

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2010

Alaska



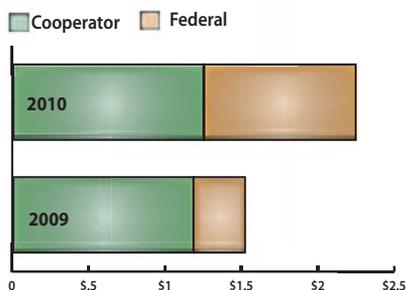
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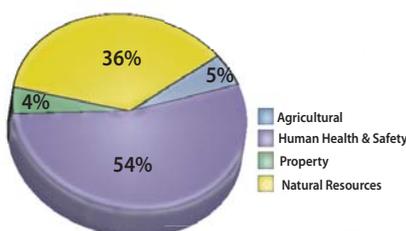
Major Cooperators

- Anchorage International Airport
- Eielson Airforce Base
- Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson
- Alaska Department of Transportation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Juneau International Airport
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Total Funding (Millions)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Alaska

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Alaska 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.

Alaska has a diverse mix of vast wilderness areas, urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, forests, coastline, islands, and tundra. The size of Alaska and its ecological and geographic diversity give the State a remarkable variety of wildlife species. Alaska is home to millions of migratory birds in the summer and unparalleled populations of native mammals and fish. Because air travel is the primary means of transportation in the State, Alaska boasts more aircraft and airports per capita than anywhere else in the United States.

WS protects the lives of air passengers, pilots, and crew, as well as the aircrafts in which they fly from dangerous collisions with wildlife. WS biologists also assist in protecting the numerous species of seabirds and waterfowl from predation by non-indigenous species, such as the arctic fox on the Aleutian Islands. WS addresses bird damage to municipal properties and public and private buildings and responds to concerns about public health and safety. In addition, WS offers assistance to Alaska's farmers and livestock producers in reducing agricultural losses from birds and 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 by phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or direct assistance, to managing complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts scientific research across the United States to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports — Each year, lives are endangered and billions of dollars are spent worldwide due to birds and other wildlife colliding with aircraft. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with aircraft cause more than 600,000 hours of aircraft downtime and cost the U.S. civil aviation industry in excess of \$615 million annually as a result of damage to equipment and other associated costs. Military aircraft are also threatened by collisions with wildlife; estimated direct and associated costs exceed \$100 million annually. In 1995, a military jet taking off from Alaska's Elmendorf Air Force Base (now Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson) crashed after striking a flock of Canada geese. All 24 crew members were killed and the aircraft was destroyed.

The State of Alaska owns and operates more than 250 airfields. In addition, there are 24 municipal airports and an estimated 3,000 private airstrips in the state. Alaska has a tremendous seasonal influx of migratory birds, and most of Alaska's airports have been constructed in prime wildlife habitat. This means the vast majority of Alaskan airfields experience some degree of risk that birds or other wildlife will collide with aircraft taking off or landing.

WS is internationally recognized for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to aviation. WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) conducts research to reduce wildlife hazards to aviation and reduce risks to the public. Studies are underway at several large U.S. airports where scientists evaluate habitat management practices and wildlife dispersal techniques. NWRC also maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the Federal Aviation Administration and airports to monitor trends and wildlife species that pose the greatest threat to aviation.

Applying this scientific expertise, the Alaska WS program provides assistance to civilian and military airports across the State. WS conducts on-site evaluations as well as comprehensive wildlife hazard assessments to assist airport managers and other aviation officials in alleviating wildlife hazards. In addition, WS biologists provide training in wildlife deterrence and dispersal to airport employees statewide.



United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Protecting Rare and Threatened and Endangered Species— WS protects rare threatened and endangered species from wildlife predation. Alaska's Aleutian Islands are home to the Aleutian cackling goose and some of the world's largest and most ecologically important colonies of nesting seabirds. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, Russian fur traders and American fur farmers introduced the arctic fox onto numerous islands in the Aleutian chain. This introduction nearly caused the extinction of the Aleutian cackling goose and had severe impacts on nesting colonies of seabirds. For more than a decade, WS has worked in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to remove arctic foxes from the islands where they negatively impact nesting bird populations. This interagency project has been instrumental in the recovery of the Aleutian cackling goose, from record population lows of a few hundred in the late 1970's to more than 100,000 today. In 2001, the Aleutian cackling goose was removed from USFWS' list of Federally threatened and endangered species due in part to WS' efforts. WS has also enhanced nesting opportunities for numerous species including Pacific black brant, and the threatened Stellar's and spectacled eiders.

Wildlife Disease Surveillance—From 2006 through 2010, WS-Alaska collected over 13,000 avian influenza samples and assisted Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) with the collection of almost 4,000 more as part of the U.S. interagency early detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza. WS-Alaska employees also traveled to Greenland and collected 307 avian influenza samples from greater snow geese and Canada geese. Avian influenza sampling concluded at the end of 2010. No highly pathogenic avian influenza was ever found. WS also assists ADFG in conducting chronic wasting disease (CWD) surveillance on road-killed moose. Approximately 100 CWD samples are collected each winter. In addition, WS does disease surveillance for rabies, toxoplasmosis, plague, and tularemia.

Looking to the Future

In Alaska, the safety of air transportation is a serious and growing concern. Increased air travel throughout Alaska, coupled with substantial populations of migratory birds and other wildlife, has created an urgent need for State and Federal management of wildlife threats. In addition, Alaskan farmers and ranchers may request WS' assistance to help minimize damage to agricultural resources from birds and predators. Although aviation and agricultural leaders turn to WS for assistance, limited resources affect WS' ability to respond to all wildlife conflicts. The immense size of Alaska creates additional challenges. Transportation is required to reach isolated areas that are not accessible by car or truck and more personnel are needed to adequately assist the State's citizens. These restrictions, in combination with WS' infrastructure needs, limit the program's ability to respond to wildlife problems in some areas of the State.

Alaska 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 government agencies. 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 passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife
- Protecting migratory seabirds from predation by introduced populations of arctic fox
- Providing wildlife hazard management training to airports, and oil spill response training to government and private industry
- Conducting Wildlife Hazard Assessments at airports
- Protecting crops, property, and public health and safety from damage by birds
- Protecting public health by assisting State and Federal cooperators with wildlife disease surveillance

Top 4 WS Research Projects of Interest to Alaska:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Improving assessment, sampling, and economic methods for wildlife damage management