

USDA National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee
September 18-19, 2019
Washington, D.C.



September 18, 2019 – USDA Whitten Building, Williamsburg Conference Room

Welcome – Janet Bucknall, Deputy Administrator for Wildlife Services

The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC) meeting was called to order at 8:05 am. Wildlife Services, Deputy Administrator (DA) Janet Bucknall provided a brief overview and history of the NWSAC meeting and Wildlife Services (WS); describing the program’s mission area within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). DA Bucknall highlighted WS’ relationships among all the different sectors and conveyed the message to the Committee that, “this is your meeting.”

Opening Remarks – Gregory Ibach, Under Secretary for USDA Marketing and Regulatory Programs

Under Secretary, Ibach opened with sincere gratitude toward the WS program. Mr. Ibach shared personal details about growing up on ranch in rural Nebraska and how his family received WS services. The Under Secretary talked about WS’ dedication and how its quality customer service has a direct effect on small town communities. His remarks stressed the importance of WS enhancing its relationships and collaborations with stakeholders and not to overlook individuals. He detailed how WS uses a full “tool box” of options to protect American agriculture.

The Under Secretary highlighted WS State Operations and the National Feral Swine Damage Management Program activities in reducing feral swine populations to protect crops, livestock and other resources. He also mentioned the 2018 Farm Bill, and how WS and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will continue to work collaboratively to reduce and repair the damage caused by feral swine. The Secretary went into detail praising WS personnel and the National Wildlife Disease Program for their outstanding emergency response and communications during recent disasters including: the Nebraska floods, California wildfires, hurricanes, and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, Exotic New Castle and New World screwworm disease outbreaks.

Under Secretary Ibach talked about the importance of research and the future, highlighting WS’ National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC). He talked about how NWRC continues to develop non-lethal technology and methods, including gene editing, breeding programs and other holistic methods that can be applied in the field. Mr. Ibach said that the public should anticipate new complications as urban, agricultural, and wildlife habitats grow closer to one another and that WS will be ready to face new wildlife-related challenges. In conclusion, he stated how important the Advisory Committee is and how he is looking forward to its advice and recommendations.

Following Under Secretary Ibach’s remarks, the formal introductions of the Committee members, visitors, and Wildlife Services personnel proceeded.

Opening Remarks – Kevin Shea, Administrator for Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service

APHIS Administrator, Mr. Kevin Shea opened with a brief history about WS and how the program originated within USDA, was transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and then later returned back to USDA APHIS. He explained how APHIS protects U.S. agriculture and natural resources, and that wildlife is a natural resource which requires WS to follow the Public Trust Doctrine. To achieve the public's trust, it is imperative WS hear from all "stakeholders" when it comes to resolving conflicts with wildlife. Mr. Shea delivered a message of safety and related it to all the Committee members who flew into Washington. He said, "Every day the flying public benefits from the safety work done by WS airport wildlife biologists, who keep birds away from moving aircraft." Mr. Shea presented the new WS strategic plan (2020-2024) and highlighted two main themes of the plan: building public trust and delivering public service. These themes are critical to wildlife damage management and emerging mission areas, such as emergency response and recovery, like the 2019 Nebraska floods and the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Mr. Shea, explained how WS' core value is working with cooperators and how this type of work requires high level collaborations. Mr. Shea went into detail about how WS applies funding towards agriculture and property protection, natural resources conservation including protecting threatened and endangered species, and human health and safety activities. Mr. Shea closed with remarks about how the WS program is comprised of scientists, wildlife biologists, and professionals who have strong connections with other government officials, stakeholders, and the public, which is important as the program continues to evolve and adapt to meet new challenges.

Following his remarks the APHIS Administrator, Shea and Under Secretary, Ibach presented the Certificates of Appointment to the NWSAC members.

Opening Remarks – Janet Bucknall, Deputy Administrator for Wildlife Services

Janet Bucknall provided an overview of the WS organizational structure, history, and program roles and priorities. She expressed gratitude to APHIS for WS' inclusion within the agency and then introduced the WS Management Team. She talked about the importance of building public trust in order to accomplish WS' broad mission. She concluded by detailing WS' involvement in various areas, including airport wildlife hazard management, responses to wildlife-human conflicts, and livestock protection.

Western Region Update – Jason Suckow, Regional Director

Western Regional Director, Jason Suckow, provided a summary of WS activities in the west. He emphasized the importance of WS utilizing integrated wildlife damage management and working with the wildlife conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs). He discussed M-44s, NEPA, drones, livestock guard dog research, and human-wildlife conflicts with protected species. He detailed how wildlife management methods have changed recently as large predators are moving closer to urban areas and rangelands. Stressing the importance of good communication, he urged WS to do a better job of telling both perspectives of predator management.

Eastern Region Update – Willie Harris, Regional Director

Eastern Regional Director, Willie Harris, presented an overview of WS in the east, which included leadership updates. He spoke about the challenges aquaculture and livestock producers have in protecting their animals while staying compliant with the USFWS Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Aquaculture producers continue to have problems with double crested-cormorants, and other fish-eating birds, consuming their farm-raised fish; while livestock producers, particularly in southern states, have been experiencing black vulture predations on cattle calves and other vulnerable livestock. Mr. Harris explained how both predating bird species are protected and require USFWS permits and coordination

with WS to remove the birds. The State programs in the region will hold meetings and workshops to offer technical assistance and assist producers in obtaining the correct permits to protect their investments.

National Wildlife Research Center Update – Dr. Larry Clark

Director of NWRC, Dr. Larry Clark, gave an overview of NWRC’s mission, research priorities, and the methods development process. He explained NWRC’s resourcefulness and ability to develop useful products by pivoting off of previous research and technology. He also described the NWRC production model which includes future product development strategies for sodium nitrite, PAPP (para-aminopropiophenone) a toxicant currently used in New Zealand, RNAi gene silencing technology, and gene mapping. He also covered wildlife and livestock protection products and technology, the roles and responsibilities of each NWRC field station, the importance of the Technology Transfer program, and continued research on developing non-lethal techniques.

National Rabies Management Program Update - Richard Chipman

WS National Rabies Coordinator, Rich Chipman, presented a brief history of WS’ involvement in wildlife rabies control that included an overview of the rabies virus and detailed information on the vaccines WS uses. He provided updates on the status of current operations, funding structure, research, and future program objectives. He discussed the economics of raccoon rabies management and urban baiting challenges and acknowledged the possible need to allocate more resources in areas where aerial vaccine bait distribution was not possible.

Feral Swine Damage Management Program Update – Dr. Dale Nolte

WS National Feral Swine Coordinator, Dr. Dale Nolte, provided an overview of the Feral Swine Damage Management Program that included current management strategies, the 2018 Farm Bill feral swine management pilot program, and program goals including the production of an effective feral swine toxicant. He also discussed the problems with feral swine translocation, possible disease transmission to humans and domestic pets from consuming feral swine meat, and the risks of reintroduction of pseudorabies to domestic swine.

Aviation Safety and Operations Center - Wiley Gustafson

National Aviation Coordinator, Wiley Gustafson, detailed the history and use of aircraft for wildlife damage management. He presented an overview of the WS aviation safety program which included the WS’ pilot workforce, future acquisition of a new helicopter fleet, and the use of drones. He talked about the redesign of the “Aviation Center of Excellence” training center, which will utilize more holistic training methods. He stressed the importance of standardization and modernization of the fleet to streamline operations and personnel training.

2016 NWSAC Recommendations – Martin Mendoza

The previous NWSAC meeting was held in 2016, in Tacoma, Washington. Associate Deputy Administrator, Martin Mendoza, presented the eight recommendations from the last meeting along with the corresponding Agency and Program decisions and actions. He noted that Alpha-Chloralose and tranquilizer tabs were removed from the list of approved WS substances. He stressed the importance of WS developing a feral swine toxicant that can be applied in the field. He described the role of the Pocatello Supply Depot, the creation of the Aviation Center of Excellence, and the goal of raccoon rabies eradication. The WS Management Team addressed questions and concerns from the Committee about the results of the 2015/16 meetings.

Review of Charter and Rules of Order – Ginger Murphy

Associate Deputy Administrator, Ginger Murphy, discussed the Committee's structure, terms of appointments, meetings, and the NWSAC Charter. The Committee was advised that once a Chair and Vice Chair were elected, the Chair will assume control of the meeting and decide what agenda items to address. WS personnel will not be involved in discussions, but will observe and be available to provide guidance and technical information, answer questions, and provide administrative assistance.

- Motion was made to nominate James LaCour, as NWSAC Chair, by Gordon Batcheller and seconded by James Anderson.
- Motion was made to nominate David McEwen, as NWSAC Chair, by Cat Urbigit and seconded by multiple members.
- The secret ballot vote was in favor of James LaCour for Chairman.
- Motion was made to nominate David McEwen, as Vice Chair, by Irma Cauley and seconded by Andrew Prosser.
- The vote was unanimous in favor of electing David McEwen for Vice Chair.
- With the election of Committee leadership complete, James LaCour solicited NWSAC members for recommendation ideas.

Discussion of Agenda Topics – James LaCour, NWSAC Chair

James LaCour asked Committee members to decide whether or not to keep the 2016 recommendations for further review. The Committee discussed and voted on the following 2016 recommendations:

1. Increase use of all available technologies – motion to strike, passed.
2. Developing and licensing wildlife toxicants – motion to retain, passed.
3. Develop science-based BMP's to address large predator conflicts – motion to retain, passed.
4. Proactively communicate activities – motion to retain, passed.
5. Rabies bait drops at the Texas/Mexico border – motion to retain, passed.
6. Development of Pocatello Supply Depot – motion to strike, passed.
7. Double-crested Cormorant management – motion to retain, passed.
8. Increase WS helicopter fleet – motion to strike, passed.

After the break, the Committee reconvened and heard topics of concern from individual members. Committee members identified the following topics to be discussed:

1. Grizzly bears – asking for additional funding for WS to focus on grizzly bear management in areas with high coyote overlap.
2. WS billing system – required billing system seems incompatible with WS and is causing cooperators stress when trying to pay invoices.
3. Raccoon rabies – an increase funding for raccoon rabies control.
4. M-44 device – use, regulations, and expansion. Possibility of removing face shield requirement from the EPA label.
5. Aggressive eradication of feral swine.
6. Chronic Wasting Disease – ways for WS to engage with this topic.
7. WS volunteers – make process of registering volunteers faster and more streamlined.
8. Wildlife disease related responses– increase funding and resources for WS emergency response, including wildlife disease response.
9. Feral pork meat safety provisions.
10. Black vultures.
11. WS general budget.

The session adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

September 19, 2019 – USDA South Building, Room 3109

After administration updates, Chairman LaCour, provided an overview of proposed recommendations. Tasked Committee members wrote the basic structure for each recommendation, the text appeared on the conference room screen and was edited in real time as Committee members provided input. Discussion concluded after each member was satisfied with the wording of each recommendation.

Recommendation #1:

The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that Wildlife Services (WS) continue the process of development and registration of wildlife toxicants, and expedite the process where possible.

Little discussion, the whole Committee agreed with the 2016 recommendation and wanted to keep the same recommendation for 2019.

Recommendation #2:

The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that WS communicate program activities proactively to constituents and stakeholders especially including non-traditional audiences in communities where Wildlife Services is providing services. We encourage the use of econometrics in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents, research, and informational materials, including the positive economic impact of livestock and resources conserved through integrated wildlife damage management; and to communicate the relevancy and value of Wildlife Services activities to the public's quality of life in keeping with the Wildlife Services' focus on building public trust.

The Committee agreed to retain the basic structure of the 2016 recommendation. 2019 Discussion:

- *“How does fish and wildlife conservation benefit the life of all Americans? Building public trust?”*
- *“Some citizens appreciate the fact that conservation efforts are being made even without ever witnessing or benefiting directly, but they need to be aware of the actions.”*
- *“WS should let the public know they donate meat from animals removed.”*
- *“Communities, where WS work, need to know the economic benefits of having their services, including the impacts to the local economy outside of the cooperators property.”*
- *“To maintain the public trust WS needs to tell (their) story better, not let others tell it for them.”*
- *“The public needs to know what positive work WS does. Example, WS should get direct credit when removing an animal involved in a human-wildlife conflict, not the state agency in-charge of the investigation.”*
- *“WS also needs to do a better and faster job highlighting the good work they do and use social media more, like Twitter.”*
- *“NWRC can develop the econometrics data that can help communicate the positive actions to the public, “Protecting wildlife investments” and maybe able integrate them into NEPA documents.”*

Recommendation #3:

The NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture seek additional appropriations to increase funding for the management of rabies in the United States in the interest of human and animal health and safety, especially but not limited to raccoon rabies in the east and canine rabies on the Texas-Mexico border. Additionally, the NWSAC recommends a continuation of research, development and use of more efficient and effective vaccines with the goal of being raccoon rabies free by 2053.

2019 Discussion opened with the topic of Mexico's proclamation of being canine-rabies free.

- *“Is there a need to continue Texas-Mexico border rabies vaccine air-drops?”*
- *“What kind of rabies surveillance is going on near the Texas-Mexico border and Northern Mexico?”*
- *“Should the Texas funds be diverted to increase rabies eradication efforts in the Eastern U.S.?”*

Discussion about diverting funds from Texas to the Eastern U.S. Conclusion, without a Texas risk analysis and rabies surveillance plan, Texas air-drops should continue.

- *“There should be new additional funding provided for rabies eradication work, but not at the expense of other WS projects or budgets.”*

New discussion about the rabies vaccines. WS uses 2 rabies vaccine baits, the VRG vaccine bait has been used for 25 years and the ONRAB vaccine has been used since 2011. The ONRAB bait still needs more testing and research on coyotes and other animals.

- *“Is the old bait going away?”*
- *R. Chipman - “No. WS utilizes both vaccines. The ONRAB vaccine is more expensive but more research is needed to determine which vaccine can be more effective over time. The ONRAB price could come down as more vaccines are produced.”*

During the final discussion; the Committee agreed to simplify their recommendation.

- *“Take generic approach so experts can decide where to use resources appropriately.”*

Recommendation #4:

The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture, in reference to Double-crested Cormorants (DCCO), WS be provided with increased resources in partnership with other wildlife agencies to include staffing and budget. The NWSAC also recommends an increase in resources and efforts to provide assistance to farmers with lethal and nonlethal management of DCCO and other migratory birds that prey on aquaculture. Additionally, the NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture communicate with the Secretary of Interior the following actions to protect the aquaculture industry:

- To expedite the completion of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to support the re-creation of a DCCO Aquaculture Depredation Order.
- Recommend an increase to the allowable take from 51,571 to at least 91,175 for individual permits to be allocated across the states as recommended by USDA Wildlife Services.
- Bring back the use of decoys by permittees to target problem birds that are unaffected by hazing.
- Bring back the use of nest and egg destruction by permittees as a management tool.
- Instruct regional offices to issue individual permits for DCCO for a 12-month period as before instead of seasonal dates.

The NWSAC also recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture discuss with the Secretary of Interior the pursuit of restoring the DCCO Public Resources Depredation Order in consultation with state fish and wildlife agencies.

In 2016, the USFWS vacated the Aquaculture and Public Resources Depredation Orders and for Double-crested Cormorants.

- *“Would like to see the old DCCO depredation order restored, but it may be easier to list the demands.”*
- *“The take should be at least 91k, the same as the previous order.”*
- *“Add language to allow nest and egg destruction.”*
- *“Don’t limit permit language, ensure it is inclusive for all parties.”*
- *“Would like to use decoys again, to remove early arriving DCCO. DCCO arriving later in the season will likely by-pass the area if there are no other DCCO already established in the area.”*

Recommendation #5:

The NWSAC recommends the Secretary of Agriculture engage the Secretary of Interior to seek additional Department of the Interior (DOI) funding for WS through an existing interagency agreement framework for conflict resolution involving large predator management in furtherance of restoration of species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The NWSAC specifically recommends additional resources be allocated for conflict resolution involving large predators, including but not limited to grizzly bears and wolves.

- *“Add specific language about working with Department of Interior to secure funding for additional resources for Endangered Species Protection.”*
- *“Should reword, to specifically add grizzly bears and wolves.”*

Recommendation #6:

The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that administrative reforms be adopted to enhance the efficacy and customer service of Wildlife Services program delivery including the following:

- Amend billing documents to process changes at no added cost to Wildlife Services.
- Provide more detailed accounting from the agency feeder system and allow Wildlife Services to review and correct bills prior to submission to the cooperator.
- Reform and simplify policies pertaining to the use of volunteers to enable the rapid and efficient recruitment of volunteer Wildlife Services workers at the field level.
- Enable immediate access to vehicles by Wildlife Services field personnel for the fulfillment of their duties. Exempt Farm Bill-funded and cooperator provided/funded vehicles from USDA vehicle caps.

The NWSAC recognizes and appreciates the APHIS Administrator and Under Secretary’s support for Wildlife Services fleet needs and active fleet management.

- *“Enable WS State Offices to adjust and offer bills to cooperators rather than directly from FMFI.”*
- *“Amend billing documents with no additional cost to WS.”*
- *“More detailed statements from the Agency feeder system and correct bills prior to billing”*
- *“Have the Department allow WS to purchase more vehicles for feral swine and airport work. Employees should not be using their own vehicles in the field.”*
- *“WS should be allowed to use cooperator and airport vehicles when available.”*
- *“Simplify and speed up the process for WS to use volunteers. It is also a good recruitment tool.”*
- *“Lump all the administration tasks together to allow flexibility.”*

Recommendation #7:

The NWSAC encourages the Secretary of Agriculture to continue working with the Secretary of the Interior to mitigate livestock depredation and property damage by vultures and eagles.

- *“Livestock depredation and property damage is increasing by vultures and eagles.”*
Discussion to combine turkey vultures and black vultures and simplify language to just read ‘vultures’. Turkey vultures that are around black vultures are learning how to predate livestock.
- *“There should be collaborative efforts between USDA and the Department of Interior to address black vultures management.*
- *“There needs to be more research about black vultures.”*

Recommendation #8:

The NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture provide adequate resources to support preparedness and sustained infrastructure for emergency response to natural disasters, disease outbreaks, or any other declared emergency, as well as disease surveillance, prevention, and control of animal disease.

The NWSAC further recommends Wildlife Services collaborate with USDA-APHIS-Veterinary Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to obtain additional funding for increased wildlife disease operations.

- *“Enhance WS ability to respond to wildlife diseases and zoonotic disease outbreaks.”*
- *“WS Wildlife Disease Biologists are over taxed and there are more issues coming up.”*
- *“The disease program was downsized but the work increased, need more people, pulled in too many different directions, VS or CDC should pay.”*
- *“It’s emergency prevention to save animals and livelihoods.”*
- *“Detection and response is the main issue, we need more surveillance and detection.”*
- *“USDA should supply more for disease surveillance, prevention and emergency response.”*

Recommendation #9:

The NWSAC recommends the Secretary of Agriculture advocate for the creation and sustainment of a Wildlife Services Aviation Center of Excellence in Cedar City, Utah. Support should be commensurate with the growth and expansion of the Wildlife Services Aviation Program, the modernization and standardization of the Wildlife Services aircraft fleet, and the development and implementation of new and innovative training techniques and pilot recruitment and retention.

- *Debated grammar and included new training techniques and pilot recruitment.*

Recommendation #10:

The NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture continue to support the use of the M-44.

- *“M-44s need more support”*
- *“Should be used as part of an integrated management plan.”*
- *“M-44s are highly controlled to avoid non-targets.”*
- *“Eliminate unnecessary impediments – the opposition to its use.”*
- *Discussion lead to keeping the recommendation ‘simple’ and have the Secretary maintain ‘support’ for M-44s.*

Recommendation #11:

The NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture encourage the development of studies and reviews that integrate economic and ecological effects of wildlife damage management for the protection of American agriculture and natural resources, including objective science-based reviews that consider the value of wildlife management for the promotion of healthy ecosystems.

The NWSAC encourages Wildlife Services research on emerging wildlife conflict issues and techniques to minimize these conflicts, including predator behaviors indicating increased risk of human attack, and the use of Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGDs) to protect varied classes of livestock, including cattle, in different production systems.

- *“Study aggressive predators involved in human conflicts, and the ecological and economics effects on a large scale.”*
- *Debated using dogs for human health and safety. Kept language to only use LGDs for livestock protection.*

Recommendation #12:

The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that WS:

- Work collaboratively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey to assist state and tribal agencies tasked with managing Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).
 - Designate the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) as the primary research facility for applied research on CWD in wild cervids.
 - Seek new funding for research including: methods to increase the timeliness of test results for both live and dead specimens, vaccine development, and other research priorities related to CWD.
- *“We need outreach to the general public concerning CWD”*
 - *Debated wild cervids vs. farm cervids and how proposed funding would be used.*
 - *“It’s more about awareness not funding”*
 - *“Are we asking WS to do more? Our intent is – contingent upon financial resources, if available.”*
 - *“Designate NWRC as the primary research center for CWD and seeking new funding.”*

Recommendation #13:

The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture to expedite the development and registration of a sodium nitrite feral swine toxicant. We also urge the Secretary of Agriculture to explore new technologies for feral swine damage management and eradication. Wildlife Services is encouraged to work with state feral swine task forces, tribal agencies, and the National Wild Pig Task Force to deliver state specific and national objectives for feral swine damage control and eradication.

Also, the NWSAC recommends the Secretary of Agriculture works with Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) to examine the safety of feral pork for human consumption as feral hogs have been shown to be the hosts for numerous zoonotic diseases and parasites.

- *Debated the word, “Eradication,” of feral swine. “Some states want to keep and manage a hunt-able population of feral swine.”*
- *“States need to have input to eliminate or control populations. We need to support state taskforces and Tribal agencies.”*
- *“Need to address feral pork food safety, humans are getting sick from brucellosis, the meat is not inspected but sold in some cases. Need to influence FSIS.”*

Following the last recommendation, the Committee considered the location and date for the next NWSAC meeting. Ideas for locations included Cedar City, Utah (Aviation Training Center), Montana (State Program), and Fort Collins, Colorado (National Wildlife Research Center, State Program). The Committee selected Fort Collins, Colorado for a yet-to-be-determined date in July, August was selected as a back-up month. The Committee members watched a short video about the collaborative work between the Defenders of Wildlife and WS. Before the final vote on the recommendations, minor edits were made to most of the recommendations for wording consistency. The NWSAC chair led the vote resulting in a unanimous vote on all the recommendations. The Committee members all moved outside for a group picture and the meeting was officially adjourned at 4 pm.

Committee Members in Attendance:

Mr. James Anderson
Mr. Gordon Batcheller
Ms. Trina Bradley
Mr. Jeffrey Campbell
Dr. Tyler Campbell
Ms. Irma Cauley
Mr. Daniel Dawson
Mr. Joel Dennis
Dr. Cynthia Driscoll (DVM)
Dr. Donald Hoenig (VMD)
Mr. Burdell Johnson
Dr. James LaCour (DVM)
Mr. David McEwen
Mr. Brent Miller
Mr. Andrew Prosser
Mr. Ronald Regan
Ms. Cat Urbigkit
Mr. Les Elliot Wright
Mr. Mark Zaubrecher

Committee Member not in Attendance:

Mr. Scott Nelson

Visitors:

Ms. Amanda Wight
Ms. Lindsay Vierheilig
Ms. Bethany Cotton
Ms. Taylor Mann
Ms. Nancy Blaney