

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2008

Florida



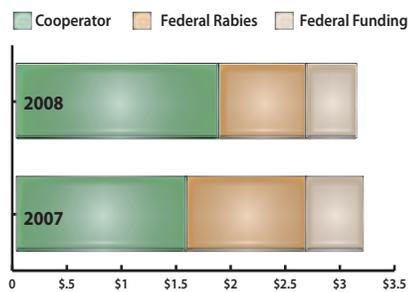
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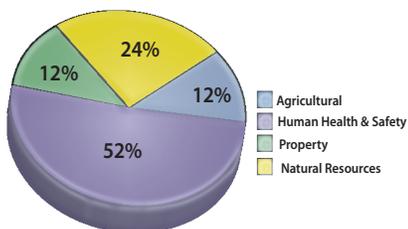
Major Cooperators

- Eglin Air Force Base
- Homestead Air Reserve Base
- Tyndall Air Force Base
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- St. John's River Water Management District
- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- Columbia County
- Palm Beach County
- The Nature Conservancy

Total Funding (Millions)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Florida

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on Wildlife Services (WS) in Florida for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. WS' professional wildlife biologists respond to these requests with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks at airports and military air bases, schools, and along roadways. The program protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases; guards many natural resources, such as fisheries and timber from wildlife depredation; protects humans and agriculture from invasive vertebrate species; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific projects conducted by Florida WS include: protecting endangered piping plovers, leatherback sea turtles and green sea turtles from predation; conducting sampling and monitoring for avian influenza, classical swine fever, pseudorabies, swine brucellosis and rabies; leading the effort to eradicate invasive Gambian giant pouch rats and other invasive vertebrate species; and managing damage caused by feral swine, beavers, pigeons, vultures, and other wildlife.

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. WS has cooperated with WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to publish 38 scientific articles in peer reviewed journals.

Aquaculture Assistance—Florida, home to the largest tropical fish industry in the world, has a relatively large and growing foodfish (i.e. catfish, tilapia and shrimp) and baitfish industry. WS has two biologists in Florida trained in protecting fish crops from bird and mammal predators who provide direct assistance and technical assistance to fish farmers.

Protecting Agricultural Crops—WS assists farmers to protect their crops from wildlife through technical assistance and recommendations for permits to remove birds and predating mammals.

Protecting Livestock—Ranchers are assisted with managing damage from coyotes and black vultures that are predating on livestock. One full-time professional trapper works to manage Columbia County coyotes to protect calves. Additionally, ranchers around Florida are given hands-on advice and assistance with obtaining permits to control black vultures that are killing newborn calves.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—With more than 100 airports, Florida is second only to California in reported wildlife collisions with aircraft. The latest Federal Aviation Administration report showed 5,843 bird strikes at Florida airports from 1990 to 2008.

WS is recognized nationally and internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS' NWRC conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports and develops management tools to reduce these hazards. Applying this scientific expertise, WS provided direct assistance to 13 Florida airports and technical assistance to 26 airports in FY 2008. Technical assistance included wildlife hazard assessments and management plans, training airport personnel to reduce the



United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

risk of wildlife/aircraft collisions, and obtaining permits. Direct assistance included removing wildlife habitat from airfields and directly managing wildlife that threaten aircraft.

Protecting Human Health and Safety from Rabies—WS, in collaboration with the State and county agencies, distributed 182,000 oral rabies vaccination baits throughout a designated area in three counties to vaccinate raccoons against rabies.

Protecting Health and Safety in the Workplace—WS has removed large concentrations of birds, mainly pigeons and vultures, from roosting areas in power plants, transmission towers, and railway yards where their feces and filth were creating hazardous working conditions for workers.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species—WS protects T&E species from wildlife predation and damage. In Florida, 47 T&E species are protected, including five sea turtle species, eight species of endangered rodents, and six bird species.

Protecting Florida from Invasive Species—WS eliminated a wild population of black-tailed jackrabbits at Miami International Airport. The jackrabbits, not native to Florida, had escaped from a cargo shipment and became established at the airfield. At the airport's request, WS removed 187 rabbits. Subsequently, no rabbits have been reported and it is assumed that all were eradicated.

WS has provided advice to the National Park Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and different counties and municipalities to manage the invasive Burmese python and Monitor lizard. The program is currently working on eliminating a population of Gambian pouch rats from Grassy Key, spiny-tailed iguanas from Gasparilla Island, and Sacred ibis from South Florida.

Addressing Residential and Industrial Property Damage Caused by Black and Turkey Vultures—Black and turkey vultures cause extensive damage to homes, watercraft, and other equipment by chewing and ripping up roof shingles, caulking, boat and seat covers and cushions, insulation and other soft, pliable material. WS in Florida have developed ways for Floridians to protect their property from vulture damage including use of vulture effigies. Similarly, vulture effigies developed by WS' NWRC field station in Gainesville are being used extensively to deter vultures from transmission towers.

Protecting Multiple Resources from Feral Swine Damage—Feral swine damage dwindling ecosystems important to the State. WS conducted a wild swine management program in Savannas State Park that saved a documented \$4 million in possible damage. For ecosystem protection, WS also conducts feral swine damage management at five additional State parks, on Eglin Air Force Base and other locations around the State. Protecting T&E species, natural wetlands, public and private property, humans and livestock from diseases through feral swine damage management is a major consideration for WS in Florida. In recent years feral swine numbers and damage have increased dramatically. Feral swine have no significant natural predators, and swine hunting does not keep the population in check. This invasive, or non-native, species is found throughout most of the State and estimates indicate a rising population. While this population escalation resulted in some benefits derived from recreational hunting, the detrimental impacts from feral swine activities have also increased. From 2000 to 2008, WS received requests for direct assistance with feral swine damage problems from Palm Beach County, the Florida DEP (Seven State Parks), St. John's River, Northwest Florida and South Florida Water Management Districts, and Eglin and Avon Park AFB. Typical

requests involved damage to sensitive wetlands, forest resources and croplands, destruction of T&E plants, erosion and siltation of streams and ponds, and the threat of disease transmission to humans and other animals.

To address some of these problems, funded programs were established to hire six WS professionals to trap and remove feral swine. The program is run by WS through cooperative service agreements with Palm Beach County, the Florida DEP, the Water Management District's, and Eglin and Avon Park AFB.

Looking to the Future

In Florida public safety is a concern for wildlife managers, particularly at airports. Additional attention must be given to this very specialized area of work.

Cormorants and other water birds are a constant threat to aquaculture producers in Florida. Additional resources are needed to meet the expanding need to help resolve these problems.

Escalating feral swine populations are becoming more of an issue. As development reduces natural areas, there is an increased need to protect remaining areas from feral swine damage.

The State also has a need to manage the transmission and spread of raccoon rabies. Florida WS is currently participating in our national effort to prevent the westward spread of raccoon rabies, and, hopefully, to eliminate rabies from the United States.

Florida Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators who have a vested interest in the program including producers, private individuals, businesses, and other Federal, State, and Local government agencies. These cooperators have a role in wildlife damage management, because in most cases they need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or conflicts.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities

- Protecting endangered and threatened plant and animal species from predation
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Managing damage caused by vultures, feral swine, beavers, and coyotes
- Controlling invasive species such as the Gambian pouch rat, Mexican Spiny-tailed iguanas and Monitor lizards
- Protecting aquaculture from bird depredation

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Florida:

- Improving surveillance and monitoring techniques
- Managing wildlife transmission of rabies
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Improving management techniques for reducing bird predation to aquaculture
- Identifying and refining methods to control predators of endangered and threatened species