times and at certain locations minimizes the amount of time that treated bait is present at a location. For exposure to the bait to occur, someone would have to approach a bait site and handle treated bait. If target bird species had already consumed the bait or WS had already removed the bait from the location, then treated bait would no longer be available and public exposure to the bait could not occur. Therefore, direct exposure to treated bait during the baiting process would only occur if someone approached a bait site that contained bait and if treated bait was present, would have to handle treated bait.

Factors that minimize any risk to human health and safety from the use of DRC-1339 include:

- Its use is prohibited within 50 feet of standing water
- It cannot be applied directly to food or feed crops (contrary to some misconceptions, DRC-1339 is not applied to feed materials that livestock can feed upon)
- DRC-1339 is highly unstable and degrades rapidly when exposed to sunlight, heat, or ultraviolet radiation. The half-life is about 25 hours; in general, DRC-1339 on treated bait material is almost completely broken down within a week if not consumed or retrieved
- The chemical is more than 90% metabolized in target birds within the first few hours after they consume the bait; therefore, little material is left in bird carcasses that may be found or retrieved by people
- Application rates are extremely low (EPA 1995)
- A person would need to ingest the internal organs of birds found dead from DRC-1339 to be

exposed to the chemical

- Based on mutagenicity (the tendency to cause gene mutations in cells) studies, the EPA has concluded that DRC-1339 is not a mutagen or a carcinogen (*i.e.*, cancer-causing agent) (EPA 1995).

Of additional concern is the potential exposure of people to crows harvested during the regulated hunting season that have ingested DRC-1339 treated bait. During the development of this EA, the hunting season for crows in the state occurred from early-March through late April and from mid-August through early November with no daily take limit and no possession limit (NDGFD 2019*b*). If WS implements Alternative 1, baiting using DRC-1339 to reduce crow damage could occur in the state during the period when people could harvest crows. Although baiting could occur in rural areas of state from November through February, most requests for assistance to manage crow damage during that period would likely occur in urban areas and would be associated with urban crow roosts. Crows using urban communal roost locations often travel long distances to forage before returning to the roost location during the evening.

When managing damage associated with urban crow roosts, the use of DRC-1339 would likely occur at known forage areas (where crows from a roost location travel to) or could occur near the roost location where WS' personnel have conditioned crows to feed by pre-baiting during the acclimation period. Crows, like other blackbirds, often stage (congregate) in an area prior to entering a roost location. The staging behavior exhibited by blackbirds occurs consistently and personnel can induce blackbirds, including crows, to stage consistently at a particular location by pre-baiting because blackbirds often feed prior to entering a roost location for the night. Pre-baiting can also induce feeding at a specific location as crows exit a roost location in the morning by providing a consistent food source. Baiting with DRC-1339 treated baits most often occurs during the winter when the availability of food is limited and personnel can condition crows to feed consistently at a location by providing a consistent source of food. Given the range in which the death of sensitive bird species occurs, crows that consume treated bait could fly long distances. Although not specifically known for crows, sensitive bird species that ingest a lethal dose of DRC-1339 treated bait generally die within 24 to 72 hours after ingestion (USDA 2001). Therefore, crows that ingest a lethal dose of DRC-1339 at the bait site could die in other areas besides the roost location or the bait site.

For a crow that ingested DRC-1339 treated bait to pose a potential risk to someone harvesting crows during the hunting season in the state, a hunter would have to harvest a crow that ingested DRC-1339 treated bait and subsequently consume certain portions of the crow. The mode of action of DRC-1339 requires ingestion by crows so handling a crow harvested or found dead would not pose any primary risks to human safety. Although not specifically known for crows, in other sensitive species, DRC-1339 is metabolized and/or excreted quickly once ingested. Sensitive species quickly metabolize or excrete nearly all of the DRC-1339 ingested normally within a few hours. Researchers have found residues of DRC-1339 in the tissues of birds consuming DRC-1339 but generally only at very high dosage rates that exceed current acute lethal dosages achieved under the label requirements of DRC-1339. In addition, residues of DRC-1339 ingested by birds appear to be primarily located in the gastrointestinal tract of birds (see discussion on secondary hazards associated with DRC-1339 under Alternative 1 in Section 3.1.2).

As stated previously, to pose risks to human safety, a hunter would have to harvest a crow that ingested DRC-1339 treated bait and then, ingest the tissue of the crow that contains residue of DRC-1339. Very little information is available on the acute or chronic toxicity of DRC-1339 in people. However, based on the information available, WS expects risks to human safety would be extremely low because of several factors. First, a hunter would have to harvest a crow that had ingested DRC-1339 treated bait. As stated previously, the use of DRC-1339 primarily occurs to address damage associated with urban roosts. Most municipal areas prohibit hunting and discharging a firearm. Therefore, a crow would have to ingest treated bait and then travel to an area (typically outside of the city limit) where hunting can occur. WS

would not recommend hunting as a damage management tool in those general areas where WS' personnel or persons under their supervision were actively placing DRC-1339 treated baits. Secondly, to pose a risk to human safety, a person would have to consume the crow. Although no information is currently available on the number of people that might consume crows in North Dakota, very few, if any, people are likely consuming crows harvested in the state or elsewhere. People primarily harvest crows for recreational purposes and to alleviate damage and are not likely harvesting crows for subsistence. Thirdly, the tissue consumed would have to contain chemical residues of DRC-1339.

Current information indicates that target bird species metabolize or excrete the majority of the chemical within a few hours of ingestion. The highest concentration of chemical residue occurs in the gastrointestinal tract of the bird, which people are likely to discard and not consume. Although residues have been detected in the tissues that people might consume (e.g., breast meat) in some bird species that have consumed DRC-1339, residues appear to only be detectable when the bird has consumed a high dose of the chemical that far exceeds the LD<sub>50</sub> for that species, which would not be achievable under normal baiting procedures. In addition, WS would infrequently use DRC-1339 to alleviate damage or threats of damage associated with crows. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, no take of crows occurred by WS using DRC-1339. Under the proposed action, the controlled and limited circumstances in which WS could use DRC-1339 would prevent any exposure of the public to DRC-1339. Based on current information, the human health risks from the use of DRC-1339 would be virtually nonexistent if WS implemented this alternative.

➤ *Commercially Available Repellents*

The recommendation of commercially available repellents or the use of those repellents registered for use to disperse birds in the state could occur as part of an integrated approach to managing bird damage if WS implements this alternative. Several commercially available repellents could be available for use with the most common ingredients being anthraquinone and methyl anthranilate.

Methyl anthranilate, which has been classified by the United States Food and Drug Administration as a product that is "*generally recognized as safe*", is a naturally occurring chemical found in grapes, and is synthetically produced for use as a grape food flavoring and for perfume (see 21 CFR 182.60). The EPA exempts methyl anthranilate from the requirement of establishing a tolerance for agricultural applications (see 40 CFR 180.1143). The final ruling published by the EPA on the exemption from the requirement of a tolerance for methyl anthranilate concludes with reasonable certainty that no harm would occur from cumulative exposure to the chemical by the public, including infants and children, when applied according to the label and according to good agricultural practices (see 67 FR 51083-51088). Based on the use patterns of methyl anthranilate and the conclusions of the United States Food and Drug Administration and the EPA on the toxicity of the chemical, WS' use of methyl anthranilate and the recommendation of the use of the chemical would not have adverse effects on human safety. The EPA (2015) stated, "*No harmful effects to humans are expected from using products containing [methyl anthranilate] as specified on the label*".

Additional repellents could contain the active ingredient anthraquinone. Overall, the EPA considers the toxicological risk from exposure to anthraquinone to be negligible (EPA 1998). The EPA also considers the primary cumulative exposure is most likely to occur to handlers and/or applicators from dermal, oral, and inhalation exposure but consider the exposure risks, when applicators use the required personal protective equipment, to be negligible (EPA 1998). Therefore, the EPA concluded that cumulative effects would not likely occur from any common routes of toxicity (EPA 1998). Based on the known use patterns and the conclusions of the EPA, WS does not expect any adverse effects on human safety to occur from WS' use of anthraquinone or the recommendation of the use of anthraquinone. When used

according to label requirements, the EPA (2015) determined the use of anthraquinone would have no harmful effects on people.

Commercially available repellents would be general use pesticides available to the public. A general use pesticide is a pesticide that, when applied in accordance with its directions for use, would not generally cause unreasonable adverse effects on people or the environment. When handling and applying commercially available repellents, WS' personnel would follow the label requirements of those products and would recommend that people use those products according to label requirements. Therefore, WS does not expect any direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to occur from WS' use of commercially available repellents or the recommendation of the use of those repellents.

➤ *Paintballs*

WS could also use paintball guns to disperse target bird species. Paintballs do not actually contain paint but are marking capsules that consist of a gelatin shell filled with a non-toxic glycol and water-based coloring that rapidly dissipates and is not harmful to the environment. Although the ingredients may vary slightly depending on the manufacturer, paintball ingredients may include polyethylene glycol, gelatin, glycerine (glycerol), sorbitol, water, ground pigskin, dipropylene glycol, mineral oil, and dye as the colorant (Donaldson 2003). Paintballs are considered non-toxic to people and do not pose an environmental hazard, as described on product labeling and Safety Data Sheets.

***EFFECTS OF NOT EMPLOYING METHODS TO REDUCE THREATS TO HUMAN SAFETY***

Section 1.2.2 discusses the need to resolve threats to human safety associated with the bird species addressed in this EA. Threats to human safety associated with those bird species addressed in this EA are primarily associated with the risks of aircraft striking birds at airports in the state. Other risks to human safety can include the threats of disease transmission between birds and people or the aggressive behavior of certain bird species toward the public. If WS implements Alternative 1, those methods identified in Appendix B would be available for WS' personnel to use when formulating a management strategy using the WS Decision Model. WS' personnel would not necessarily use every method from Appendix B to address every request for assistance but would use the WS' Decision Model to determine the most appropriate approach to address each request for assistance, which could include using additional methods from Appendix B if initial efforts did not adequately reduce threats to human safety.

Some methods discussed in Appendix B would only be available for use by WS' personnel or persons under their direct supervision. Mesurol and DRC-1339 would generally be the methods that would not be available for other entities to use. Therefore, implementation of Alternative 1 would provide the widest selection of methods to resolve requests for assistance. Restricting methods or limiting the availability of methods could lead to incidents where risks to human safety increase because the only available methods may not be effective enough to reduce risks to human safety adequately. In addition, implementation of Alternative 1 would provide another way for people to resolve threats to human safety because WS would be available to provide direct operational assistance and/or technical assistance. People experiencing threats to human safety could conduct activities themselves to alleviate threats, they could seek assistance from private businesses/entities, they could seek assistance from WS, they could seek assistance from other state or federal agencies, and/or they could take no further action. The mission of the national WS program is to provide federal leadership with managing conflicts with wildlife. In some cases, WS may be the only entity available to manage threats to human safety, such as in rural areas or remote air facilities.



Overall, implementation of this alternative would likely result in a higher likelihood of successfully reducing threats to human safety because of the availability of WS and WS' ability to use the widest range of available methods to reduce threats associated with those bird species addressed in this EA.

***Alternative 2 - WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota using only non-lethal methods***

Implementation of this alternative would require WS to only recommend and use non-lethal methods to manage and prevent damage caused by target bird species. WS would provide technical assistance and direct operational assistance under this alternative recommending and using only non-lethal methods. If WS implements Alternative 2, the non-lethal methods that would be available for WS to recommend and/or use would have the potential to threaten human safety.

***SAFETY OF NON-CHEMICAL METHODS EMPLOYED***

Alternative 1 discusses the threats to human safety associated with non-chemical methods that would be available if WS implements Alternative 2. If WS implements Alternative 2, the threats to human safety associated with non-chemical methods would be the same as those threats that would occur if WS implemented Alternative 1 because WS would use the same non-chemical methods that were also non-lethal methods. Non-chemical methods that WS could use and/or recommend if WS implements Alternative 2 include limited habitat modification, exclusion methods, auditory deterrents, visual deterrents, live-capture methods, and inactive nest destruction.

No adverse effects to human safety have occurred from WS' use of non-chemical methods to alleviate bird damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. The risks to human safety from the use of non-chemical methods, when used appropriately and by trained personnel, would be low. Based on the use patterns of methods available to address damage caused by birds, this alternative would comply with Executive Order 12898 and Executive Order 13045.

Other entities could and would likely continue to use non-chemical lethal methods if WS implements this alternative, such as firearms. Many of the lethal methods available to manage bird damage would be available for use by other entities. This could result in less experienced persons implementing lethal methods, which could lead to greater risks to human safety. Other entities could use lethal methods where WS' personnel may not because WS' personnel would consider threats to human safety when formulating strategies to alleviating bird damage.

***SAFETY OF CHEMICAL METHODS EMPLOYED***

If WS implements Alternative 2, those non-lethal chemical methods that would be available for WS to use would include paintballs fired from paintball equipment, mesurol (crows), ncarbazine (primarily pigeons), and chemical repellents (primarily waterfowl). Those non-lethal chemical methods that WS could use would be identical to those non-lethal chemical methods available if WS implemented Alternative 1. To reduce redundancy, the safety of non-lethal methods occurs in the discussion for Alternative 1.

No adverse effects to human safety have occurred from WS' use of chemical methods to alleviate bird damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. The risks to human safety from the use of chemical methods, when used appropriately and by trained personnel, would be low. Based on the use patterns of methods available to address damage caused by birds, this alternative would comply with Executive Order 12898 and Executive Order 13045.

Formulations of 4-Aminopyridine are restricted use pesticides; therefore, other entities with appropriate pesticide applicators licenses could continue to use some formulations of 4-Aminopyridine. If other entities use 4-Aminopyridine in accordance with label requirements, the risks to human safety associated with the use of 4-Aminopyridine would be similar to Alternative 1. If other entities use 4-Aminopyridine inconsistent with the label requirements, the risks to human health and safety could be higher.

### ***EFFECTS OF NOT EMPLOYING METHODS TO REDUCE THREATS TO HUMAN SAFETY***

As discussed previously, using non-lethal methods can be effective at alleviating damage associated with birds. The use of non-lethal methods in an integrated approach can be effective at dispersing birds (*e.g.*, see Avery et al. 2008a, Chipman et al. 2008, Seamans and Gosser 2016). Section 1.2.2 discusses the need to resolve threats to human safety associated with the target bird species. Threats to human safety associated with birds are primarily associated with the risks of aircraft striking birds at airports in the state but can include threats of pathogen transmission where fecal droppings accumulate. Limiting the methods available could lead to higher risks to human health and safety. For example, vultures have the potential to cause severe damage to aircraft, which can threaten the safety of flight crews and passengers. Risks of aircraft strikes could increase if birds near airports and/or military facilities habituate to the use of non-lethal methods and no longer respond to the use of those methods.

### ***Alternative 3 - WS would recommend an integrated methods approach to managing bird damage in North Dakota through technical assistance only***

If WS implements this alternative, WS' personnel would only provide recommendations on methods the requester could use to alleviate bird damage themselves with no direct involvement by WS. On occasion, WS' personnel could demonstrate the use of methods but WS' personnel would not conduct any direct operational activities to manage damage caused by birds. WS' personnel would only recommend for use those methods that were legally available to the requester for use. If WS implements this alternative, the only methods described in Appendix B that would not be available for use by other entities, would be mesurol and DRC-1339. WS would only provide technical assistance to those persons requesting assistance with bird damage and threats.

### ***SAFETY OF NON-CHEMICAL METHODS EMPLOYED***

If WS implements this alternative, those people that request assistance from WS could conduct activities and use methods recommended by WS' personnel, they could implement other methods, they could seek further assistance from other entities, or they could take no further action. Therefore, the requester and/or other entities would be responsible for using those methods available, including methods recommended by WS. The skill and knowledge of the person applying methods would determine the safety and efficacy of the methods the person was using. If people receiving technical assistance use non-chemical methods according to recommendations and as demonstrated by WS, the potential risks to human safety would be similar to those risks if WS' personnel were using those methods. If people implement non-chemical methods inappropriately, without regard for human safety, and/or use methods not recommended by WS, risks to human health and safety could be higher than those risks associated with the implementation of Alternative 1. The extent of the increased risk would be unknown and variable. However, non-chemical methods inherently pose minimal risks to human safety given the design and the extent of the use of those methods.

### ***SAFETY OF CHEMICAL METHODS EMPLOYED***

Several chemical methods would continue to be available for use by the public if WS implements Alternative 3, which WS could recommend to people when providing technical assistance. Nicarbazin,

carbon dioxide for euthanasia, egg oiling, paintballs, Avitrol, and commercially available repellents are chemical methods that would continue to be available to the public for use. Similar to the use of non-chemical methods, the skill and knowledge of the person applying methods would determine the safety and efficacy of the methods the person was using. If people receiving technical assistance from WS implement chemical methods appropriately and in consideration of human safety, including following label requirements, then the effects of implementing this alternative on human health and safety would be similar to those effects if WS implemented Alternative 1. If people implement chemical methods inappropriately, without regard for human safety, and/or use methods not recommended by WS, risks to human health and safety could be higher than those risks associated with the implementation of Alternative 1.

### ***EFFECTS OF NOT EMPLOYING METHODS TO REDUCE THREATS TO HUMAN SAFETY***

If WS implemented this alternative, mesurol and the avicide DRC-1339 would not be methods that WS could recommend because those methods are currently only available for use by WS. A product with the same active ingredient as DRC-1339 has been commercially available to the public in the past and it is possible that other entities could seek to register the active ingredient of DRC-1339 as a restricted use pesticide in the state if WS implements this alternative. Mesurol would also not be available for WS to recommend through technical assistance because mesurol is only available to prevent egg predation of threatened or endangered species by crows and would not be available to reduce threats to human health and safety if WS implements any of the alternatives. DRC-1339 can effectively reduce local populations of target bird species, which can reduce threats to human health and safety. For example, Boyd and Hall (1987) showed that a 25% reduction in a local crow roost using DRC-1339 resulted in reduced hazards to a nearby airport. However, DRC-1339 is only available to target certain bird species. The avicide DRC-1339 would only be available to target pigeons, crows, blackbirds, starlings, and gulls.

As discussed previously, if WS implements this alternative, the skill and knowledge of the person using methods would determine how effective those methods were at reducing threats to human health and safety. If people implement methods as intended at a similar level that would occur if WS' personnel were conducting those activities, the ability to reduce threats to human health and safety would be similar. If people attempting to reduce threats to human health and safety applied methods incorrectly or were not as diligent at employing methods, then the ability of those people to reduce threats to human health and safety would be lower than Alternative 1. This would likely occur on a case by case basis because one person may apply methods as intended at a similar intensity level as would occur if WS were conducting the activities while another person may not apply methods as intended or may not apply those methods at a similar intensity level. Therefore, implementing this alternative would likely be effective at reducing threats to human health and safety similar to Alternative 1 in some cases but would not be as effective in other cases. However, implementing this alternative would likely be more effective at reducing threats to human health and safety than the implementation of Alternative 4 because WS would be available to provide technical assistance and demonstration to those persons seeking assistance.

### ***Alternative 4 - WS would not provide any assistance with managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota***

If WS implements Alternative 4, WS would not provide assistance in North Dakota with any aspect of managing damage caused by those target bird species addressed in this EA, including providing technical assistance. People could contact WS for assistance but WS would refer those people to other entities, such as the USFWS, NDGFD, and/or private entities. Due to the lack of involvement in managing damage caused by those target bird species addressed in this EA, no impacts to human safety would occur directly by WS. This alternative would not prevent those entities from conducting damage management activities in the absence of WS' assistance. Many of the methods discussed in Appendix B would be

available to those persons experiencing damage or threats and, when required, people could continue to take birds lethally when authorized by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD.

#### ***SAFETY OF NON-CHEMICAL METHODS EMPLOYED***

If WS implements this alternative, those people experiencing bird damage could conduct activities themselves, they could seek assistance from other entities, or they could take no action. The requester and/or other entities would be responsible for using those methods available. Non-chemical methods available to alleviate or prevent damage associated with birds generally do not pose risks to human safety. Most non-chemical methods available to alleviate bird damage involve the live-capture or hazing of birds. The skill and knowledge of the person applying methods would determine the safety and efficacy of the methods the person was using. If people implement non-chemical methods appropriately and in consideration of human safety, then the effects of using non-chemical methods would be similar to those effects if WS implemented Alternative 1. If people implement non-chemical methods inappropriately, without regard for human safety, and/or use illegal methods, risks to human health and safety could be higher than those risks associated with the implementation of Alternative 1. Although some risks to human safety are likely to occur with the use of pyrotechnics, propane cannons, exclusion devices, and firearms, those risks would likely be minimal when people use those methods appropriately and in consideration of human safety.

#### ***SAFETY OF CHEMICAL METHODS EMPLOYED***

Similar to Alternative 3, several chemical methods would continue to be available for use by the public if WS implements Alternative 4. Nicarbazin, carbon dioxide for euthanasia, egg oiling, paintballs, Avitrol, and commercially available repellents are chemical methods that would continue to be available to the public for use. Similar to the use of non-chemical methods, the skill and knowledge of the person applying methods would determine the safety and efficacy of the methods the person was using. If people use chemical methods appropriately and in consideration of human safety, including follow label requirements, then the effects of implementing this alternative on human health and safety would be similar to those effects if WS implemented Alternative 1. If people implement chemical methods inappropriately, without regard for human safety, and/or use illegal methods, risks to human health and safety could be higher than those risks associated with the implementation of Alternative 1.

#### ***EFFECTS OF NOT EMPLOYING METHODS TO REDUCE THREATS TO HUMAN SAFETY***

Similar to Alternative 3, mesurol and the avicide DRC-1339 would not be available for the public to use if WS implements this alternative because those methods are currently only available for use by WS. A product with the same active ingredient as DRC-1339 has been commercially available to the public in the past and it is possible that other entities could seek to register the active ingredient of DRC-1339 as a restricted use pesticide in the state if WS implements this alternative. Mesurol would also not be available for the public to use; however, mesurol is only available to prevent egg predation of threatened or endangered species by crows and would not be available to reduce threats to human health and safety if WS implements any of the alternatives.

As discussed previously, if WS implements this alternative, the skill and knowledge of the person using methods would determine how effective those methods were at reducing threats to human health and safety. If people implement methods as intended at a similar level that would occur if WS' personnel were conducting those activities, the ability to reduce threats to human health and safety would be similar. If people attempting to reduce threats to human health and safety applied methods incorrectly or were not as diligent at employing methods, then the ability of those people to reduce threats to human health and safety would be lower than Alternative 1. This would likely occur on a case by case basis because one

person may apply methods as intended at a similar intensity level as would occur if WS were conducting the activities while another person may not apply methods as intended or may not apply those methods at a similar intensity level. Therefore, implementing this alternative would likely be effective at reducing threats to human health and safety similar to Alternative 1 in some cases but would not be as effective in other cases. However, implementing this alternative would likely be less effective at reducing threats to human health and safety than the implementation of Alternative 3 because WS would not be available to provide technical assistance and demonstration to those persons seeking assistance.

### **3.1.4 Issue 4 - Humaneness and Animal Welfare Concerns of Methods**

As discussed previously, a common issue often raised is concerns about the humaneness and animal welfare concerns of methods available under the alternatives for resolving damage and threats. Discussion of method humaneness and animal welfare concerns for those methods available under the alternatives occurs below.

#### ***Alternative 1 - WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota (Proposed Action/No Action)***

The issue of humaneness and animal welfare, as it relates to the killing or capturing of wildlife is an important but very complex concept that people interpret in a variety of ways. Schmidt (1989) indicated that vertebrate damage management for societal benefits could be compatible with animal welfare concerns, if “...*the reduction of pain, suffering, and unnecessary death is incorporated in the decision making process.*” The AVMA has previously described suffering as a “...*highly unpleasant emotional response usually associated with pain and distress*” (AVMA 1987). However, suffering “...*can occur without pain...*,” and “...*pain can occur without suffering...*” (AVMA 1987). Because suffering carries with it the implication of occurring over time, a case could be made for “...*little or no suffering where death comes immediately...*” (California Department of Fish and Game 1991). Pain and physical restraint can cause stress in animals and the inability of animals to effectively deal with those stressors can lead to distress. Suffering occurs when people do not take action to alleviate conditions that cause pain or distress in animals.

Defining pain as a component in humaneness appears to be a greater challenge than that of suffering. Pain obviously occurs in animals. Altered physiology and behavior can be indicators of pain. However, pain experienced by individual animals probably ranges from little or no pain to considerable pain (California Department of Fish and Game 1991). Research has not yet progressed to the development of objective, quantitative measurements of pain or stress for use in evaluating humaneness (Bateson 1991, Sharp and Saunders 2008, Sharp and Saunders 2011). Therefore, the challenge in coping with this issue is how to achieve the least amount of animal suffering.

The AVMA has previously stated “...*euthanasia is the act of inducing humane death in an animal*” and “... *the technique should minimize any stress and anxiety experienced by the animal prior to unconsciousness*” (Beaver et al. 2001). Some people would prefer the use of AVMA accepted methods of euthanasia when killing all animals, including wild animals. However, the AVMA has previously stated, “*For wild and feral animals, many of the recommended means of euthanasia for captive animals are not feasible. In field circumstances, wildlife biologists generally do not use the term euthanasia, but terms such as killing, collecting, or harvesting, recognizing that a distress-free death may not be possible*” (Beaver et al. 2001).

Humaneness, in part, appears to be a person’s perception of harm or pain inflicted on an animal, and people may perceive the humaneness of an action differently. Some individuals believe any use of lethal methods to resolve damage associated with wildlife is inhumane because the resulting fate is the death of

the animal. Others believe that certain lethal methods can lead to a humane death. Others believe most non-lethal methods of capturing wildlife to be humane because the animal is generally unharmed and alive. Still others believe that any disruption in the behavior of wildlife is inhumane. Given the multitude of attitudes on the meaning of humaneness and the varying perspectives on the most effective way to address damage and threats in a humane manner, the challenge for agencies is to conduct activities and employing methods that people perceive to be humane while assisting those persons requesting assistance to manage damage and threats associated with wildlife. The goal of WS would be to use methods as humanely as possible to resolve requests for assistance to reduce damage and threats to human safety. WS would continue to evaluate methods and activities to minimize the pain and suffering of methods addressed when attempting to resolve requests for assistance.

Some people and groups of people have stereotyped methods as “*humane*” or “*inhumane*”. However, many “*humane*” methods can be inhumane if not used appropriately. Therefore, the goal would be to address requests for assistance effectively using methods in the most humane way possible that minimizes the stress and pain to the animal. When formulating a management strategy using the WS Decision Model, WS’ personnel would give preference to the use of non-lethal methods, when practical and effective, pursuant to WS Directive 2.101.

Although some issues of humaneness could occur from the use of non-lethal methods, when used appropriately and by trained personnel, those methods would not result in the inhumane treatment of birds. The non-lethal methods of primary concern would be the use of live-capture methods, such as nets and cage traps. Concerns from the use of those non-lethal methods would be from injuries to birds while those methods restrain birds and from the stress of the bird while being restrained or during the application of the method. However, WS’ personnel would be present on-site during capture events or personnel would check methods frequently to ensure WS addresses birds captured in a timely manner to prevent injury. Although stress could occur from being restrained, timely attention to live-captured wildlife would alleviate suffering. Stress would likely be temporary.

Under the proposed action, WS could also use lethal methods to resolve requests for assistance to resolve or prevent bird damage and threats. Lethal methods would include firearms, DRC-1339, the recommendation that people harvest birds during regulated hunting seasons, egg destruction, and euthanasia after birds are live-captured. WS’ use of euthanasia methods under the proposed action would follow those required by WS Directive 2.505.

The euthanasia methods being considered for use under the proposed action for live-captured birds are cervical dislocation and carbon dioxide. The AVMA guideline on euthanasia lists cervical dislocation and carbon dioxide as conditionally acceptable methods of euthanasia for free-ranging birds, which can lead to a humane death (AVMA 2020). The use of cervical dislocation or carbon dioxide for euthanasia would occur after the animal has been live-captured and away from public view. Although the AVMA guideline also lists gunshot as a conditionally acceptable method of euthanasia for free-ranging wildlife, there is greater potential the method may not consistently produce a humane death (AVMA 2020). WS’ personnel that employ firearms to address bird damage or threats to human safety would be trained in the proper placement of shots to ensure a timely and quick death.

Although the mode of action of DRC-1339 is not well understood, it appears to cause death primarily by nephrotoxicity in susceptible species and by central nervous system depression in non-susceptible species (DeCino et al. 1966, Westberg 1969, Schafer 1984). DRC-1339 causes irreversible necrosis of the kidney and the affected bird is subsequently unable to excrete uric acid with death occurring from uremic poisoning and congestion of major organs (Decino et al. 1966, Knittle et al. 1990). The external appearances and behavior of starlings that ingested DRC-1339 slightly above the LD<sub>50</sub> for starlings appeared normal for 20 to 30 hours, but water consumption doubled after 4 to 8 hours and decreased

thereafter. Food consumption remained fairly constant until about 4 hours before death, at which time starlings refused food and water and became listless and inactive. The birds perched with feathers fluffed as in cold weather and appeared to doze but were responsive to external stimuli. As death nears, breathing increased slightly in rate and became more difficult; the birds no longer responded to external stimuli and became comatose. Death followed shortly thereafter without convulsions or spasms (DeCino et al. 1966). Birds ingesting a lethal dose of DRC-1339 become listless and lethargic, and a quiet death normally occurs in 24 to 72 hours following ingestion. This method appears to result in a less stressful death than which probably occurs by most natural causes, which are primarily disease, starvation, and predation. In non-sensitive birds and mammals, central nervous system depression and the attendant cardiac or pulmonary arrest is the cause of death (Felsenstein et al. 1974). DRC-1339 is the only lethal method that would not be available to other entities under the other alternatives. Certain formulations of DRC-1339 to manage damage caused by certain species of birds are only available to WS' personnel for use. A similar product containing the same active ingredient is commercially available as a restricted use pesticide for use to manage damage associated with blackbirds and starlings but at the time this document was developed was not registered for use in North Dakota.

The chemical repellent under the trade name Avitrol acts as a dispersing agent when birds ingest treated bait particles, which causes them to become hyperactive which elicits a flight response by other members of a flock. Their distress calls generally alarm the other birds and cause them to leave the site. Only a small number of birds need to be affected to cause alarm in the rest of the flock. The affected birds generally die. In most cases where Avitrol is used, only a small percentage of the birds are affected and killed by the chemical with the rest being merely dispersed. In experiments to determine suffering, stress, or pain in affected animals, Rowsell et al. (1979) tested Avitrol on pigeons and observed subjects for clinical, pathological, or neural changes indicative of pain or distress but none were observed. Conclusions of the study were that the chemical met the criteria for a humane pesticide.

When WS' personnel deem firearms to be an appropriate method to alleviate damage or threats of damage using the WS Decision Model, WS' personnel would strive to minimize the distress and pain of target birds and to induce death as rapidly as possible. The use of carbon dioxide for euthanasia would occur after WS' personnel live-capture a bird. WS' personnel that use firearms and carbon dioxide would receive training in the proper use of the methods to ensure a timely and quick death. Egg destruction would involve puncturing, breaking, shaking, or oiling an egg. In general, egg destruction would represent a humane method of making an egg unviable. In accordance with WS Directive 2.505, when taking an animal's life, WS' personnel would exhibit a high level of respect and professionalism toward the animal, regardless of method.

WS' personnel would be experienced and professional in their use of management methods (see WS Directive 1.301). WS' personnel would receive training in the latest and most humane devices/methods to manage damage associated with birds. Consequently, WS' personnel would implement methods in the most humane manner possible. People experiencing damage or threats of damage associated with birds could use many of those methods discussed in Appendix B regardless of the alternative implemented by WS. The only methods that would not be available for the public to use if WS implemented the other alternatives would be DRC-1339 and mesurol. Therefore, the issue of humaneness associated with methods would be similar across any of the alternatives because people could use those methods in the absence of WS' involvement. Those persons who view a particular method as humane or inhumane would likely continue to view those methods as humane or inhumane under any of the alternatives.

***Alternative 2 - WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota using only non-lethal methods***

If WS implemented this alternative, WS would only use non-lethal methods, which most people would generally regard as humane. WS would use non-lethal methods to live-capture, exclude, or disperse birds. The humaneness and animal welfare concerns of non-lethal methods would be identical to those described for Alternative 1 because those same non-lethal methods would be available for use if WS implemented this alternative. Although some issues of humaneness and animal welfare concerns could occur from the use of non-lethal methods, those methods, when used appropriately and by trained personnel, would not result in the inhumane treatment of birds.

***Alternative 3 - WS would recommend an integrated methods approach to managing bird damage in North Dakota through technical assistance only***

If WS implemented this alternative, the issue of method humaneness and animal welfare concerns would be similar to the humaneness and animal welfare concerns discussed for Alternative 1 because many of the same methods would be available for people to use. WS would not directly be involved with damage management activities if WS implemented Alternative 3. However, the entity receiving technical assistance from WS could employ those methods that WS recommends. Therefore, by recommending methods and, thus, a requester employing those methods, the issue of humaneness and animal welfare concerns would be similar to Alternative 1.

WS would instruct and demonstrate the proper use of methodologies to increase their effectiveness and to ensure people have the opportunity to use methods to minimize pain and suffering. However, the skill and knowledge of the person applying methods would determine the humane use of the methods the person was using despite WS' demonstration. Therefore, a lack of understanding of the behavior of birds or improperly identifying the damage caused by birds along with inadequate knowledge and skill in using methodologies to resolve the damage or threat could lead to incidents with a greater probability of people perceiving those activities as inhumane. In those situations, people are likely to regard the pain and suffering to be greater than discussed for Alternative 1.

Those persons requesting assistance would be directly responsible for the use and placement of methods and if monitoring or checking of those methods does not occur in a timely manner, captured wildlife could experience suffering and if not addressed timely, could experience distress. The amount of time an animal is restrained under the proposed action would be shorter compared to a technical assistance alternative if those requesters implementing methods are not as diligent or timely in checking methods. It is difficult to evaluate the behavior of individual people. In addition, it is difficult to evaluate how those people will react under given circumstances. Therefore, this alternative can only evaluate the availability of WS' assistance because determining human behavior can be difficult. If those persons seeking assistance from WS apply methods recommended by WS through technical assistance as intended and as described by WS, then those people could apply those methods humanely to minimize pain and distress. If those persons provided technical assistance by WS apply methods not recommended by WS or do not employ methods as intended or without regard for humaneness or animal welfare concerns, then the issue of method humaneness and animal welfare concerns would be of greater concern because the pain and distress of birds would likely be higher.

***Alternative 4 – WS would not provide any assistance with managing damage caused by birds in North Dakota***

WS would not provide any assistance in North Dakota if WS implemented Alternative 4. Those people experiencing damage or threats associated with birds could continue to use those methods legally



available. Those persons who consider methods inhumane would likely consider those methods inhumane under any alternative because people often label methods inhumane no matter the entity employing those methods. A lack of understanding regarding the behavior of birds or methods used could lead to an increase in situations perceived as being inhumane to wildlife despite the method used. Despite the lack of involvement by WS under this alternative, those methods perceived as inhumane by certain individuals and groups would still be available to the public to use to resolve damage and threats caused by birds.

### **3.2 ISSUES NOT CONSIDERED FOR COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

WS identified additional issues during the scoping process of this EA. WS considered those additional issues but a detailed analysis does not occur in Chapter 3. Discussion of those additional issues and the reasons for not analyzing those issues in detail occur below.

#### **3.2.1 Effects of Activities on Soils, Water, and Air Quality**

The implementation of those alternative approaches discussed in Section 2.4.1 by WS would meet the requirements of applicable federal laws, regulations, and Executive Orders for the protection of the environment, including the Clean Air Act. The actions described in Section 2.4.1 do not involve major ground disturbance, construction, or habitat alteration. Activities that WS could conduct during implementation of those alternative approaches discussed in Section 2.4.1 would not cause changes in the flow, quantity, or storage of water resources. The use and storage of methods by WS' personnel would also follow WS' directives, including WS Directive 2.210, WS Directive 2.401, WS Directive 2.405, WS Directive 2.430, WS Directive 2.465, WS Directive 2.601, WS Directive 2.605, WS Directive 2.615, WS Directive 2.620, WS Directive 2.625, and WS Directive 2.627. Through programmatic risk assessments, WS has determined the use of cage traps (USDA 2019*d*), foothold traps (USDA 2019*e*), nets (USDA 2020*b*), aircraft (USDA 2019*f*), and firearms (USDA 2019*g*) to manage wildlife damage pose minimal risks to the environment.

Most methods available for use to manage damage caused by birds are mechanical methods. Mechanical methods would not cause contaminants to enter water bodies or result in bioaccumulation. For example, firearms are mechanical methods that WS could use to remove a target bird lethally and to reinforce the noise associated with non-lethal methods, such as pyrotechnics. Firearms would not enter bodies of water and would be securely stored off-site after each use; therefore, the firearm itself would not contaminate water or result in the bioaccumulation of chemicals or other hazardous materials. Depredation permits issued by the USFWS require the use of non-toxic shot when using shotguns to target birds listed on the permit. Therefore, when conducting activities pursuant to a depredation permit issued by the USFWS and when using shotguns, WS' personnel would only use non-toxic shot. WS would also use non-toxic ammunition when required by depredation/control orders. Occasionally, WS' personnel could use lead ammunition in rifles, handguns, air rifles, and shotguns<sup>12</sup>.

There is often concern about the deposition of lead into the environment from ammunition used in firearms to remove birds lethally. In an ecological risk assessment of lead shot exposure in non-waterfowl birds, ingestion of lead shot was identified as the concern rather than just contact with lead shot or lead leaching from shot in the environment (Kendall et al. 1996). To address lead exposure from the use of shotguns, the USFWS Migratory Bird Permit Program has implemented the requirement to use non-toxic shot (see 50 CFR 20.21(j)) as part of the standard conditions of depredation permits issued pursuant to the MBTA for the lethal take of birds under 50 CFR 21.41. The depredation order for

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<sup>12</sup>Occasionally, WS could use shotguns using lead shot when targeting bird species that do not require a depredation permit from the USFWS to take those species, such as pigeons, house sparrows, and starlings.

blackbirds (see 50 CFR 21.43(b)) includes the requirement for use of non-toxic shot, as defined under 50 CFR 20.21(j), as well as, non-toxic bullets. However, this prohibition on the use of lead bullets does not apply if an entity uses an air rifle or an air pistol to remove depredating blackbirds under the depredation order.

The take of target bird species by WS in the state would occur primarily using shotguns. However, WS' personnel could use rifles, air rifles, and handguns to disperse or remove target bird species in some situations when WS' personnel determine their use to be safe. To reduce risks to human safety and property damage from bullets passing through a target bird, the use of rifles and air rifles would be applied in such a way (*e.g.*, caliber, bullet weight, distance) to reduce the likelihood of the bullet passing through the target bird species. Birds that were removed using a firearm would often occur within areas where retrieval of all carcasses for proper disposal would be highly likely (*e.g.*, at roost sites). WS' personnel would retrieve the carcasses of birds to the extent possible and would dispose of the carcasses in accordance with WS Directive 2.515. With risks of lead exposure occurring primarily from ingestion of bullet fragments and lead shot, the retrieval and proper disposal of bird carcasses would greatly reduce the risk of scavengers ingesting lead contained within the carcass.

However, deposition of lead into soil could occur if, during the use of a firearm, the projectile passed through a bird, if misses occurred, or if WS' personnel were not able to retrieve the carcass. Laidlaw et al. (2005) reported that, because of the low mobility of lead in soil, all of the lead that accumulates on the surface layer of the soil generally stays within the top 20 cm (about eight inches). In addition, concerns occur that lead from bullets deposited in soil from shooting activities could lead to contamination of ground water or surface water. Stansley et al. (1992) studied lead levels in water that had high concentrations of lead shot accumulation because of intensive target shooting at several shooting ranges. Lead did not appear to “*transport*” readily in surface water when soils were neutral or slightly alkaline in pH (*i.e.*, not acidic), but lead did transport more readily under slightly acidic conditions. Although Stansley et al. (1992) detected elevated lead levels in water in a stream and a marsh that were in the shot “*fall zones*” at a shooting range, the study did not find higher lead levels in a lake into which the stream drained, except for one sample collected near a parking lot. Stansley et al. (1992) believed the lead contamination near the parking lot was due to runoff from the lot, and not from the shooting range areas. The study also indicated that even when lead shot was highly accumulated in areas with permanent water bodies present, the lead did not necessarily cause elevated lead levels in water further downstream. Muscle samples from two species of fish collected in water bodies with high lead shot accumulations had lead levels that were well below the accepted threshold standard of safety for human consumption (Stansley et al. 1992).

Craig et al. (1999) reported that lead levels in water draining away from a shooting range with high accumulations of lead bullets in the soil around the impact areas were far below the “*action level*” of 15 parts per billion as defined by the EPA (*i.e.*, requiring action to treat the water to remove lead). The study found that the dissolution (*i.e.*, capability of dissolving in water) of lead declines when lead oxides form on the surface areas of the spent bullets and fragments, which reduces the transport of lead across the landscape and naturally serves to reduce the potential for ground or surface water contamination (Craig et al. 1999). Those studies suggest that, given the very low amount of lead deposited and the concentrations that would occur from WS' activities to reduce bird damage using firearms, as well as most other forms of hunting in general, lead contamination from such sources would be minimal to nonexistent.

Because the take of birds could occur by other entities when authorized by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD, when required, WS' assistance with removing target bird species would not be additive to the environmental status quo. WS' assistance would not be additive to the environmental status quo because those birds removed by WS using firearms could be lethally removed by the entities experiencing damage using the same method in the absence of WS' involvement. WS' involvement in activities may result in

lower amounts of lead being deposited into the environment due to efforts by WS to ensure projectiles do not pass through, but are contained within the bird carcass, which would limit the amount of lead potentially deposited into soil from projectiles passing through the carcass. The proficiency training received by WS' employees in firearm use and accuracy increases the likelihood that WS' personnel lethally remove a target bird humanely in situations that ensure accuracy and that misses occur infrequently, which would further reduce the potential for WS' activities to deposit lead in the soil.

In addition, WS' involvement in activities would ensure WS' personnel made efforts to retrieve bird carcasses lethally removed using firearms to prevent the ingestion of lead in carcasses by scavengers. WS' involvement would also ensure carcasses were disposed of properly to limit the availability of lead. Based on current information, the risks associated with lead ammunition that WS' activities could deposit into the environment due to misses, the bullet passing through the carcass, or from bird carcasses that may be irretrievable would be below any level that would pose any risk from exposure or significant contamination. WS would not use lead ammunition at a magnitude that activities would deposit a large amount of spent bullets or shot in such a limited area that would result in large accumulations of lead in the soil. As stated previously, when using shotguns to target those migratory bird species addressed in a depredation permit issued by the USFWS, only non-toxic shot would be used by WS pursuant to 50 CFR 20.21(j). WS may utilize non-toxic ammunition in rifles, air rifles, and handguns as the technology improves and ammunition becomes more effective and available. In addition, when targeting birds pursuant to a depredation or control order, WS would use non-toxic ammunition if required by the order (e.g., the blackbird depredation order (50 CFR 21.43)).

WS could also use aircraft to survey, locate, and monitor birds. The use of a fixed-winged aircraft or helicopter for surveillance and monitoring activities, like any other flying, may result in an accident. WS would primarily use aircraft to conduct surveys of waterbirds in the state, such as American white pelicans. WS' pilots and crewmembers receive training and have experience to recognize the circumstances that lead to accidents. The national WS Aviation Program has a strong emphasis on safety, including funding for training, the establishment of a WS Flight Training Center, and annual recurring training for all pilots. In addition, WS has developed a comprehensive Aviation Operations and Safety Manual that provides guidance to WS' personnel when conducting aerial operations. However, accidents may still occur. Nationwide, the WS program has been using aircraft during aerial operations for many years. During this time, no incidents of major ground fires associated with WS' aircraft accidents have occurred; thus, the risk of catastrophic ground fires caused by an aircraft accident is exceedingly low.

Aviation fuel is extremely volatile and it will normally evaporate within a few hours or less to the point that even detecting its odor is difficult. The fuel capacity for aircraft used by WS varies. For fixed-winged aircraft, a 52-gallon capacity would generally be the maximum, while 91 gallons would generally be the maximum fuel capacity for helicopters. In some cases, little or none of the fuel would spill if an accident occurs. Thus, there should be little environmental hazard from unignited fuel spills.

With the size of aircraft used by WS, the quantities of oil (e.g., 6 to 8 quarts maximum for reciprocating (piston) engines and 3 to 5 quarts for turbine engines) capable of spilling in any accident would be small with minimal chance of causing environmental damage. Aircraft used by WS would be single engine models, so the greatest amount of oil that could spill in one accident would be about eight quarts.

Petroleum products degrade through volatilization and bacterial action, particularly when exposed to oxygen (EPA 2000). Thus, small quantity oil spills on surface soils can biodegrade readily. Even in subsurface contamination situations involving underground storage facilities that generally involve larger quantities than would ever be involved in a small aircraft accident, the EPA guidelines provide for "natural attenuation" or volatilization and biodegradation in some situations to mitigate environmental hazards (EPA 2000). Thus, even where the owner of the aircraft did not clean up oil spills in small

aircraft accidents, the oil does not persist in the environment or persists in such small quantities that no adverse effects would likely occur. In addition, WS' accidents generally would occur in remote areas away from human habitation and drinking water supplies. Thus, the risk to drinking water appears to be exceedingly low to nonexistent.

For those reasons, the risk of ground fires or fuel/oil pollution from aviation accidents would be low. In addition, based on the history and experience of the program in aircraft accidents, it appears the risk of environmental damage from such accidents is exceedingly low.

Currently, the two principal types of fuel used in aviation today are aviation gasoline (commonly referred to as avgas) and jet fuel. According to the Federal Aviation Administration, aviation gasoline is the only transportation fuel that still contains a lead additive (Federal Aviation Administration 2018). Jet fuel does not contain a lead additive. The helicopters that WS could use to conduct monitoring and surveillance activities would use jet fuel, which does not contain lead. However, the airplanes that WS utilizes would use aviation gasoline, which does contain a lead additive. The Federal Aviation Administration (2018) stated, “[Aviation gasoline] *emissions have become the largest contributor to the relatively low levels of lead emissions produced in [the United States].*”

In consultation with the Federal Aviation Administration, the EPA has the authority to regulate aircraft emissions under the Clean Air Act, including lead emissions from the use of aviation gasoline. When the EPA sets standards for aircraft emissions, the Clean Air Act specifies that the EPA and the Federal Aviation Administration must consider the time needed to develop required technology, consider cost, and must not adversely affect aircraft safety or noise (Federal Aviation Administration 2018).

In 2006, an environmental advocacy organization petitioned the EPA to find that lead emissions from airplanes using aviation gasoline containing lead additives contribute to lead air pollution that may endanger public health or welfare. The same environmental advocacy organization petitioned the EPA again in 2014 and urged the EPA to make an endangerment finding regarding lead emissions from aviation gasoline. Despite the petitions, the EPA continues to indicate a need for more data and findings to make a judgment on whether lead emissions from aviation gasoline are a danger to public health. Pursuant to Section 231 of the Clean Air Act, the EPA is currently conducting proceedings regarding whether lead emissions from piston-engine general aviation aircraft that use aviation gasoline cause or contribute to air pollution that may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public health or welfare. In addition, the Federal Aviation Administration is supporting research of alternative fuels to replace aviation gasoline that contain lead additives. The Federal Aviation Administration anticipates issuing final test reports on alternative fuels to replace aviation gasoline that contain lead additives by mid-2020 (Federal Aviation Administration 2018). The Federal Aviation Administration is committed to developing an alternative fuel or fuels for use in airplanes and the EPA continues to proceed with investigations regarding whether lead emissions from airplanes using aviation gasoline cause or contribute to air pollution that may endanger the public. When the EPA and the Federal Aviation Administration approve the general use of an alternative fuel or fuels and the fuel or fuels become readily available for use, WS would use the alternative fuel or fuels.

The use of chemical immobilization and euthanizing agents by WS' employees would occur pursuant to WS Directive 2.430. WS' employees would follow WS Directive 2.401, which provides for the safe and effective storage, disposal, recordkeeping, and use of pesticides. When using pesticides, WS' employees would follow product labels to minimize risks of environmental hazards. For example, label requirements of the avicide DRC-1339 may include not placing treated bait directly in water, not using treated bait within 50 feet of permanent manmade or natural bodies of water, not applying treated bait when runoff is likely to occur, and not contaminating water when cleaning equipment or disposing of waste. Similarly, label requirements for 4-Aminopyridine (Avitrol) may include not placing treated bait directly in water,

not using treated bait within 25 feet of permanent bodies of water, and not contaminating water when cleaning of equipment or disposing of waste.

When conducting activities using lethal methods, WS' personnel would retrieve carcasses to the extent possible for disposal. WS' personnel would dispose of retrieved carcasses in accordance with WS Directive 2.510 and WS Directive 2.515. When applicable, WS' personnel would also dispose of carcasses pursuant to requirements in authorizations issued by the USFWS and/or authorizations provided by the NDGFD. In addition, WS' personnel would follow the requirements of labels and use guidelines when using pesticides and when using chemical immobilization and euthanizing agents.

Consequently, WS does not expect that implementing any of the alternative approaches discussed in Section 2.4.1 would significantly change the environmental status quo with respect to soils, geology, minerals, water quality, water quantity, floodplains, wetlands, other aquatic resources, air quality, prime and unique farmlands, timber, and range. WS has received no reports or documented any effects associated with soil, water, or air quality from previous activities associated with managing damage caused by birds in the state that WS conducted. Therefore, the EA will not analyze those elements further.

### **3.2.2 Greenhouse Gas Emissions by WS**

Under the alternative approaches intended to meet the need for action discussed in Section 2.4.1, WS could potentially produce criteria pollutants (*i.e.*, pollutants for which maximum allowable emission levels and concentrations are enforced by state agencies). Those activities could include working in the office, travel from office to field locations, travel at field locations (vehicles or all-terrain vehicles), and from other work-related travel (*e.g.*, attending meetings). During evaluations of the national program to manage feral swine (*Sus scrofa*), the WS program reviewed greenhouse gas emissions for the entire national WS program (see pages 266 and 267 in USDA 2015b). The analysis estimated effects of vehicle, aircraft, office, and all-terrain vehicle use by WS for FY 2013 and included the potential new vehicle purchases that could be associated with a national program to manage damaged caused by feral swine. The review concluded that the range of Carbon Dioxide Equivalents (includes CO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub> CO, and SO<sub>x</sub>) for the entire national WS program would be below the reference point of 25,000 metric tons per year recommended by Council on Environmental Quality for actions requiring detailed review of impacts on greenhouse gas emissions. The activities that WS could conduct under the alternative approaches discussed in Section 2.4.1 would have negligible cumulative effects on atmospheric conditions, including the global climate.

### **3.2.3 WS' Actions Would Result in Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources**

Other than relatively minor uses of fuels for vehicles/aircraft, electricity for office operations and UAVs, carbon dioxide for euthanasia, and some components associated with ammunition (*e.g.*, black powder, shot) and pyrotechnics (*e.g.*, black powder, cardboard), no irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources result from WS' activities.

### **3.2.4 Impacts on Cultural, Archaeological, Historic, and Tribal Resources and Unique Characteristics of Geographic Areas**

A number of different types of federal and state lands occur within the analysis area, such as national wildlife refuges, national forests, and wildlife management areas. WS recognizes that some persons interested in those areas may feel that any activities that could occur in those areas would adversely affect the esthetic value and natural qualities of the area. Similarly, WS' activities could occur within areas with cultural, archaeological, historic, and/or tribal resources. WS would only provide direct operational

assistance in the state if WS implements Alternative 1 or Alternative 2 (see Section 2.4.1). WS would provide no assistance with managing damage caused by birds if WS implements Alternative 4 and WS would only provide technical assistance if WS implements Alternative 3.

If WS implements Alternative 1 or Alternative 2, the methods that WS could employ would not cause major ground disturbance and would not cause any physical destruction or damage to property. In addition, the methods available would not cause any alterations of property, wildlife habitat, or landscapes, and would not involve the sale, lease, or transfer of ownership of any property. In general, implementation of Alternative 1 or Alternative 2 would not have the potential to introduce visual, atmospheric, or audible elements to areas that could result in effects on the character or use of properties. Therefore, if WS implemented Alternative 1 or Alternative 2, the methods would not have the potential to affect the unique characteristics of geographic areas or any cultural, archeological, historic, and tribal resources. If WS implements Alternative 1 or Alternative 2 and WS planned an individual activity with the potential to affect historic resources, WS and/or the entity requesting assistance would conduct the site-specific consultation, as required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as necessary.

Conducting activities at or in close proximity to historic or cultural sites for the purposes of alleviating damage caused by birds would have the potential for audible effects on the use and enjoyment of the historic property. For example, WS could use pyrotechnics to disperse birds. However, WS would only use such methods at a historic site after the property owner or manager signed a work initiation document allowing WS to conduct activities on their property. A built-in minimization factor for this issue is that nearly all the methods involved would only have temporary effects on the audible nature of a site and could be ended at any time to restore the audible qualities of such sites to their original condition with no further adverse effects.

In addition, WS would only conduct activities on tribal lands at the request of the Tribe and only after signing appropriate authorizing documents. Therefore, the Tribe would determine what activities they would allow and when WS' assistance was required. Because Tribal officials would be responsible for requesting assistance and determining what methods would be available to alleviate damage, no conflict with traditional cultural properties or beliefs would likely occur. WS would also adhere to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. If WS' personnel located Native American cultural items while conducting activities on federal or tribal lands, WS would notify the land manager and would discontinue work at the site until authorized by the managing entity.

WS would abide by federal and state laws, regulations, work plans, Memorandum of Understandings, and policies to minimize any effects and would abide by any restrictions imposed by the land management agency on activities conducted by WS. The implementation of those alternative approaches discussed in Section 2.4.1 by WS would meet the requirements of applicable federal laws, regulations, and Executive Orders for the protection of the unique characteristics of geographic areas or any cultural, archeological, historic, and tribal resources.

### **3.2.5 Impacts of Dispersing a Bird Roost on People in Urban/Suburban Areas**

Another issue often raised is that the dispersal of birds from a roost location to alleviate damage or conflicts at one site could result in new damage or conflicts at a new roost site. While the original complainant may see resolution to the bird problem when dispersal of the roost occurs, the recipient of the bird roost may see the bird problem as imposed on them. Thus, overall, there is no resolution to the original bird problem (Mott and Timbrook 1988). Bird roosts usually are dispersed using a combination of hazing methods including pyrotechnics, propane cannons, effigies, and electronic distress calls (Avery et al. 2008a, Chipman et al. 2008, Seamans and Gosser 2016). A similar conflict could develop when

making minor habitat alterations (*e.g.*, trimming tree branches) to disperse a bird roost. This could be a concern in metropolitan areas where the likelihood of birds dispersed from a roost, finding a new roost location, and not coming into conflict would be very low. WS has developed alternatives to minimize the potential of dispersing bird roosts in urban/suburban areas by evaluating a management option to depopulate a bird roost.

In urban areas, WS would often work with the community or municipal leaders to address bird damage involving large bird roosts that would likely be affecting several people; therefore, WS often consults not only with the property owner where roosts are located but also with community leaders to allow for community-based decision-making on the best management approach. In addition, funding would often be provided by the municipality where the roost was located, which would allow activities to occur within city limits where bird roosts occurred. This would allow WS and/or other entities to address roosts that relocated to other areas effectively and often times, before roosts become well established. Section 2.2.1 further discusses a community-based decision-making approach to bird damage management in urban areas. Therefore, WS did not consider this issue further.

### **3.3 SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

Based on the best available information, the analyses in Section 3.1.1 and the information discussed in Appendix D indicate the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on target bird populations associated with implementing Alternative 1 would be of low magnitude. The cumulative lethal removal of target bird species from all known sources of mortality would not reach a threshold that would cause a decline in their respective populations. The implementation of Alternative 2, Alternative 3, or Alternative 4 would likely have similar effects on target bird populations to implementing Alternative 1 because the same or similar activities would occur by other entities. The USFWS and the NDGFD have issued depredation permits and authorizations for other entities to take many of the bird species addressed in this EA and the lethal take of birds in North Dakota has occurred by entities other than WS. The USFWS and the NDGFD could continue to issue depredation permits and authorizations to entities experiencing damage or threats of damage caused by birds in the state despite WS only providing technical assistance if WS implemented Alternative 3 or provided no assistance if WS implemented Alternative 4.

If WS implemented Alternative 1, those methods that WS could use to alleviate damage would essentially be selective for target bird species because WS' personnel would consider the methods available and their potential to disperse, capture, or kill non-target animals based on the use pattern of the method. WS' personnel would have experience with managing animal damage and would receive training in the use of methods, which would allow WS' employees to use the WS Decision Model to select the most appropriate methods to address damage caused by birds and to reduce the risks to non-target animals. No take of non-target animals has occurred by WS during prior activities to manage bird damage in the state. If WS implemented Alternative 3, the knowledge and skill of those persons implementing recommended methods would determine the potential for impacts to occur. If those persons experiencing damage do not implement methods or techniques correctly, the potential impacts from providing only technical assistance could be greater than Alternative 1. The incorrect implementation of methods or techniques recommended by WS could lead to an increase in non-target animal removal when compared to the non-target animal removal that could occur by WS under Alternative 1. Similarly, if WS implemented Alternative 4, the knowledge and skill of those persons implementing methods would determine the potential for impacts to occur. If those persons experiencing damage do not implement methods or techniques correctly, the potential impacts from implementing Alternative 4 could be greater than Alternative 1.

The risks to human health and safety from the use of available methods, when used appropriately and by trained personnel, would be low. No adverse effects to human safety have occurred from WS' use of

methods to alleviate bird damage in the state from FY 2015 through FY 2019. Based on the use patterns of methods available to address damage caused by birds, implementation of Alternative 1 would comply with Executive Order 12898 and Executive Order 13045. Other entities have and could continue to conduct activities to manage bird damage in the state. If people implemented methods appropriately and in consideration of human safety, threats to human health and safety would be minimal. If people implemented methods inappropriately, without regard for human safety, and/or used illegal methods, risks to human health and safety would increase.

People experiencing damage or threats of damage associated with birds could use many of those methods discussed in Appendix B regardless of the alternative implemented by WS. If WS implemented Alternative 2, Alternative 3, or Alternative 4, the only methods that would not be available for use by the public would be the avicide DRC-1339 (pigeons, crows, ravens, magpies, blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds, starlings, Eurasian collared-doves, gulls only) and mesurol (crows only). Therefore, the issue of humaneness associated with methods would be similar across any of the alternatives because people could use those methods in the absence of WS' involvement. Those persons who view a particular method as humane or inhumane would likely continue to view those methods as humane or inhumane under any of the alternatives. In addition, many "humane" methods can be inhumane if not used appropriately. For example, people may view a live trap as a humane method because the trap captures an animal alive. Yet, without proper care, people can treat a bird captured in a live trap inhumanely if they do not attend to the bird appropriately.

In conclusion, implementation of Alternative 1 would not result in cumulatively significant environmental impacts on any of the issues analyzed in this EA based on past, present, and/or reasonably foreseeable future actions. If WS implements Alternative 1, all activities would comply with relevant laws, regulations, policies, orders, procedures, and WS' directives. In addition, WS would review this EA periodically to ensure activities and their impacts remain consistent with the activities and impacts analyzed in this EA. Monitoring activities would ensure that WS' activities and the effects of those activities occurred within the limits of evaluated/anticipated activities. Monitoring involves review of the EA for all of the issues evaluated in Chapter 3 to ensure that the activities and associated impacts have not changed substantially over time.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESPONSES TO PUBLIC COMMENTS**

WS made the EA available to the public for review and comment by a legal notice published in the *Bismarck Tribune* newspaper from January 5, 2021 through January 7, 2021. WS made the EA available to the public for review and comment on the APHIS website on January 4, 2021 and on the federal e-rulemaking portal at the regulations.gov website beginning on December 29, 2020. WS also sent out direct mailings to local known stakeholders and an electronic notification to stakeholders registered through the APHIS Stakeholder Registry on December 30, 2020. The public involvement process ended on February 8, 2021.

### **4.1 SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS AND WS' RESPONSES TO THE COMMENTS**

During the public comment period, WS received four comment responses on the draft EA. Section 4.1 summarizes the comments received and provides WS' responses to the comments.

#### **Comment – WS should leave birds alone unless they are non-native or introduced**

**Response:** Section 1.2 addresses the need to manage damage and threats of damage associated with birds in North Dakota. Table 1.1 in Section 1.2 and Table D-1 in Appendix D identify the bird species associated with requests for assistance that WS could receive and the primary resource types those bird



species damage in North Dakota. As shown in Table 1.1 and Table D-1, native and non-native bird species can cause damage to agricultural resources (see Section 1.2.1), property (see Section 1.2.3), natural resources (see Section 1.2.4), and pose threats to human health and safety (see Section 1.2.2). As discussed in Section 2.2.5 and Section 2.2.6, WS' activities to manage birds would comply with authorizations from the USFWS and/or the NDGFD, which are responsible for the management of bird species.

**Comment – WS should concentrate on reducing human impacts instead of wildlife impacts**

**Response:** As discussed in the EA and Appendix B, WS could recommend that people requesting assistance modify behaviors that may be contributing to bird damage or threats of damage or make limited habitat modifications to make an area less attractive to bird species. However, managing impacts that the human population may cause are outside the authority of the WS program. Section 1.1 discusses the primary statutory authority of the WS program.

**Comment – WS sneaks into areas with no notice to anyone**

**Response:** WS only provides assistance after receiving a request for such assistance and only after the entity requesting assistance and WS sign a work initiation document. Therefore, the decision-maker for what activities WS conducts is the entity that owns or manages the affected property. The decision-makers have the discretion to involve others as to what occurs or does not occur on property they own or manage. Therefore, in the case of an individual property owner or manager, the involvement of others and to what degree they involve others in the decision-making process would be a decision made by that individual. Section 2.2.1 in the EA discusses WS' co-managerial approach to making decisions.

**Comment – WS should not use taxpayer funding**

**Response:** WS identified an alternative approach that would require cooperators completely fund activities (see Section 2.4.2). However, WS did not consider the alternative in detail for the reasons provided in Section 2.4.2. In those cases where WS receives federal and/or state funding to conduct activities, federal, state, and/or local officials have made the decision to provide funding for damage management activities and have allocated funds for such activities. Additionally, wildlife damage management is an appropriate activity for government programs because managing wildlife has been deemed a government responsibility in the United States.

**Comment – WS uses national population numbers/damage data instead of state population/damage data as a way to embellish actual bird damage problems.**

**Response:** The EA uses both national data as well as state or local data to evaluate damage and damage threats. WS believes it is important to use some national data to emphasize the importance of a particular topic while also using as much state and local data as possible to evaluate the specific damage issue. Section 1.2 provides numerous citations of local or state data.

**Comment – WS only works with state fish and game agencies**

**Response:** WS works with many partner agencies and stakeholders. WS does work with the USFWS and the NDGFD because those agencies have management authority of those bird species that WS could address when managing damage (see Section 1.5, Section 2.2.5, Section 2.2.6). WS also made this EA available to the public for their review and to provide their comments.

**Comment – WS wants to kill all birds; WS should not kill birds**

**Response:** The WS Decision Model would be the implementing mechanism for a bird damage management program under applicable alternatives that WS' personnel would adapt to an individual damage situation. When WS receives a request for direct operational assistance, WS would conduct site visits to assess the damage or threats, would identify the cause of the damage, and would apply the Decision Model described by Slate et al. (1992) and WS Directive 2.201 to determine the appropriate methods to resolve or prevent damage. Discussion of the Decision Model and WS' use of the Model occurs in Section 2.4.1. In addition, WS would give preference to non-lethal methods when practical and effective (see WS Directive 2.101). Appendix B in the EA discusses many non-lethal methods that WS' personnel could recommend or employ to resolve damage under the applicable alternatives. As indicated in Section 3.1.1, WS has used and will continue to use numerous non-lethal methods to manage damage caused by bird species in North Dakota. WS does not attempt to eradicate any native bird species. WS operates in accordance with federal and state laws and regulations enacted to ensure species viability.

**Comment – WS seeks money to kill birds**

**Response:** WS only provides assistance after receiving a request for such assistance that is specifically directed to WS, normally through phone calls, emails, and in-person communication. WS does not initiate solicitation of any of the services offered by WS. Furthermore, WS does not consider publicly advertised solicitations, notices, or bid advertisements seeking wildlife damage management activities that are open to private sector service providers (see WS Directive 3.101). Funding for WS' activities could occur from federal appropriations, through state funding, and/or through money received from the entity requesting assistance. In most cases, those entities requesting assistance would provide the funding for activities conducted by WS.

**Comment – WS poisons birds with gas and uses cyanide; WS does not use humane methods**

**Response:** WS identified the humaneness of methods and animal welfare as an issue. Section 2.1.4 and Section 3.1.4 discuss and evaluate the issue of humaneness and animal welfare. WS' personnel would use euthanasia methods in accordance with WS Directive 2.505. WS could use carbon dioxide gas to euthanize birds once WS captures those birds using other methods. Section 3.1.2, Section 3.1.3, Section 3.1.4, and Appendix B discusses WS use of carbon dioxide to euthanize birds once live captured. WS would not use cyanide for bird damage management activities in North Dakota.

**Comment – Commenter believes birds are especially problematic at airports and believes the Federal Aviation Administration should address the issue**

**Response:** The Federal Aviation Administration requires certificated airports to alleviate wildlife hazards whenever they occur (see 14 CFR 139.337). Because WS is the lead federal agency responsible for managing conflicts between people and wildlife, airport authorities could request assistance from WS to manage aircraft strike risks at their airports.

**Comment – Commenter strongly supports Alternative 1 and believes WS should continue the current integrated methods approach to managing damage caused by blackbirds in North Dakota.**

**Response:** WS developed alternative approaches to meet the need for action and to address the identified issues associated with managing damage caused by birds. If WS implements Alternative 1, the WS would continue the current integrated methods approach to manage damage caused by birds in North Dakota, including blackbirds. Section 3.1 analyzes the environmental consequences of each of the alternative approaches in comparison to determine the extent of actual or potential impacts on the issues,

including Alternative 1. Based on the analyses of the alternative approaches that WS developed to address those issues analyzed in detail within the EA, including individual and cumulative impacts of those alternative approaches, WS will issue a decision for the final EA.

## **CHAPTER 5: LIST OF PREPARERS, REVIEWERS, AND PERSONS CONSULTED**

### **5.1 LIST OF PREPARERS**

John Paulson, State Director	USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services
Ryan Powers, District Supervisor	USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services
Ryan Wimberly, Environmental Coordinator	USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services
Chad Richardson, Environmental Coordinator	USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services

### **5.2 LIST OF INVITED REVIEWERS**

Bureau of Land Management  
National Sunflower Association  
North Dakota Department of Agriculture  
North Dakota Game and Fish Department  
United States Forest Service  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service

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## **APPENDIX B METHODS AVAILABLE TO MANAGE BIRD DAMAGE**

WS is evaluating the use of an adaptive approach to managing damage associated with birds, when requested, through the implementation and integration of safe and practical methods based on local problem analyses and the informed decisions of trained WS' personnel. WS' personnel would formulate integrated method approaches using the WS Decision Model (Slate et al. 1992; see WS Directive 2.201). An integrated approach to resolving requests for assistance using the Decision Model would allow WS' personnel greater flexibility and more opportunity to develop an effective damage management strategy for each request for assistance, such as considerations for threatened, endangered, or candidate species, that could be present in an area.

When selecting damage management techniques for specific damage situations, WS' personnel would consider the species involved along with the magnitude, geographic extent, duration, frequency, and likelihood of further damage. WS' personnel would also consider the status of target and potential non-target species, local environmental conditions and impacts, social and legal aspects, humaneness of methods, animal welfare concerns, and relative costs of damage reduction options. The cost of damage reduction may sometimes be a secondary concern because of the overriding environmental, legal, and animal welfare considerations. WS' personnel would evaluate those factors when formulating damage management strategies that incorporate the application of one or more techniques.

A variety of methods would potentially be available to WS in North Dakota relative to the management or reduction of damage from birds. Various federal, state, and local statutes and regulations and WS directives would govern WS' use of damage management methods. WS would develop and recommend or implement strategies based on resource management, physical exclusion, and wildlife management approaches. Within each approach there may be available a number of specific methods or techniques. WS could recommend or use the following methods in North Dakota. Many of the methods described would also be available to other entities in the absence of any involvement by WS.

### **I. NON-LETHAL METHODS**

Non-lethal methods consist primarily of tools or devices used to disperse, exclude, or capture a particular bird or a local population of birds to alleviate damage and conflicts. When evaluating management methods and formulating a management strategy, WS' personnel would give preference to non-lethal methods when they determine those methods to be practical and effective (see WS Directive 2.101). Most of the non-lethal methods available to WS would also be available to other entities within the state and other entities could employ those methods to alleviate bird damage.

**Human presence:** Human presence may consist of physical actions of people, such as clapping, waving, or shouting, or the presence of people and/or a vehicle at a location where damage or threats of damage are occurring. For example, birds may associate a vehicle with previous hazing activities and approaching an area in that vehicle or a similar vehicle may disperse target bird species from an area. Similarly, making a person's presence known to target bird species by clapping, waving, or shouting can often disperse birds from an area. When birds begin to associate people with hazing and/or shooting activities, the presence of people can disperse those birds when they see people approach. Human activities can also enhance the effectiveness of effigies, such as human effigies, because they associate people with hazing or shooting activities.

**Modifying cultural practices:** WS' personnel could make recommendations to people on where to locate facilities, the design of facilities, modifications of existing facilities, and fisheries management to reduce the threat of bird damage. WS' personnel could make recommendations on facility design or



modifications to existing facilities to minimize the attractiveness of the facilities to birds, such as removing or altering areas where birds can perch and loaf. WS' personnel could also make recommendations on operations management, such as areas to locate vulnerable fish stock, stocking rates, and the timing of releasing vulnerable fish stock.

Recommendations could include modifying the behavior of people that may be attracting or contributing to the damage caused by birds. For example, artificial feeding of waterfowl by people can attract and sustain more birds in an area than could normally be supported by natural food supplies. Recommendations may include altering planting dates so that crops are less vulnerable to damage when birds may be present. Modifying human behavior could include recommending people plant crops that are less attractive or less vulnerable to damage. At feedlots or dairies, cultural methods generally involve modifications to the level of care or attention given to livestock, which may vary depending on the age and size of the livestock. For example, Carlson et al. (2018a) found that red-winged blackbirds preferred flaked corn over ground corn in livestock feed. Similarly, Carlson et al. (2018b) found that pelleted feed of 0.95 centimeters diameter or larger inhibited starling consumption by more than 79%. WS could make recommendations on changes to animal husbandry practices, such as feeding animals at night, feeding animals indoors, removing spilled grain or standing water, and use of bird proof feeders.

In situations where the presence of birds at or near airports results in threats to human safety and cannot be resolved by other means, WS' personnel could recommend airports or military facilities alter aircraft flight patterns or schedules to avoid risks of striking birds. However, altering operations at airports to decrease the potential for strike hazards involving birds would generally not be feasible unless an emergency exists. Otherwise, the expense of interrupted flights and the limitations of existing facilities generally make this practice prohibitive.

Removal of domestic waterfowl could be recommended or implemented by WS and other entities to alleviate damage. Flocks of urban/suburban domestic waterfowl can act as decoys and attract other migrating waterfowl (Crisley et al. 1968, Woronecki 1992). Avery (1994) reported that birds learn to locate food sources by watching the behavior of other birds. The removal of domestic waterfowl from water bodies removes birds that act as decoys that attract other waterfowl. Domestic waterfowl could also carry diseases, which can threaten wild populations.

**Limited habitat modification:** In most cases, the resource or property owner would be responsible for implementing habitat modifications, and WS would only provide recommendations on the type of modifications that would provide the best chance of achieving the desired effect. Habitat management would most often be a primary component of damage management strategies at or near airports to reduce bird aircraft strike problems by eliminating bird nesting, roosting, loafing, or feeding sites. Management of vegetation and water from areas adjacent to aircraft runways can minimize many bird problems on airport properties. WS could also recommend limited habitat modification in urban areas. For example, habitat management would often be necessary to minimize damage caused by crows, blackbirds, and starlings that form large roosts during late autumn and winter in urban areas. Selectively thinning trees or pruning trees can greatly reduce bird activity at a roost location.

**Supplemental feeding and lure crops:** Supplemental feeding and lure crops are food resources planted or provided to attract wildlife away from more valuable resources (*e.g.*, crops). The intent is to provide a more attractive food source so that the animals causing damage would consume it rather than a more valuable resource. In feeding programs, an alternative food source with a higher appeal is offered to target birds with the intention of luring them from feeding on affected resources. This method can be ineffective if other food sources are available. For example, lure crops would largely be ineffective for geese because food resources (*e.g.*, turf) are readily available. For lure crops to be effective, the ability to keep birds from surrounding fields would be necessary, and the number of alternative feeding sites must

be minimal (Fairaizl and Pfeifer 1988). Additionally, lure crops reduce damage for only a short time (Fairaizl and Pfeifer 1988) and damage by birds is often continuous. The resource owner would be limited in implementing this method contingent upon ownership of or ability to manage the property.

**Fencing:** WS could recommend and implement fencing to alleviate bird damage; however, fencing has limited application for birds. WS' personnel would primarily use and recommend fencing when addressing requests for assistance associated with waterfowl. Similar to other exclusion methods, the intent of fencing is to prevent waterfowl from accessing an area. For example, WS could place fencing between a crop and a pond that waterfowl use. The fencing would act as a barrier to prevent waterfowl from leaving the pond and walking to feed on the crop. Exclusion adequate to stop bird movements can also restrict movements of livestock, people, and other wildlife (Fuller-Perrine and Tobin 1993). In addition, limits to the use of fencing arise where there are multiple landowners, the size of the area, and its proximity to bodies of water used by waterfowl. Unfortunately, there have been situations where barrier fencing designed to inhibit goose nesting has entrapped young and resulted in starvation (Cooper 1998). The preference for geese to walk or swim, rather than fly, during this time period contributes to the success of barrier fences. Birds that are capable of full or partial flight render this method useless, except for enclosed areas small enough to prevent landing.

Fencing could include the use and recommendation of electrified fencing. Cooper and Keefe (1997) found people viewed the use of electric fencing as highly effective. The application of electrified fencing would be limited to rural settings, due to the possibility/likelihood of interaction with people and pets in populated areas. Problems that typically reduce the effectiveness of electric fences include vegetation on fence, flight capable birds, fencing knocked down by other animals (*e.g.*, white-tailed deer and dogs), and poor power.

**Surface coverings:** WS could recommend or use surface coverings to discourage birds from using areas. For example, covering the surface of a pond with plastic balls that float on the surface of the water can prevent access by waterfowl and gulls. However, a "*ball blanket*" would render a pond unusable for boating, swimming, fishing, and other recreational activities. It would also make it difficult to harvest fish from the pond. In addition, this method can be very expensive depending on the area covered, which often restricts its applicability to small water retention ponds.

**Overhead wire grids:** Overhead lines and wires consist of a line (*e.g.*, fishing line) or wire (*e.g.*, high-tensile galvanized or stainless steel wire) grid that is stretched over a resource to prevent access by birds. The birds apparently fear colliding with the wires and thus avoid flying into areas where the method has been employed. Johnson (1994) found that wire grids could deter crow use of specific areas where they are causing a nuisance. Waterfowl may be excluded from ponds using overhead wire grids (Fairaizl 1992, Lowney 1993) and are most applicable on ponds of two acres or less. Exclusion may be impractical in most settings (*e.g.*, commercial agriculture); however, wire grids could be practical in small areas (*e.g.*, personal gardens) or for high-value crops (*e.g.*, grapes) (Johnson 1994). A few people would find exclusionary devices such as wire grids unsightly and a lowering of the esthetic value of the neighborhood when used in residential areas or public areas. Wire grids can render an area unusable by people.

**Netting:** In some limited situations, WS could recommend or use netting to exclude birds. Similar to overhead wire grids, netting is not likely practical in most situations because the size of the area requiring netting would be too large, such as fields used for commercial agriculture. In addition, as they attempt to access resources, birds may entangle themselves in nets causing injuries or death.

**Visual scaring techniques:** Visual scaring techniques that WS may use and/or recommend include Mylar tape, eyespot balloons, flags, effigies, lasers, and lights. Visual scaring techniques can act as novel

stimuli that birds act to avoid. WS' personnel would place those methods in areas to scare and disperse target bird species, such as at roosting locations or areas where target birds nest.

Mylar tape has a highly reflective surface that produces flashes of light as sunlight reflects off the surface, which can startle birds. In addition, the metallic rattle and quick movement of Mylar tape as it moves in the wind can startle birds. WS' personnel would attach Mylar tape to a stake and then insert the stake into the ground so the Mylar tape was visible and could move in the wind. In addition, WS' personnel could tie Mylar tape to structures in a similar manner to using a stake. Mylar tape has produced mixed results in its effectiveness to frighten birds (Dolbeer et al. 1986, Tobin et al. 1988). Reflective tape has been used successfully to repel some birds from crops when spaced at three to five meter intervals (Bruggers et al. 1986, Dolbeer et al. 1986). Mylar flagging has been reported effective at reducing migrant Canada goose damage to crops (Heinrich and Craven 1990). Other studies have shown reflective tape ineffective (Bruggers et al. 1986, Tobin et al. 1988, Conover and Dolbeer 1989). Flagging often works similar to Mylar tape, which often creates quick movements when they blow in the wind.

Eyespot balloons are large balloons that people can hang inside buildings to disperse birds. When inflated, the balloons appear to have a large eye or eyes that apparently give birds a visual cue that a large predator is present.

Scarecrows and effigies are models or silhouettes that often depict predator animals (*e.g.*, alligators, owls), people (*e.g.*, scarecrows), or mimic distressed target species (*e.g.*, dead geese, dead vultures) that applicators can place in areas where birds cause damage or pose a threat of damage. Scarecrows and effigies may elicit a flight response from target birds, which disperses those birds from the area. Avery et al. (2002) and Seamans (2004) found that the use of vulture effigies were an effective non-lethal method to disperse roosting vultures. Avery et al. (2008a) found that effigies could be effective at dispersing crows. Effigies and scarecrows that pop-up into the air and/or have moving parts are often more effective at dispersing birds. Scarecrows and effigies would be most effective when they were moved frequently, alternated with other methods, and were well maintained. However, scarecrows and effigies tend to lose effectiveness over time and become less effective as populations increase (Smith et al. 1999).

WS' personnel could use lasers and lights to disperse birds when low-light conditions exist (Glahn et al. 2000, Blackwell et al. 2002). Lasers and lights may be novel stimuli that birds act to avoid. Lasers and lights have advantages over other dispersal methods because they are silent and WS' personnel can use those methods directly at birds. Therefore, WS' personnel can use those methods in areas where disturbing other wildlife is a concern.

For best results and to disperse numerous birds from a roost, a laser is most effectively used in periods of low light, such as after sunset and before sunrise. In the daytime, the laser can be used during overcast conditions or in shaded areas to move individual and small numbers of birds, although the effective range of the laser may be diminished. Blackwell et al. (2002) tested lasers on several bird species and observed varied results among species. Lasers were ineffective at dispersing pigeons and mallards with birds habituating in approximately 5 minutes and 20 minutes, respectively (Blackwell et al. 2002). Similarly, lasers were ineffective at dispersing starlings and cowbirds (Blackwell et al. 2002). Lasers were found to be only moderately effective for hazing geese, with a reduction in night roosting, but little to no reduction in diurnal activity at the site pre- and post-use (Sherman and Barras 2004).

Lights would primarily consist of high-powered spotlights. Similar to the use of lasers, application of spotlights to haze birds from night roosts has proven to be a moderately effective method. It is a method that can be incorporated with other methods in integrated management plans (VerCauteren et al. 2003).

Birds quickly learn to ignore visual and other scaring devices if the birds' fear of the methods is not reinforced with shooting or other tactics. Visual scaring techniques can be impractical in many locations and has met with some concerns due to the negative esthetic appearance presented on the properties where those methods are used.

**Trained Dogs:** The use of trained dogs can be effective at hazing waterfowl to keep them off turf and beaches (Conover and Chasko 1985, Castelli and Sleggs 2000). Around water, this technique appears most effective when the body of water is less than two acres in size (Swift and Felegy 2009). WS would recommend and encourage the use of dogs where appropriate. Swift and Felegy (2009) have reported that when hazing with dogs ceases, the number of geese returns to pre-treatment numbers.

**Electronic Hazing Devices:** WS could recommend and/or use electronic devices that mimic the sounds exhibited when target species are in distress, which is intended to cause a flight response and disperse target animals from the area. Alarm calls are given by birds when they detect predators while distress calls are given by birds when they are captured by a predator (Conover 2002). When other birds hear these calls, they know a predator is present or a bird has been captured (Conover 2002). Recordings of both calls have been broadcast in an attempt to scare birds from areas where they are unwanted. Recordings have been effective in scaring starlings from airports and vineyards, gulls from airports and landfills, finches from grain fields, and herons from aquaculture facilities and American crows from roosts (Conover 2002). However, the effectiveness of alarm or distress calls can be reduced as birds become accustomed to the sounds and learn to ignore them (Seamans and Gosser 2016).

Because alarm or distress calls are given when a bird is being held by a predator or when a predator is present, birds should expect to see a predator when they hear these calls. If they do not, they may become accustomed to alarm or distress calls more quickly. Birds can habituate to hazing techniques (Zucchi and Bergman 1975, Summers 1985, Aubin 1990, Seamans and Gosser 2016). For this reason, scarecrows or effigies should be paired with alarm or distress calls (Conover 2002), pyrotechnics (Mott and Timbrook 1988), or other methods to achieve maximum effectiveness. Although, Mott and Timbrook (1988) reported distress calls were effective at repelling resident geese 100 meters from the distress unit, the birds would return shortly after the calls stopped. The repellency effect was enhanced when pyrotechnics were used with the distress calls. Whitford (2003) used a combination of noise harassment, dogs, nest displacement, and visual harassment to chase geese from an urban park during the nesting season. Birds responded by dispersing and continued harassment with alarm calls prevented recolonization of the site during the nesting season.

The use of electronic hazing devices can have some drawbacks. For example, birds hazed from one area where they were causing damage frequently move to another area where they continue to cause damage (Brough 1969, Conover 1984, Summers 1985, Swift and Felegy 2009). Smith et al. (1999) noted that others have reported similar results, stating "*biologists are finding that some techniques (e.g., habitat modifications or scare devices) that were effective for low to moderate population levels tend to fail as flock sizes increase and geese become more accustomed to human activity*". In some situations, the level of volume required for this method to be effective may disturb local residents or be prohibited by local noise ordinances.

**Paintballs:** WS' personnel may use paintballs and recreational paintball equipment to supplement other hazing methods. Paintballs consist of a gelatin shell filled with a non-toxic glycol and water-based coloring that rapidly dissipates and is not harmful to the environment. A paintball marker (or gun) uses compressed CO<sub>2</sub> to propel paintballs an average of 280 feet per second but they are not very accurate. The discharge of the paintball marker combined with the sound of paintballs hitting the ground or splashing in water may be effective in dispersing birds, especially when combined with other hazing techniques. Although paintballs break easily and velocity rapidly decreases with distance, firing at close

range is discouraged to avoid harming birds. The use of paintballs may be restricted in some areas by local ordinances.

**Pyrotechnics:** The term “*pyrotechnic*” encompasses a number of commercially available devices that produce a loud noise after firing the device. People may refer to some of the common individual devices as “*bird bombs*”, “*screamers*”, “*bangers*”, “*shell crackers*”, or “*CAPA*”. The most common pyrotechnics are pyrotechnics that people fire from a pyrotechnic launcher or from a shotgun. Those pyrotechnics fired from a launcher or from a shotgun travel approximately 200 to 300 feet downrange. Some types of pyrotechnics emit a loud whistle as they travel while some travel downrange and then explode with a bang. Pyrotechnics that whistle as they travel and those that explode with a bang after travelling downrange generally emit a 100-decibel report that can startle target animals. A long-range pyrotechnic that is commercially available can travel approximately 1,000 feet downrange and produce a 150-decibel report. Pyrotechnics are one of the primary methods that WS’ personnel use to disperse birds.

Williams (1983) reported an approximate 50% reduction in blackbirds at two south Texas feedlots because of pyrotechnics and propane cannon use. These devices are sometimes effective but usually only for a short period before birds become accustomed and learn to ignore them (Arhart 1972, Rossbach 1975, Shirota et al. 1983, Schmidt and Johnson 1984, Mott 1985, Bomford 1990). There are also safety and legal implications regarding their use. Discharge of pyrotechnics is inappropriate and prohibited in some urban/suburban areas. Pyrotechnic projectiles can start fires, ricochet off buildings, pose traffic hazards, trigger dogs to bark incessantly, and annoy and possibly injure people. Use of pyrotechnics in certain municipalities would be constrained by local firearm discharge and noise ordinances.

**Propane cannons:** These small cannons operate using propane gas and when fired, produce a noise similar to a firearm. The user attaches the cannon to a propane tank using a hose. Opening the valve on the propane tank releases propane gas into a bladder system on the propane cannon, which begins to fill with propane gas. Once the bladder system fills, it releases the propane gas into the chamber of the cannon and simultaneously, a striking mechanism produces a spark that ignites the gas causing a loud explosion similar to the sound of a firearm firing. Propane cannons use a timing mechanism that people can adjust to vary how often the cannon fires. For example, propane cannons may be set to fire every five minutes. Some models are capable of being set to produce multiple blasts. For example, the user can set the propane cannon to produce a random series of single, double, or triple blasts. In addition, attachments to propane cannons can allow the user to control when the cannon operates during a 24-hour period. For example, the user may set the cannon to begin firing in the morning and then shut off in the evening. The user can also fit cannons with mechanisms that allow the cannon to rotate so that each firing occurs from a different direction.

**High-pressure water spray:** WS could use high-pressure water to scare birds from a location (*e.g.*, areas where birds loaf or roost) and/or to clean surfaces (*e.g.*, remove fecal droppings, remove inactive nests). Spray from a high-pressure sprayer would be persistent enough to irritate birds and cause them to leave an area, but would not be strong enough to cause physical damage. For example, WS could use this method when rousing crows or other gregarious bird species from a roost. Using high-pressure water may be more acceptable than using loud noises or chemicals in some areas, such as urban areas. WS could also use high-pressure water to remove inactive nests to discourage nesting. Logistical issues with using this method arise due to the size of the equipment needed and access to water.

**Bow nets:** Bow nets are suitcase or basket-type traps that people use to primarily live-capture raptors. Bow nets consist of two semi-circular bows as a frame with loose netting strung between the bows that the user places on the ground. Hinges and springs connect the two semi-circular bows at their bases with one bow fixed to the ground. The other semi-circular frame is folded and held together with the staked portion of the bow net that are held together by a trigger or release mechanism (Bloom et al. 2007). The

user typically places an attractant near the center of the circle. For example, WS could use a mouse inside a small cage or a tethered rock pigeon in the center of the bow net to attract raptors. For other bird species, WS could place the bow net to envelope a nest on the ground. Therefore, the nest would act as the attractant. When a target bird approaches the nest, the user activates the bow net by a line or electronic mechanism that the user pulls or that personnel trigger while monitoring the trap. When activated, the net envelopes the bird. WS' personnel would be present on site during the use of bow nets to address birds live-captured in the net.

**Cage traps:** Cage traps often consist of wire mesh or netting and are available in a variety of styles to live-capture birds. Cage traps allow target bird species to enter inside the trap through a one-way door or opening but prevent the target bird from exiting the trap. When using cage traps, WS' personnel would place a visual attractant or bait inside the trap to attract target bird species. Visual attractants usually consist of a decoy bird or birds of the same species as the target birds. The feeding behavior and calls of the decoy birds attract other birds to the trap. WS could also place cage traps over nests where the nest acts as the attractant. Target bird species enter the trap through one-way doors or openings to access the bait or attractant but are then unable to exit. People often refer to cage traps that use a visual attractant as decoy traps. WS' personnel could use decoy traps for a variety of species, such as European starlings (Homan et al. 2017), blackbirds (Dolbeer and Linz 2016), crows (Johnson 1994), and rock pigeons (Williams and Corrigan 1994). When using live decoy birds in traps, WS' personnel would ensure the birds have sufficient food, water, and shelter to assure their survival. WS' personnel may also configure perches within the trap to allow birds to roost and perch above the ground. WS' personnel would monitor decoy traps appropriately (*e.g.*, daily) to remove target bird species and to replenish food and water.

**Nest box traps:** Nest box traps are similar to cage traps; however, nest box traps resemble a nest box used by cavity nesting birds (DeHaven and Guarino 1969, Knittle and Guarino 1976). When birds enter inside the box trap, they trigger a mechanism that closes the opening to the box. WS would place nest box traps on the side of a building or on a tree in an area where the target birds are active.

**Raptor traps:** There are a variety of traps available designed to capture raptors. WS would primarily use raptor traps at airports to live-capture raptors that pose a risk of an aircraft strike. The bal-chatri trap, dho-gaza trap, the phai hoop trap, and the Swedish goshawk traps are some of the more common raptor traps. The designs of several raptor traps are similar to the use of nets (*e.g.*, dho-gaza trap) and the use of cage traps (*e.g.*, Swedish goshawk trap). Raptor traps use a prey animal (*e.g.*, mouse, pigeon) to attract raptors to the traps.

Bal-chatri traps consist of a small cage made from mesh wire. The small cage is often in a conical, half cylinder, or rectangle shape and holds the prey animal. To capture raptors, the user attaches one end of short pieces of monofilament line to the exposed areas of the cage trap and creates a noose with the other end of the monofilament line. As a raptor attempts to grab the prey item in the cage with their foot or feet, the noose tightens around the raptor's foot or feet, which holds the raptor at the location. WS' personnel place weights on or anchor Bal-chatri traps to prevent the raptor from flying off with the trap attached to their foot or feet. Phai hoop traps function in a similar way to the bal-chatri trap. Phai hoop traps consist of a circular hoop with upright nooses placed along the length of the hoop with the lure animal placed inside the hoop. As a raptor attempts to grab the prey animal, the nooses close on their feet and/or legs. Similar to bal-chatri traps, personnel would place weights on the trap or anchor the hoop to the ground to prevent raptors from flying off with the trap.

Dho-gaza traps function similar to mist nets. Personnel attach the four corners of a small net to a pole frame. WS' personnel attach the net to the pole frame in such a way as to allow the net to easily detach from the pole frame, such as attaching the net to the pole frame using paper clips. A cinch-line string runs through the mesh along all four sides of the net with the ends of the cinch-line string securely attached to

the pole frame. WS' personnel place the net in front of a lure animal that acts to attract the target raptor. Personnel place the net and frame perpendicular to the anticipated approach of the raptor to the lure animal. As the raptor swoops in to grab the attractant, the raptor hits the net, which causes the net to detach from the pole frame and the cinch-line string to close the net behind the raptor. The closing net forms a net bag around the raptor.

The Swedish goshawk trap consists of two parts. The base consists of a cage made from wire mesh that holds a prey animal while the upper portion contains the trap. The trap portion attaches to the top of the cage containing the prey animal. A trigger stick holds the top part of the trap open. As a raptor attempts to land on the trigger stick to investigate the prey animal, the trigger stick falls away causing springs to close the doors of the trap quickly. Once shut, the raptor is unable to exit the trap.

**Corral traps:** WS could use corral traps to live capture waterfowl or other birds that are unable to fly. WS' personnel can slowly guide birds unable to fly into corral traps. Corral traps as described by Costanzo et al. (1995) are lightweight, portable panels (approximate size 4' x 10') that WS could use to surround and slowly guide target birds into a moveable catch pen. Catch pens consist of panels erected and attached to form a "U" shape. WS' personnel would guide a target bird or birds through the open end of the "U" using hand held panels. As the bird or birds enter the "U", the hand held panels are brought together to close the catch pen and prevent birds from exiting. Once WS' personnel confine a target bird or birds inside the catch pen, employees can live-capture the bird or birds.

**Hand nets:** The hand nets WS' personnel could use would be similar to those used during fishing, such as a dip net or hand-thrown net. Generally, dip nets have netting at one end of a long pole that a user uses to scoop up a target animal. A hand-thrown net would be a net that a WS' employee throws over a target bird. Hand-thrown nets typical have weights on the edges of the net.

**Cannon nets:** The term cannon net refers to net deployment systems that use rockets, cannons, or compressed air to propel a net over a target area. Rocket nets and cannon nets are projectile-type net traps comprised of three to five rockets or cannons and a large net (*e.g.*, 33 x 57 foot with 2-inch square nylon mesh) (Dill and Thornberry 1950, Cox and Afton 1994). The user would anchor the rear of the net to 5- or 10-pound boat anchors or would tie the rear of the net with inner tubes to stakes driven into the ground. Smokeless powder or black powder charges propel the rockets or projectiles in the cannons that a user would ignite with an electric squib inside the charge. The user would place the charges inside the rockets or cannon tubes and test with a galvanometer for electrical continuity. The user would unspool at least 200 to 350 feet of 18 or larger gauge wire and connect one end to the charges and the other end to a blasting machine. When an adequate number of birds gather in front of the net, the user would charge the blasting machine and fire the net. Firing the blasting machine sends an electrical charge down the wire and ignites the charges in the rockets or cannon tubes, which discharge the net. Pneumatic cannon nets deploy under similar methodology as the cannon or rocket nets but do not use smokeless powder or black powder charges to deploy the net. Pneumatic cannons utilize compressed air to deploy the net. The user also remotely discharges the pneumatic air cannon through push button controls wired to a mechanism that releases the compressed air. WS' personnel would primarily use cannon nets in areas where birds routinely congregate or loaf. In most cases, WS' personnel would use an attractant (*e.g.*, food source) to acclimate target birds to feeding at the location and to position the birds in an area that ensures the net envelopes the target birds.

**Drop nets:** Although not a commonly used method for birds, WS could occasionally use drop nets to capture target bird species. The use of drop nets is similar to cannon nets; however, instead of propelling the net outward when fired, WS' personnel would drop the net on top of target birds. WS' personnel could manually drop the net onto target birds or remotely trigger the net to drop onto target birds. When dropped, the net would envelope target birds. WS' personnel would use attractants to ensure target birds

were using the location and to ensure the net envelopes target birds. Attractants could include a food source or decoy birds.

**Net guns:** Net guns are another method that WS does not frequently use to live-capture birds. Net guns are similar to cannon nets except the nets are smaller and the nets are propelled from a hand-held launcher similar to a gun. The hand-held gun launches a weighted net over a target bird or birds using a firearm blank or compressed air. Similar to the use of cannon nets and drop nets, the use of net guns is often associated with the use of an attractant. WS may use net guns to capture individual birds or a small number of birds that WS is unable to capture using other methods.

**Mist nets:** Mist nets consist of a fine black silk or nylon net that are generally three to 10 feet wide and 25 to 35 feet long. Users of mist nets generally suspend the net between two poles anchored into the ground. Mist nets contain overlapping pockets that extend the length of the net. As a bird flies into the net, the bird falls into the pocket and becomes entangled in the net. In general, WS would use mist nets to capture small birds, such as sparrows, blackbirds, and starlings. However, WS could occasionally use mist nets to catch larger bird species, such as raptors and waterfowl. When in use, WS' personnel would monitor mist nets to address birds captured in the net. WS may use decoys and/or electronic calls to enhance the effectiveness of mist nets.

**Modified padded foothold traps:** Another live-capture method that WS' personnel could consider is a modified foothold trap with padded jaws. WS' personnel would modify padded foothold traps by removing or weakening springs on the trap so that when the jaws snap shut on the leg of a bird, the jaws do not injure the bird. WS' personnel would primarily use modified padded foothold traps at airports where WS' personnel would place the trap atop poles (*i.e.*, pole traps). Pole traps live-capture raptors as they land atop a pole to perch. When landing atop the pole, the raptor triggers the modified padded foothold trap, which closes around the foot or leg of the bird. WS' personnel would attach the modified padded foothold trap to a guide wire that runs from the trap down the pole to the ground. Once live-captured by the foothold trap, the trap and raptor slide down the guide wire to the ground for handling. WS could occasionally place modified padded foothold traps on the ground or submerge the trap in shallow water to live-capture larger bird species, such as white pelicans.

**Nest destruction:** The destruction of nests involves the removal of nesting materials during the construction phase of the nesting cycle or the removal of an inactive nest. Nest destruction could also occur after destroying eggs in the nests or after euthanizing nestlings in the nest. WS could destroy nests by hand, using hand tools, and/or using high-pressure water.

**Live-capture and translocation:** WS' personnel could use live-capture methods to capture birds and then translocate those birds to other areas. Once live-captured, WS' personnel would place the birds in appropriately sized containers (*e.g.*, pet carriers) for transport to a release site. Translocation would only occur when authorized by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD. WS' personnel would only release birds on properties where the appropriate property owner or manager agrees to allow the release of those birds. WS would primarily translocate raptor species and primarily when those species present an aircraft strike risk at airports. WS often uses translocation when damage or threats of damage occur during the migratory periods when many bird species do not have well defined territories as birds migrate to and/or through the state.

**Aircraft:** Surveying wildlife from an aircraft is a commonly used tool for evaluating and monitoring damage and establishing population estimates and locations of various species of wildlife. WS could use fixed-winged aircraft and/or helicopters to conduct surveys to locate and/or estimate the number of birds in areas of the state. For example, WS could use fixed-winged aircraft to identify locations where American white pelicans roost or conduct surveys to estimate the number of American white pelicans



near aquaculture facilities. Low-level flights would primarily occur in the fall and during the winter when the number of individuals from certain species increase in the state. Surveying could involve circling an area as an observer counts the number of birds present in an area.

WS could also use fixed-winged aircraft and/or helicopters to identify movement patterns of birds. For example, WS' personnel could place radio-transmitting collars on American white pelicans and then monitor their movements over a specified period. WS' personnel would then attempt to locate the research subject using a hand-held antennae and radio receiver from the ground; however, occasionally birds could travel long distances that would prevent biologists from locating the bird from the ground. In those situations, WS may utilize either fixed wing aircraft or helicopters and elevation to conduct aerial telemetry and locate the specific bird wherever it has moved to.

**Unmanned Aerial Vehicles:** UAVs have several applications to prevent or reduce damage caused by birds. UAVs are receiving increasing attention as a wildlife management tool (Watts et al. 2010, Koh and Wich 2012, Martin et al. 2012, Lyons et al. 2017, Wandrie et al. 2019, Wang et al. 2019). WS' personnel could use UAVs to locate nuisance birds, haze birds, and monitor bird nests for the presence of eggs or chicks. Wandrie et al. (2019) found that red-winged blackbirds showed behavioral responses to UAVs when flown within 30 meters of the ground, which could reduce damage occurring to sunflower fields. Egan et al. (2020) also noted that drones with predatory characteristics exhibited greater alarm responses in blackbirds than other common drone models. Unmanned aircraft generally produce less noise, use less fuel, and are generally less expensive to operate than manned aircraft (Watts et al. 2010). Burr et al. (2019) used UAVs to estimate waterbird abundance on aquaculture ponds. When using UAVs, WS would adhere to all federal, state, and local laws. WS would also follow the guidelines established in the WS' Small Unmanned Aircraft System Flight Operations Procedures manual.

**Nicarbazin:** Commercial products are available that contain the active ingredient nicarbazin that, when ingested by target bird species, can reduce the hatchability of eggs laid. Nicarbazin is the only reproductive inhibitor currently registered with the EPA for birds and the only reproductive inhibitor approved for use in North Dakota by the NDDA. In North Dakota, nicarbazin is currently only available to inhibit egg hatching in localized populations of rock pigeons, European starlings, red-winged blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, common grackles, and brown-headed cowbirds. Nicarbazin is available as a general use commercial product available to the public under the trade name OvoControl® P (Innolytics, LLC, Rancho Mirage, California).

When consumed by birds, nicarbazin is broken down into the two base components of DNC and HDP, which are then rapidly excreted. In addition, nicarbazin is only effective in reducing the hatchability of eggs when blood levels of DNC are sufficiently elevated in a bird species. To maintain the high blood levels required to reduce egg hatch, birds must consume nicarbazin daily at a sufficient dosage that appears to be variable depending on the bird species (Yoder et al. 2005, Avery et al. 2006). For example, to reduce egg hatch in Canada geese, geese must consume nicarbazin at 2,500 ppm compared to 5,000 ppm required to reduce egg hatch in pigeons (Avery et al. 2006, Avery et al. 2008b). In pigeons, consuming nicarbazin at a rate that would reduce egg hatch in Canada geese did not reduce the hatchability of eggs in pigeons (Avery et al. 2006).

**Mesurol:** Mesurol is the commercial name of a product that contains the active ingredient methiocarb and is available for use by WS to discourage crows from feeding on the eggs of threatened or endangered species. Methiocarb is a carbamate pesticide that acts as a cholinesterase inhibitor. When crows ingest methiocarb, they become sick (*e.g.*, regurgitate, become lethargic) but they generally recover, which can condition crows to avoid feeding on the eggs of threatened or endangered bird species because they associated those eggs with becoming sick. Upon ingestion, birds develop post-ingestional malaise (Mason 1989) and crows develop an aversion to consuming similar looking eggs (Dimmick and Nicolaus

1990, Avery and Decker 1994). To condition crows not to feed on the eggs of threatened or endangered bird species, WS' personnel would use raw eggs of domestic bird species that are similar in size and appearance to the eggs of the threatened or endangered bird species. WS would only use raw eggs from those bird species allowed on the label for mesurol. Currently, the label for mesurol requires the use of raw eggs from Japanese quail (*Coturnix japonica*), chickens, ducks, or geese.

Mesurol is a powder that WS' personnel would mix with water and the liquid contents of eggs. Once mixed, WS' personnel would inject the mixture inside raw eggs that are similar in size and appearance to the eggs of the threatened or endangered species that WS is trying to protect from predation by crows. WS' personnel would place treated eggs inside "dummy" nests (*i.e.*, nests created by WS' personnel or others that are similar in appearance to nests constructed by the threatened or endangered species). WS would place treated eggs in the area where the protected species nests approximately three weeks prior to the onset of egg laying to condition crows to avoid feeding on eggs.

**Anthraquinone:** Anthraquinone is a taste repellent that is commercially available for the public to purchase and use. Anthraquinone is available to discourage geese from feeding on turf and to discourage pheasants, blackbirds, crows, grackles, cowbirds, starlings, and Sandhill cranes from feeding on planted corn and rice seed. Anthraquinone has shown effectiveness in protecting rice seed from red-winged blackbirds and boat-tailed grackles (Avery et al. 1997) and Canada geese from feeding on emerging soybeans (Werner et al. 2019). However, Kaiser (2019) found anthraquinone relatively ineffective at reducing avian consumption of sunflowers. Like other taste repellents, products containing anthraquinone require the user to apply the products directly to resources they are protecting so the target bird species ingest the product and results can vary depending on the specific circumstances.. Anthraquinone is a naturally occurring chemical found in many plant species and in some invertebrates as a natural predator defense mechanism. WS would very rarely use products containing anthraquinone operationally but could recommend the use of products through technical assistance. Therefore, the entity receiving technical assistance would be responsible for using the product.

**Methyl anthranilate:** Methyl anthranilate naturally occurs in grapes and often occurs as a flavor additive in food, candy, and soft drinks (Dolbeer et al. 1992). Methyl anthranilate is the active ingredient in repellents commercially available to disperse several bird species, primarily geese and blackbirds. Products containing methyl anthranilate are either taste repellents or olfactory repellents. Products containing methyl anthranilate are often liquids that people apply directly to susceptible resources and require target bird species to ingest the product. Applying products containing methyl anthranilate to a food source, such as turf, can make the food source unpalatable to a target bird species, such as waterfowl (Dolbeer et al. 1993). Some commercially available products allow the use of methyl anthranilate in fogging applications that act as an olfactory repellent. The use of methyl anthranilate in fogging applications can disperse target bird species in areas where they congregate in large numbers, such as a blackbird roost at an industrial company (Vogt 1997). When inhaled, the methyl anthranilate fog acts as a mild irritant to birds. Taste and olfactory repellents containing methyl anthranilate are commercially available and available for use by the public.

Cummings et al. (1995) found the effectiveness of methyl anthranilate declined after 7 days. Belant et al. (1996) found methyl anthranilate ineffective as a bird grazing repellent, even when applied at triple the recommended label rate. Mason et al. (1984, 1989) evaluated methyl anthranilate as a livestock feed additive; however, formulations of methyl anthranilate are not available for use on livestock feed. Like anthraquinone, WS would infrequently use products containing methyl anthranilate but could recommend the use of products through technical assistance.

## II. LETHAL METHODS

In addition to the use of non-lethal methods, WS' personnel could also use lethal methods. The lethal removal of birds by WS would only occur when authorized by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD (when required) and only at levels authorized. In addition, WS would only use those lethal methods authorized by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD.

**Egg destruction:** WS' personnel could make eggs of target birds unviable in several different ways. Egg destruction would involve puncturing an egg, breaking an egg, shaking an egg, or oiling an egg. When puncturing an egg, a person holds the egg securely in a hand that they brace against the ground and then inserts a long, thin metal probe into the pointed end of the egg with slow steady pressure. The person inserts the probe all of the way through the egg until the tip of the probe hits against the inside of the shell at the opposite side of entry. While the person has the probe inserted into the egg, the egg is swirled in a circular motion to emulsify the yolk sac, ensuring the embryo is unviable. After removing the metal probe from the egg, a person can seal the puncture hole with a small amount of glue to prevent the contents of the egg from leaking out of the egg. WS' personnel can then place the egg back in the nest so that birds continue to incubate the egg.

WS' personnel could destroy eggs by manually gathering the eggs and breaking them open or by vigorously shaking an egg numerous times, which causes the embryo to detach from the egg sac. Egg oiling involves spraying a small quantity of food grade corn oil on eggs in a nest. The oil prevents exchange of gases through the eggshell and causes asphyxiation of developing embryos. Puncturing eggs, shaking eggs, or oiling eggs often has advantages over breaking an egg open because the adults may continue to incubate the egg and do not re-nest. The EPA has ruled that use of corn oil for this purpose is exempt from registration requirements under the FIFRA.

**Firearm:** WS' personnel could use firearms to lethally remove and/or haze target bird species. Firearms are mechanical methods that WS could use to remove birds lethally and to reinforce the noise associated with non-lethal methods, such as pyrotechnics or propane cannons. In addition, the noise associated with discharging a firearm can disperse birds. As appropriate, WS' personnel could use suppressed firearms to minimize noise impacts. Pursuant to the standard conditions included with the current depredation permit issued to WS, when using a shotgun, WS' personnel would not use shotguns larger than 10-gauge. In addition, when using shotguns to take migratory birds pursuant to the current depredation permit, WS would use non-toxic shot as listed in 50 CFR 20.21(j). When using rifles, WS could use ammunition that contains lead. WS' personnel would retrieve the carcasses of birds to the extent possible and would dispose of the carcasses in accordance with WS Directive 2.515. As noted for pyrotechnics, some commercially available pyrotechnics require the use of a shotgun to fire the pyrotechnic. WS' firearm use and safety would comply with WS Directive 2.615.

**Sport hunting:** In limited situations, WS' personnel could recommend that a person allow sport hunting on their property when people can legally harvest the target species during a hunting season, such as allowing hunters to harvest waterfowl during the appropriate hunting season for waterfowl.

**Cervical dislocation:** WS' personnel could use cervical dislocation to euthanize birds that are captured in live traps. The bird is stretched and the neck is hyper-extended and dorsally twisted to separate the first cervical vertebrae from the skull. The AVMA (2020) considers this technique as a conditionally acceptable method of euthanasia and states that cervical dislocation when properly executed may be a humane technique for euthanasia of poultry and other small birds. Cervical dislocation is a technique that may induce rapid unconsciousness, does not chemically contaminate tissue, and is rapidly accomplished (AVMA 2020).

**Carbon dioxide:** Carbon dioxide is another method that WS' personnel may use to euthanize birds after personnel live-capture those birds using other methods. After capture, WS' personnel would place a bird or birds into a container or chamber that personnel seal shut. WS' personnel would then slowly release carbon dioxide gas into the container or chamber. The carbon dioxide gas would begin to displace oxygen in the container or chamber. At high concentrations, inhaling carbon dioxide can induce anesthesia initially followed by loss of consciousness in bird species.

**Snap traps:** Snap traps are common household traps used for rats or mice. WS could occasionally use modified snap traps to target bird species that use cavities, such as European starlings. Snap traps are available in many designs and shapes but generally consist of a rectangular wooden or plastic base, a spring, a hammer, a catch, and a holding bar. The spring holds the hammer down on the base when closed; however, setting or opening the hammer applies tension on the spring. The holding bar, which the user places over the hammer to prevent the hammer from closing, attaches to the catch. The catch holds the bar in place while the spring is under tension. WS could use the modified rat snap traps inside nest boxes so the target bird would trigger the trap once the bird enters the trap. In some situations, WS' personnel would bait the catch with peanut butter or other food attractants. As the target bird attempts to feed on the bait, they trip the catch causing the holding bar to release and allowing the spring to close the hammer forcibly onto the target bird. WS' personnel would place snap traps near the damage area and in areas where the target bird is active.

**4-Aminopyridine (Avitrol):** Avitrol is a flock dispersal method available for public use to manage damage associated with some bird species. The active ingredient of Avitrol is 4-Aminopyridine. 4-Aminopyridine is available to manage damage associated with house sparrows, red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, European starlings, and rock pigeons.

Avitrol acts as a flock-dispersing method because, when a target bird species ingests a treated bait particle, the bird becomes hyperactive, produces distress vocalizations, and displays abnormal flying behavior, which can elicit a flight response by other members of a flock. The distress calls and erratic behavior by a bird that ingests a treated particle can alarm the other birds in a flock causing them to leave the site. Only a small number of birds need to show erratic behavior and/or produce distress vocalizations to cause alarm in the rest of the flock. Although Avitrol is a flock dispersing method, birds that ingest a treated particle often die.

The EPA has approved the public use of several Avitrol formulations as restricted use pesticides. The different formulations involve the use of different bait types, such as chopped corn, whole corn, and mixed grains, which may be more palatable to the bird species the applicator is targeting when using Avitrol. Additionally, formulations may differ in the concentration of active ingredient. In North Dakota, the NDDA has approved the use of several Avitrol formulations by people with the appropriate applicators license within the state.

**DRC-1339:** DRC-1339 is an avicide available to manage damage associated with rock pigeons, American crows, common ravens, black-billed magpies, red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, European starlings, herring gulls, ring-billed gulls, California gulls, and Eurasian collared-doves in certain locations (*e.g.*, feedlots, blackbird staging areas) using certain bait types (*e.g.*, cracked corn, brown rice). The active ingredient of DRC-1339 is 3-chloro-p-toluidine hydrochloride. Birds that ingest DRC-1339 probably die because of irreversible necrosis of the kidney and subsequent inability to excrete uric acid (*i.e.*, uremic poisoning) (DeCino et al. 1966, Felsenstein et al. 1974, Knittle et al. 1990, Eisemann et al. 2003). Birds ingesting a lethal dose of DRC-1339 usually die in one to three days.

The EPA has approved the use of DRC-1339 as a restricted use pesticide that only WS' personnel and people under their direct supervision can use. WS has registered two formulations of DRC-1339 with the EPA and, if the NDDA approved their use in North Dakota, would be available for WS to use. One formulation of DRC-1339 would be available to manage American crows, common ravens, and black-billed magpies causing damage to livestock, causing damage to silage/fodder bags, and feeding on the eggs or young of federally designated threatened or endangered species (Compound DRC-1339 Concentrate – Livestock, Nest, and Fodder Depredations; EPA Reg. #56228-29). The other formulation of DRC-1339 would be available to manage Brewer's blackbirds, red-winged blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, European starlings, common ravens, American crows, black-billed magpies, rock pigeons, and Eurasian collared-doves at commercial animal operations and staging areas along with herring gulls, ring-billed gulls, and California gulls at gull colonies and gull feeding or loafing sites (Compound DRC-1339 Concentrate – Bird Control; EPA Reg. #56228-63).

For all uses, WS must mix technical DRC-1339 (powder) with water and in some cases, a binding agent (required by the label for specific bait types). Once the technical DRC-1339, water, and binding agent, if required, are mixed, the liquid is poured over the bait and mixed until the liquid is absorbed and evenly distributed. After mixing, the handler allows the treated bait to air dry. The mixing, drying, and storage of DRC-1339 treated bait occurs in controlled areas that are not accessible by the public. Before application at bait locations, applicators would mix treated bait with untreated bait at ratios required by the product label to minimize non-target hazards and to avoid bait aversion by target species.

WS' personnel would determine potential locations to apply treated bait based on product label requirements (*e.g.*, distance from water, specific location restrictions). Other factors would also require consideration of appropriate locations to apply treated bait, such as the target bird species use of the site (determined through pre-baiting), on non-target animal use of the area (areas with non-target animal activity are not used or abandoned), and based on human safety (*e.g.*, in areas restricted or inaccessible by the public). Once WS' personnel determine a location to be appropriate to place treated baits, they would place bait in feeding stations, would broadcast the bait using mechanical methods (ground-based equipment or hand spreaders), or would distribute bait by manual broadcast (distributed by hand) per label requirements. Once baited using the diluted mixture (treated bait and untreated bait), when required by the label, WS' personnel or people under the direct supervision would monitor locations for activity by non-target animals and to ensure the safety of the public.

Through pre-baiting, applicators can acclimate target birds to feed at certain locations at certain times. By acclimating birds to a feeding schedule, baiting can occur at specific times to ensure that target birds quickly consume bait shortly after the applicator places the bait, especially when addressing large flocks of target species. For example, an applicator could condition target birds to feed at a specific location by placing pre-bait early each morning near a roost so as target birds leave the roost, they fly to the location knowing that food is available. Therefore, the acclimation period allows applicators to place treated bait at a location after conditioning the target birds to be present at the site at a certain time of day and provides a higher likelihood that target birds consume treated bait shortly after applicators place the bait. Conditioning target birds to feed at certain times and at certain locations minimizes the amount of time that treated bait is present at a location. For exposure to the bait to occur, a non-target animal would have to approach a bait site and consume treated bait. If target bird species had already consumed the bait or WS had already removed the bait from the location, then treated bait would no longer be available for non-target animals to find and consume.

**APPENDIX C**  
**THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES THAT ARE FEDERALLY LISTED IN THE**  
**STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA**

**Table C.1 – Federal list of threatened or endangered species in North Dakota**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status <sup>†</sup>	Determination <sup>‡</sup>
<b>Animals</b>			
<b>Invertebrates</b>			
Dakota Skipper	<i>Hesperia dacotae</i>	T	MANLAA
Poweshiek Skipperling	<i>Oarisma poweshiek</i>	E	MANLAA
<b>Fish</b>			
Pallid Sturgeon	<i>Scaphirhynchus albus</i>	E	NE
<b>Mammals</b>			
Northern Long-eared Bat	<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	T	MANLAA
<b>Birds</b>			
Least Tern	<i>Sternula antillarum</i>	E	MANLAA
Piping plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	T	MANLAA
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus rufa</i>	T	MANLAA
Whooping Crane	<i>Grus americana</i>	E	MANLAA
<b>Flowering Plants</b>			
Western Prairie Fringed Orchid	<i>Platanthera praeclara</i>	T	MANLAA

<sup>†</sup>T=Threatened; E=Endangered

<sup>‡</sup>NE=No effect; MANLAA=May affect, not likely to adversely affect

**Table C.2 – Critical habitats designated in North Dakota**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status <sup>†</sup>	Determination <sup>‡</sup>
<b>Animals</b>			
<b>Invertebrates</b>			
Dakota Skipper	<i>Hesperia dacotae</i>	CH	NE
Poweshiek Skipperling	<i>Oarisma poweshiek</i>	CH	NE
<b>Birds</b>			
Piping Plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	CH	NE

<sup>†</sup>CH=Critical Habitat

<sup>‡</sup>NE=No Effect; No adverse modification

## APPENDIX D

### ADDITIONAL TARGET BIRD SPECIES THAT WS COULD ADDRESS IN NORTH DAKOTA

In addition to the bird species identified in Section 1.2, WS could also receive requests for assistance to manage damage and threats of damage associated with several additional bird species but those requests would occur infrequently or the requests would involve only a few individual birds. Damages and threats of damages associated with those species would occur primarily at airports or military facilities where those species pose a threat of aircraft strikes. WS anticipates addressing those requests for assistance using primarily non-lethal dispersal methods. Under Alternative 1, WS could receive requests for assistance to use lethal methods to remove those species when non-lethal methods were ineffective or were determined to be inappropriate using the WS Decision model. An example could include birds that pose an immediate strike threat at an airport where attempts to disperse the birds were ineffective.

Those species that WS could address in low numbers and/or infrequently when those species cause damage or pose a threat of damage include feral/free-ranging domestic fowl<sup>13</sup>, snow geese (*Anser caerulescens*), Ross's geese (*Anser rossii*), greater white-fronted geese (*Anser albifrons*), trumpeter swans (*Cygnus buccinator*), tundra swans (*Cygnus buccinator*), wood ducks (*Aix sponsa*), blue-winged teal (*Spatula discors*), northern shovelers (*Spatula clypeata*), American wigeons (*Mareca americana*), northern pintail (*Anas acuta*), gadwall (*Mareca strepera*), green-winged teal (*Anas crecca*), canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*), redhead (*Aythya americana*), ring-necked ducks (*Aythya collaris*), lesser scaup (*Aythya affinis*), bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*), common goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), hooded mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), common merganser (*Mergus merganser*), red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*), ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*), gray partridge (*Perdix perdix*), ring-necked pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus*), sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*), wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*), pied-billed grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*), horned grebes (*Podiceps auritus*), eared grebes (*Podiceps nigricollis*), Eurasian collared-doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*), American coots (*Fulica americana*), Sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis*), American avocets (*Recurvirostra americana*), killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), upland sandpipers (*Bartramia longicauda*), marbled godwits (*Limosa fedoa*), Baird's sandpipers (*Calidris bairdii*), Wilson's snipe (*Gallinago delicata*), lesser yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*), willets (*Tringa semipalmata*), Wilson's phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*), Bonaparte's gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*), black tern (*Chlidonias niger*), double-crested cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), American white pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*), great blue herons (*Ardea herodias*), snowy egrets (*Egretta thula*), cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), green herons (*Butorides virescens*), black-crowned night-herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*), ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), northern harriers (*Circus hudsonius*), sharp-shinned hawks (*Accipiter striatus*), Cooper's hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*), northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), broad-winged hawks (*Buteo platypterus*), Swainson's hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*), red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*), rough-legged hawks (*Buteo lagopus*), ferruginous hawks (*Buteo regalis*), barn owls (*Tyto alba*), eastern screech-owls (*Megascops asio*), great horned owls (*Bubo virginianus*), snowy owls (*Bubo scandiacus*), long-eared owls (*Asio otus*), short-eared owls (*Asio flammeus*), belted kingfishers (*Megaceryle alcyon*), red-headed woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), downy woodpeckers (*Dryobates pubescens*), hairy woodpeckers (*Dryobates villosus*), northern flickers (*Colaptes auratus*), pileated woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*), American kestrels (*Falco sparverius*), merlins (*Falco columbarius*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), prairie falcons (*Falco mexicanus*), western kingbirds (*Tyrannus verticalis*), eastern kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*), common ravens (*Corvus corax*), horned larks (*Eremophila alpestris*), bank swallows (*Riparia riparia*), northern rough-winged swallows (*Stelgidopteryx*

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<sup>13</sup>Free-ranging or feral domestic fowl refers to captive-reared, domestic, of some domestic genetic stock, or domesticated breeds of ducks, geese, swans, peafowl, and other fowl. Examples of domestic waterfowl include, but are not limited to, mute swans, Muscovy ducks, pekin ducks, Rouen ducks, Cayuga ducks, Swedish ducks, Chinese geese, Toulouse geese, Khaki Campbell ducks, emden geese, and pilgrim geese. Feral ducks may include a combination of mallards, Muscovy ducks, and mallard-Muscovy hybrids.

*serripennis*), purple martins (*Progne subis*), American robins (*Turdus migratorius*), house finches (*Haemorhous mexicanus*), snow buntings (*Plectrophenax nivalis*), lark buntings (*Calamospiza melanocorys*), savannah sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), and rusty blackbirds (*Euphagus carolinus*).

Many of those bird species can cause damage to or pose threats to a variety of resources. The bird species associated with requests for assistance that WS could receive and the resource types those bird species primarily damage in North Dakota occur in Table D-1.

**Table D-1: Additional bird species that WS could address in North Dakota and the primary resource types damaged by those species**

Species	Resource <sup>†</sup>				Species	Resource <sup>†</sup>			
	A	N	P	H		A	N	P	H
Domestic fowl	X	X	X	X	Great blue heron	X		X	X
Snow goose*	X		X	X	Snowy egret	X		X	X
Ross's goose*	X		X	X	Cattle egret	X	X	X	X
Greater white-fronted goose*	X		X	X	Green heron	X		X	X
Trumpeter swan			X	X	Black-crowned night-heron	X		X	X
Tundra swan*	X		X	X	Turkey Vulture	X		X	X
Wood duck*			X	X	Osprey	X		X	X
Blue-winged teal*			X	X	Northern harrier		X	X	X
Northern shoveler*			X	X	Sharp-shinned hawk	X	X	X	X
American wigeon*			X	X	Cooper's hawk	X	X	X	X
Northern pintail*			X	X	Northern goshawk	X	X	X	X
Gadwall*			X	X	Broad-winged hawk	X	X	X	X
Green-winged teal*			X	X	Swainson's hawk	X	X	X	X
Canvasback*			X	X	Red-tailed hawk	X	X	X	X
Redhead*			X	X	Rough-legged hawk	X	X	X	X
Ring-necked duck*			X	X	Ferruginous hawk	X	X	X	X
Lesser scaup*			X	X	Barn owl	X	X	X	X
Bufflehead*			X	X	Eastern screech-owl			X	X
Common goldeneye*			X	X	Great horned owl	X	X	X	X
Hooded merganser*	X		X	X	Snowy owl			X	X
Common merganser*	X		X	X	Long-eared owl			X	X
Red-breasted merganser*	X		X	X	Short-eared owl			X	X
Ruddy duck*			X	X	Belted kingfisher	X		X	X
Gray partridge*			X	X	Red-headed woodpecker			X	X
Ring-necked pheasant*	X		X	X	Downy woodpecker			X	X
Sharp-tailed grouse*			X	X	Hairy woodpecker			X	X
Wild turkey*	X		X	X	Northern flicker			X	X
Pied-billed grebe	X		X	X	Pileated woodpecker			X	X
Horned grebe	X		X	X	American kestrel		X	X	X
Eared grebe	X		X	X	Merlin			X	X
Eurasian collared-dove*		X	X	X	Peregrine falcon			X	X
American coot*			X	X	Prairie falcon			X	X
Sandhill crane*	X		X	X	Western kingbird			X	X
American Avocet			X	X	Eastern kingbird			X	X
Killdeer			X	X	Common raven	X	X	X	X
Upland sandpiper			X	X	Horned lark			X	X



Marbled godwit			X	X	Bank swallow			X	X
Baird's sandpiper			X	X	Northern rough-winged swallow			X	X
Wilson's snipe*			X	X	Purple martin			X	X
Lesser yellowlegs			X	X	American robin			X	X
Willet			X	X	House finch			X	X
Wilson's phalarope			X	X	Snow bunting			X	X
Bonaparte's gull	X		X	X	Lark bunting			X	X
Black tern			X	X	Savannah sparrow			X	X
Double-crested cormorant	X	X	X	X	Rusty blackbird	X		X	X
American white pelican	X	X	X	X					

†A=Agriculture, N=Natural Resources, P=Property, H=Human Health and Safety

\*Bird species that people can harvest during annual hunting seasons in North Dakota

Based on previous requests for assistance and the take levels necessary to alleviate those requests for assistance, WS would not lethally remove more than 25 individuals annually of any of those species identified in Table D-1, except for those waterfowl and game species identified in Table D-1 that have annual hunting seasons and several raptor species. People can harvest snow geese, Ross's geese, greater white-fronted geese, tundra swans, wood ducks, blue-winged teal, northern shovelers, American wigeons, northern pintail, gadwall, green-winged teal, canvasback, redheads, ring-necked ducks, lesser scaup, buffleheads, common goldeneyes, hooded mergansers, common mergansers, red-breasted mergansers, ruddy ducks, gray partridge, ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, wild turkeys, Eurasian collared-doves, American coots, Sandhill cranes, and Wilson's snipe in the state during annual hunting seasons. For those waterfowl and game species, WS could lethally remove up to 100 individuals of those species annually in the state because those species often occur during the migration periods in large numbers and the limited take of 100 individuals would be a minor component of the annual harvest of those species.

Most requests for assistance associated with waterfowl and game species occur near airports where waterfowl and other waterbirds may aggregate in large numbers in wet areas or on large bodies of water in close proximity to active runways, posing a strike risk and threat to human safety. Assistance may also be requested by fish hatcheries in the state that are receiving damage from fish-eating birds, such as mergansers, or from urban parks with large resident waterfowl populations that may be accumulating feces in public areas or behaving aggressively toward visitors. In addition, waterfowl can act as bioindicators to assess environmental quality and, thus, individuals of these species are frequently sampled for environmental toxins, viruses, and/or bacterial organisms. For these reasons, WS could potentially take up to 100 individuals of each harvestable species annually. When compared to the annual harvest levels of these species, WS' take of up to 100 individuals a year would have little impact on the population or hunter harvest.

For northern harriers, sharp-shinned hawks, Cooper's hawks, northern goshawk, broad-winged hawks, Swainson's hawks, red-tailed hawks, rough-legged hawks, ferruginous hawks, barn owls, eastern screech-owls, great horned owls, snowy owls, long-eared owls, short-eared owls, American kestrels, merlins, peregrine falcon, and prairie falcons, WS' annual take would not exceed five individuals of any of those species. WS anticipates addressing those raptor species infrequently and primarily using non-lethal methods. For example, if a raptor returned to an airfield after WS live-captured and translocated the raptor to another area, WS could lethally take the raptor to reduce aircraft strike risks.

In addition, to alleviate damage or discourage nesting in areas where damages were occurring, WS could destroy up to 20 nests annually of those species in Table D-1 that nest in the state, including eggs in those nests. Many bird species have the ability to identify areas with regular human disturbance and low reproductive success and they will relocate to nest elsewhere when confronted with repeated nest failure.

Although there may be reduced fecundity for the individuals affected by nest destruction, this activity has no long-term effect on breeding adult birds. WS does not use nest and egg removal as a population management method. WS uses nest and egg removal to inhibit nesting in an area experiencing damage due to nesting activity and would only be employed at a localized level. As with the lethal removal of birds, the destruction of active nests can only occur when authorized by the USFWS and/or the NDGFD; therefore, the number of active nests taken by WS annually would occur at the discretion of the USFWS and/or the NDGFD.

WS does not expect the annual take of those species identified in Table D-1 to occur at any level that would adversely affect populations of those species. Take would be limited to those individuals deemed causing damage or posing a threat. The MBTA protects most of those bird species from take unless the USFWS permits the take pursuant to the MBTA. If the USFWS and/or the NDGFD did not issue a permit or authorization, no take would occur by WS. In addition, take could only occur at those levels stipulated in a permit or authorization. Therefore, the take of those bird species would occur in accordance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations authorizing take of migratory birds and their nests and eggs, including the USFWS and/or the NDGFD permitting processes. The USFWS and/or the NDGFD, as the agencies with management responsibility for migratory birds, could impose restrictions on depredation take as needed to assure cumulative take does not adversely affect the continued viability of populations. This would assure that cumulative effects on those bird populations would not have a significant adverse effect on the quality of the human environment. In addition, WS would report annually to the USFWS and/or the NDGFD any take of the bird species listed in Table D-1 in accordance with a depredation permit, depredation/control order, and/or other authorizations.