

# Wildlife Services

Protecting People  
Protecting Agriculture  
Protecting Wildlife

## State Report

FY 2010

# Alabama



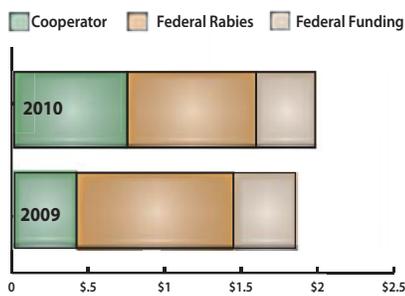
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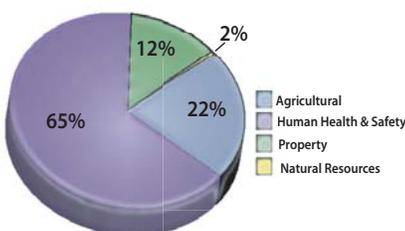
### Major Cooperators

- Alabama Departments of Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries, Public Health, and Transportation
- Alabama Cooperative Extension Service
- Auburn University
- Alabama Farmers Federation
- Maxwell Air Force Base, U. S. Army Missile Command Redstone Arsenal, U. S. Army Corp of Engineers
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U. S. Federal Aviation Administration
- Local and regional airports
- Private companies
- Tennessee Valley Authority

### Total Funding (Millions)



### Resources Protected % of Total Funds



### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Alabama

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Alabama Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts. Alabama is a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, and forests all with high populations of wildlife.

As Alabama's human population grows, conflicts with wildlife have also increased. WS biologists help Alabama farmers control losses to birds and predators. A biologist, located at the Alabama Fish Farming Center, is devoted to addressing bird predation at aquaculture facilities where losses are estimated at several million dollars annually. WS biologists also address beaver damage to Alabama's transportation infrastructure and timber resources, protect the lives of pilots, air passengers, and aircraft from dangerous wildlife collisions with airplanes, assist with monitoring and control of wildlife-vectored human diseases such as rabies and West Nile virus, assist in feral swine disease testing, and provide landowners assistance in trapping, and assist in protecting threatened or endangered species from other wildlife predators.

### Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this technical assistance can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or direct assistance, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts scientific research across the nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

**Protecting Agricultural Resources**—Agriculture is Alabama's most important industry, with annual farm receipts of \$5.29 billion. Agriculture-related jobs employ more than 21 percent of the state's workforce. The State ranks second nationally in catfish production and ranks high in timber, poultry, and forest products. Agricultural losses to wildlife include livestock predation, bird depredation to crops, flooding of timber lands by beaver, and catfish losses to migratory birds.

More than \$19 million is lost annually because of beaver damage to timber and almost \$4 million is lost annually from bird depredation at aquaculture facilities. WS biologists work closely with the Alabama Department of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, the Alabama Farmers Federation, and the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries to address these problems. WS personnel conduct bird roost dispersal activities to reduce the number of birds in aquaculture areas. In addition, WS assists catfish producers in developing the most effective control programs available with current technology.

WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) is investigating the migratory movements and feeding behavior of fish-eating birds and is working to develop new management methods to reduce the economic losses that result from depredation in Alabama. Fish-eating birds are not the only wildlife causing damage to agriculture in Alabama. WS biologists provide technical assistance and management recommendations as well as train landowners on beaver damage management. WS direct assistance includes water level manipulation, exclusion, population reduction, and the safe and effective use of explosives by certified specialists to remove beaver dams that can cause extensive flooding.

**Protecting Air Travel**—WS is internationally recognized for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with airplanes cost the U.S. civil aviation industry nearly \$615 million annually in the United States. Alabama has major airports that must manage a variety of potential wildlife hazards. WS scientists at the NWRC conduct research to understand the nature



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to manage or prevent these hazards. Applying this scientific expertise, the Alabama WS program has provided airports in the State with technical assistance, training, and direct operational management.

WS has reduced the presence of wildlife on and around runways by up to 80 percent at these airports.

**Protecting Public Health**—Wildlife may directly infect humans with disease or act as human disease carriers. With expanding human populations and the loss of wildlife habitat, wild animals are coming into closer contact with humans and increasing the risk of transmitting wildlife-borne diseases such as rabies. Alabama WS is involved in several human health and wildlife disease-related projects, many in conjunction with the Alabama Department of Public Health.

WS cooperates with homeowners and business owners, many in underprivileged areas, to exclude bats from their buildings. Bats can pose a year-round rabies and histoplasmosis (a fungus that causes lung infections) threat to humans. In addition, Alabama WS distributes brochures and pamphlets explaining to homeowners and private operators how to best exclude bats from inhabited buildings. Alabama WS also works closely with State public health officials to monitor several avian diseases that can impact human health and safety such as West Nile virus and avian influenza. Alabama WS is currently implementing a raccoon rabies surveillance program to locate areas in the State where the disease has advanced. This surveillance work is part of a nationwide effort to determine the bounds of the virus within the United States. Traditionally, rabies has been a problem in the eastern United States, but the virus continues to move westward. In Alabama, WS is surveying to determine if the virus has spread west of two natural barriers: the Alabama and Coosa Rivers. Based on the results, WS conducts oral vaccination projects to stop the westward movement of the rabies virus through the state. As part of the wildlife disease monitoring program, feral swine are also sampled across the state and tested for classical swine fever, pseudorabies, and swine brucellosis in cooperation with other State and Federal agencies.

### **Looking to the Future**

WS resolves a diverse range of wildlife conflicts, and the demand for services continues to grow in Alabama. Wildlife diseases, such as rabies, are posing greater threats to people, livestock, and pets. Fish-eating birds continue to increase and threaten Alabama's growing aquaculture industry. Lack of sport trapping due to a decline in the fur market is contributing to continued increases in the beaver population and some predator problems. Finally, introduced species, such as feral swine, are a rapidly growing wildlife management problem.

### **Alabama Wildlife Services Funding**

In addition to receiving Federally allocated funds, WS also receives funding from airports, private individuals, businesses, and other Federal, State, and local governments. In most cases, these cooperators need help in resolving wildlife damage problems or play a role in wildlife damage management.

#### **Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:**

- Protecting agricultural commodities
- Protecting aquaculture resources from migratory bird predation
- Protecting timber resources and transportation infrastructure from beaver damage
- Protecting human health and safety from wildlife-vectoring diseases such as rabies and West Nile virus
- Protecting passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife

#### **Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Alabama:**

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing bird predation to aquaculture in the southeastern United States
- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies and bovine tuberculosis
- Managing beaver damage to timber and other forest resources
- Developing improved techniques to manage damage from feral swine