

National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee Meeting

USDA Center at Riverdale
Oklahoma City Memorial Conference Center
Riverdale, MD
August 1-2, 2006

Tuesday, August 1, 2006

Committee Members in Attendance:

Joel Alderete, New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau (Vice Chair)
Jeff Baxter, Baxter Land Company
Scott Bender, Navajo Nation
Karen Elaine "Maggie" Brasted, Humane Society of the United States
Robert Frost, Animal Health
Joel Kretz, Ranching/timber
Cathy Liss, Animal Welfare Institute
Debra Miller, Veterinary Diagnostic and Investigational Lab, UGA
Bruce Morrison, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Ira New Breast, Native American Fish and Wildlife Society
John Ostrom, Aviation Industry (Chair)
Bryce Reece, Wyoming Wool Growers Association
Maurice Shelton, Sheep and Goat Industry – Texas A&M University
Scott Steckel, Varmint Guard Environmental Services
Patti Strand, National Animal Interest Alliance
Hugh Warren, Catfish Farmers of America

Committee Members Not in Attendance:

Nina Baucus, Sieban Ranch Company
John Baughman, Assn of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Seniora Ann Burdette, Urban Wildlife
David F. Lacour, Rice Growers Association

Welcome and Introductions

The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC) met at the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service/Wildlife Services Oklahoma City Conference Center in Riverdale, MD. The meeting was called to order at 8:10 a.m., on August 1, 2006.

Bill Clay, Deputy Administrator, Wildlife Services (WS), welcomed the group and expressed his appreciation for the Committee's commitment to providing the Secretary of Agriculture with recommendations that would further the mission of Wildlife Services. Mr. Clay introduced the WS management team and headquarters staff and reviewed the agenda for the upcoming meeting, including procedures for conducting the business of

the meeting. Martin Mendoza, Associate Deputy Administrator, WS made the presentation of appointment certificates to the Committee members. Pictures were taken.

Bill Clay then introduced Dr. Chuck Lambert, Deputy Undersecretary, Marketing and Regulatory Programs. Dr. Lambert gave a brief overview of WS activities including WS efforts to enhance aviation safety, work with the Department of Defense to minimize wildlife damage impacts on Defense properties, and the current efforts to coordinate migratory bird conservation activities with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Dr. Lambert reviewed WS's wolf damage management, avian influenza prevention efforts, ongoing work in the oral rabies vaccination program and invasive species initiatives. Dr. Lambert also discussed research initiatives that include the development of oral contraceptive technologies and the analysis of migratory bird population status and trends. An update was given on construction activities at the National Wildlife Research Center with specific mention of the new state-of-the-art invasive species research building facility. Dr. Lambert informed the committee that WS funding levels for FY 2007 will remain basically level.

WS Program Updates

Program updates were provided to the committee by Jeff Green, Western Regional Director, Charles Brown, Eastern Regional Director, and Rick Bruggers, Director, National Wildlife Research Center.

Review of Charter and Rules of Order

Bill Clay referred the Committee to the USDA Departmental Regulation dated February 17, 2005, which renews the NWSAC and acts as a charter for the committee. He noted the charter is general in nature and therefore provides the Committee the flexibility to develop appropriate recommendations for the Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Clay stated that the Committee's budget had been increased this fiscal year to allow for a full three day meeting, and that the expiration date for the current 2-year appointment was September, 7, 2007. Bill encouraged the Committee to keep their recommendations to a manageable level (suggested that 20 was a good workable number) and should always be cognizant that similar items (e.g. funding) could be grouped into a single recommendation for efficiency. He reminded the Committee that recommendations forwarded to the Secretary should address program and policy issues and that the Secretary retains the prerogative to either accept or reject based on USDA policies, priorities and ongoing initiatives.

Mr. Clay reminded the Committee that this was their meeting and that WS personnel were present to provide guidance, technical information and to answer any questions posed by Committee members.

Prior to continuing with the general business of the day, Mr. Clay introduced Dr. Ron DeHaven, Administrator, APHIS. Dr. DeHaven welcomed the committee participants and commended them for participating in this important endeavor. He spoke about the

growth and diversity of the Wildlife Services program and the dedication of Wildlife Services personnel. He identified several current high priority activities being conducted by WS, with emphasis on ongoing wildlife disease work, with a specific reference to the current avian influenza initiative. He reiterated the importance of the Committee's work in providing stakeholder perspective to Wildlife Services activities.

Mr. Clay then announced that the Committee's next order of business was to select a Chairman and Vice Chairman to serve the next two years. John Ostrom was nominated as Chairman and elected without opposition. Deb Miller and Joel Alderete were nominated for the position of Vice Chairman and Joel was elected by majority vote. With the election of the Committee leadership, WS turned the meeting over to Mr. Ostrom.

Mr. Ostrom briefly reviewed the agenda with the Committee members who then accepted the agenda with no changes or additions. Mr. Ostrom's first order of business was to inform the Committee how he proposed to handle the recommendation process. He encouraged the Committee members to each focus on their most pressing issues, and then to bring those issues to the table for discussion. He viewed his responsibility to keep the Committee focused on developing succinct recommendations. All topics were open for discussion and each member would have the opportunity to discuss, question, support or challenge any discussion topic. Final recommendations to the Secretary would be approved by majority vote.

Update on Last Committee Meeting Recommendations

Last year's NWSAC meeting was conducted in June, 2005 in Fort Collins, CO. Recommendations from last years meeting were presented by Martin Mendoza, WS Associate Deputy Administrator. He reported the status of last year's Committee recommendations, and stressed the importance of the recommendations to the Secretary when formulating the budget. Each recommendation was briefly reviewed and discussed.

Committee Discussion

Mr. Ostrom then asked the Committee members to offer any initial recommendations for consideration. This led to a Committee discussion of a wide range of issues. Committee members Scott Bender and Cathy Liss provided a list of topics that focused Committee discussion. Some of the general discussion topics included rabies, urban wildlife issues, invertebrate wildlife damage control, tribal project overview, prairie dog control, use of lure crops, airport reporting, dissemination of research results to the field, cost/benefit analysis of research activities, non-lethal research (additional discussion of defining the term non-lethal), trapping best management practices, immunocontraception, endangered species incidental take, WS policy to follow state law/policy, and the JFK International Airport supplemental EIS.

The session was adjourned at 4:45pm.

Wednesday, August 2, 2006

Administrative Issues

Candy Anderson, from the APHIS administrative support staff, briefed the Committee on how to complete their travel vouchers for reimbursement and answered several questions on ticket reservation and voucher processing procedures.

Recommendations

Recommendations developed by the Committee for consideration by the Secretary are as follows (Vote is shown as Y(yes), N(no), A(abstain):

1. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends the Secretary of Agriculture seek new funding to support the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Service's (WS) Wildlife Disease Surveillance, Monitoring, Response and Research Program. This program should include two wildlife biologists per state and U.S. territory, and support collaboration of the WS's National Wildlife Research Center with the National Animal Health Laboratory Network and state wildlife agencies.

Approved: Y(14) N(1) A(0)

Background: The Wildlife Disease Surveillance and Monitoring (actually Emergency Response) program was established to provide assistance to Federal, Tribal, and State agencies with wildlife disease threats. This includes partnership in an international border disease-surveillance system. Currently 23 wildlife disease biologists are attempting to address all disease issues in all U.S. States and territories. This often results in reallocation of other "non-disease" personnel to fulfill duties when needs are high (especially during disease outbreaks or periods of intense surveillance testing). Two wildlife disease biologists per State and territory would alleviate a significant portion of this reallocation, especially given that these individuals are expected to be mobile and travel (with estimated arrival time of less than or equal to 48 hours of notification in emergency situations) to other areas during times of increased need (e.g. outbreaks). Further, the suggestion to encourage partnerships with other disease professionals (especially diagnostic facilities) will greatly aid in increasing the trained personnel available to provide physical labor and maximize specimen processing.

2. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC) recommends the Secretary of Agriculture reaffirm Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services priority to protect livestock and agriculture from offending animals. The NWSAC recommends the Secretary of Agriculture seek new funding providing for yearly inflation and future annual resource needs.

Approved: Y(11) N(0) A(4)

Background: Since 1885 the Federal government has taken a position of assisting agricultural producers in protecting their crops and livestock from wildlife species. Common law in the U.S. is that wildlife belongs to the state (public), and thus it may be assumed that the public share responsibility for their management and control of the

damage they cause to individuals. Since wildlife species do not respect political or private property boundaries, it is difficult or many cases impossible for individuals acting alone to manage them. Thus it is necessary that some entity with a broader interest participate in this effort. At the present time this role is served by the USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services. It is also significant that both Federal and State governments place serious restrictions on the tools which individuals can use to protect their property. Wildlife Services are active in many areas and situations, and may be able to solve problems in individual cases. However, in the case of wildlife predation on livestock the problems are increasing with exploding populations of coyote and feral swine, and the reintroduction (wolves) and increased protection (grizzly bears) of larger carnivore species. Thus the efforts of WS must be strengthened with the necessary funding and the tools necessary to do their job.

3. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends the Secretary of Agriculture seek new funding for Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services to increase coyote and feral swine research. This research should include identifying property and ecological damage, expanding distribution and population, associated disease risks, and development of effective long and short term control methods.

Approved: Y(15) N(0) A(0)

Background: Beginning in the last decades of the previous century, the coyote population of this country has erupted and expanded their range to include all the continental United States. This has resulted in untold losses to the U.S. livestock industry and they have invaded urban areas as well. The greatest financial losses to coyotes have been experienced by the cattle industry, but their greatest impact has been on the sheep and goat industries. The feral swine population in the United States has increased as well (in more recent times). Feral swine are livestock predators, but they also destroy field crops and pasture lands, damage fences, and represent disease threats to man as well as the domestic swine industry. WS personnel are working to deal with these species, but at present are losing the battle with the expanding population of both species. It is significant to notice that swine are not a native to the United States. Clearly new tools and approaches are needed to deal with both species. The tools currently in use were empirically developed many years ago and have proved inadequate to do the job. USDA-APHIS-WS has a rather large research budget, but little of this is effectively directed toward control methods for coyotes and feral swine. This no doubt reflects more scientific and public interest in other areas of research, but does not necessarily equate with the needs and the charge to WS.

4. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends the Secretary of Agriculture seek dialogue and cooperation with the Secretary of the Interior to gain new funding to increase field resource capacity for Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services to resolve increasing conflicts involving humans, livestock, other domestic animals, and wildlife resulting from restored and expanding wolf populations.

Approved: Y(10) N(0) A(5)

5. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that airport safety remain a priority and that Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services continue to provide leadership and direction in the areas of research, control and training for the mitigation of aircraft/wildlife hazards.

Approved: Y(14) N(0) A(1)

Background: Aviation/wildlife strikes are estimated to cost over \$600 million in damage to U.S. civil and military aviation and puts lives of aircrew members and their passengers at significant risk. Although the FAA and airports are trying to mitigate this risk, it is Wildlife Services who is needed to provide “boots on the ground” and technical expertise in order to develop and deliver an integrated approach to alleviate the risks posed by wildlife to aviation.

6. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends the Secretary of Agriculture work with the Secretary of Interior to develop a cooperative arrangement between Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to process and respond to migratory bird depredation permit applications within seven days.

Approved: Y(11) N(0) A(2)

7. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC) commends the Secretary of Agriculture and Wildlife Services for the increased use of electronic trap monitors. The NWSAC recommends the expanded development of monitors with the long-term strategy being to encourage use of these monitors which results in the immediate notification of a sprung trap. The NWSAC further supports the goal of minimizing the amount of time an animal remains in a trap.

Approved: Y(14) N(0) A(0)

8. National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends the Secretary of Agriculture seek new funding for the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services, National Wildlife Research Center to expand contraceptive research, especially for predator control/management, the use of field trials to aid in cost/benefit analysis of the technique, and encourage implementation of these methods as appropriate.

Approved: Y(14) N(0) A(0)

Background: It becomes increasingly important to implement multiple forms of predator management techniques to address the concerns of the various stakeholders (wildlife conservation agencies, the general public, and the agricultural industry). Wildlife contraceptive research has made great strides in the past decade and is proving to be a promising approach in some species. Unfortunately, lack of available funding is often the primary impediment to use of these techniques. Funding is needed to continue to improve contraception techniques, explore their use in various species, and move contraception from the developmental stage to the practice stage. The latter being accomplished first through field trials and then through implementation wherever needed.

9. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture, through the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services, National Wildlife Research Center, conduct full economic cost/benefit analysis

of practices and/or programs recommended, promoted or offered by the agency, dependent upon the availability of financial resources.

Approved: Y(13) N(0) A(1)

10. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC) commends the Secretary of Agriculture and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) for the excellent and extraordinary efforts in the development and implementation of “An Early Detection System for Highly Pathogenic H5N1 Avian Influenza in Wild Migratory Birds: U.S. Interagency Strategic Plan.” Dr. Thomas DeLiberto, Mr. Seth Swafford, Ms. Joyce Gubler and other WS employees worked above and beyond the call of duty to complete this plan in a timely manner and to develop and implement a system to provide grants to State Wildlife Agencies to insure the successful achievement of goals and objectives. The NWSAC recommends appropriate recognition be given these employees by the Office of the Secretary.

Approved: Y(15) N(0) Y(0)

11. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends the Secretary of Agriculture seek \$1.5 million of new annual funding to sustain requirements mandated by the Department of Homeland Security for protection of Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services facilities.

Approved: Y(15) N(0) A(0)

12. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends the Secretary of Agriculture seek new funding to support increased research for improved baits and vaccines critical to the control and eradication of wildlife rabies in skunk and mongoose.

Approved: Y(15) N(0) A(0)

Background: Currently, the two North American species that have been the hardest to control rabies and the least responsive to the current WS Oral Rabies Vaccine have been skunks and mongoose. If control and eradication of rabies from North America is going to be successful, these two species will require additional vaccine and bait research and investigation to prevent them from becoming reservoirs of future Rabies outbreaks.

13. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture investigate the feasibility of funding from a first point of sale or importation of each dose of rabies vaccine sold for use in the United States to aid the expansion of wildlife rabies research and eradication.

Approved: Y(8) N(5) A(2)

Background: With the constant need and often shortage of funding for WS programs, and in particular making sure the funding for the WS rabies program continue to address the need for rabies control, this request to investigate the potential of funding from alternative sources was presented. This recommendation has the potential to provide funding for wildlife rabies control, and may develop other additional funding methods from current rabies control programs.

14. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that when feral canids and felids adversely impact agriculture, wildlife, or

human health they be officially included within the scope of Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services research and control operations.

Approved: Y(12) N(2) A(1)

Background: Feral animals, and in particular feral cats and dogs are the fastest growing populations that are adversely impacting wildlife, endangered species recovery programs and agriculture. These populations are often outside the operation scope of local control agencies, and increasingly WS is being requested to assist with control. This recommendation would give WS the ability to respond to these requests, and additionally address and mitigate impact from these species through WS research programs.

15. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC) recommends the Secretary of Agriculture expedite the Texas Gray Fox Rabies eradication project. The NWSAC recommends that strategic efforts include those endemic areas of southern New Mexico and Arizona.

Approved: Y(14) N(0) A(0)

Background: Wildlife Services and cooperative partners have been showing great success in the control and eradication of the endemic Gray Fox Rabies in Texas. This recommendation is to support and expedite the eradication of the Texas endemic Gray Fox Rabies area, and that the program for Gray Fox is utilized to eradicate the Gray Fox Rabies endemic area in Southern Arizona and New Mexico.

16. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture include feral canids and felids in Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services, Oral Rabies Vaccination (ORV) research, and if proven efficacious, that ORV be used for rabies control and prevention in those species under Memorandum of Understanding guidelines on Native Nations.

Approved: Y(11) N(1) A(2)

Background: Regulatory requirements for rabies vaccination of domestic dogs and cats has been the greatest method for the control and eradication of rabies as a human health threat in North America. However, there is a large population of domestic and feral animals that are not being adequately addressed for Rabies vaccination and pose a potential threat to human health if rabies were reintroduced. ORV would offer the best method for control in these populations if proven by research. The largest area of unvaccinated dogs and cats in North America are on Native Nations where veterinary services and rabies vaccination is severely underserved, and ORV would be one of the most cost effective and practical methods of Rabies vaccination. This ORV use and research would also have world wide impact in preventing the some 36,000 human rabies cases that occur every year.

17. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends the Secretary of Agriculture working in conjunction with the Secretary of Interior to amend regulations such that the accessibility requirements of migratory bird permit log holders are greater than 30 days old.

Approved: Y(10) N(3) A(2)

18. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends the Secretary of Agriculture explore long-term strategic planning, development and operations for the purpose of raising management control capacity. The NWSAC recommends that this long term plan be accomplished through training and outreach of cooperators.

Approved: Y(12) N(0) A(3)

19. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee recommends that Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services, seek to minimize impacts to producers when State and Federal laws and regulations conflict and result in a limitation of services or programs.

Approved: Y(11) N(3) A(1)

The following recommendation was not passed.

1. The Committee commends the Secretary of Agriculture and Wildlife Services (WS) for the increased use of electronic trap monitors. NWSAC recommends the expanded development of monitors with long-term strategy being to encourage the use of 1) these monitors for the prompt checking of sprung traps or 2) a 24-hour trap check for all live traps used by WS.

Defeated: Y(5) N(7) A(3)

Closing

Prior to adjourning, the Committee discussed possible locations for next years meeting. Three WS research field station sites were identified by the Committee for consideration by USDA: Hilo, Hawaii, Logan, Utah, and Gainesville, Florida. Also the Committee preferred an earlier meeting date (June) for next year.

Mr. Ostrom thanked the members for their contributions to the success of the meeting and commended them for concluding all agenda items in only 2 days, a sentiment echoed by Mr. Mendoza. The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 pm.