

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2008

Mississippi



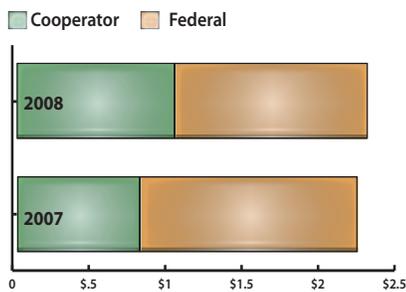
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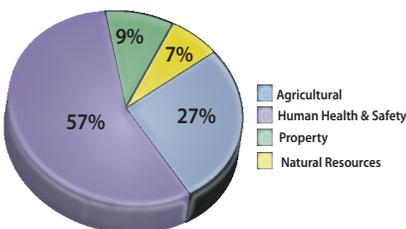
Major Cooperators

- Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce
- Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks
- Mississippi Department of Transportation
- Mississippi Forestry Commission
- Delta Council
- Mississippi Farm Bureau
- Mississippi Association of Supervisors
- Mississippi State University
- Mississippi State Department of Health
- Mississippi Airport Association
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Park Service

Total Funding (Millions)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Mississippi

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

Mississippi is a diverse ecological mix of urban suburban settings as well as agricultural and forested environments that serve as home to more than 2.8 million people. Accordingly, WS works to reduce wildlife threats to human safety and property by managing wildlife-related damage such as flooding to roads, crops, and timber; depredation to the aquaculture industry; and the potential spread of disease. WS helps protect the safety of the flying public at numerous airport facilities around the State by addressing hazardous situations wildlife may cause to aircraft.

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' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) continually conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife and conflicts and to develop management tools. Mississippi hosts a WS' NWRC Field Station focused on aquaculture and fish-eating bird conflicts.

Aquaculture Assistance—Fish-eating birds cause an estimated \$5 million in losses annually to the Mississippi aquaculture industry. Estimates are that this loss would be two to three times higher if WS was not active in using nonlethal harassment to reduce predation. Two species, the double-crested cormorant and the American white pelican, account for most damage to Mississippi aquaculture. Populations of both have increased over the last decade.

WS conducts aerial surveys of cormorant roosts in the Mississippi Delta every two weeks, from October through April. Areas of heavy cormorant concentrations are noted and local aquaculture producers are notified, so they can plan appropriate harassment activities. WS specialists also educate producers about nonlethal harassment methods to disperse other fish-eating species and, when necessary, help obtain depredation permits. WS also has begun to survey American white pelicans from the ground and the air to help producers plan harassment activities.

WS has begun implementation of new aquaculture depredation and natural resources depredation orders, which allows the agency to lethally control cormorants in winter roost sites and nontraditional nesting areas. This effort has been successfully implemented with the assistance of numerous Mississippi cooperators.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—WS is recognized internationally 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 more than \$625 million annually in the United States. Mississippi contains major airports (both civil and military) on the coast and inland, which must manage a variety of potential wildlife hazards. WS in Mississippi currently fields three full time employees protecting both civil and military installations. WS also provides technical assistance to numerous airports within the State each year.



United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Human Health and Safety Issues—WS provides assistance to a variety of groups and individuals on health and safety issues concerning wildlife. The most widespread request concerns bats dwelling in residences and businesses. Other species concerns include: vultures roosting on homes and towers; resident Canada geese interfering with enjoyment of recreational areas; black bird roosts within city limits; and pigeons defecating on buildings and other properties. All of these species can harbor a variety of diseases and their fecal material can create hazardous conditions for people. WS also conducts rabies and avian influenza surveillance in wildlife.

Protecting Multiple Resources from Beaver Damage—Protecting transportation, agriculture, forestry, and property through beaver damage management is a major consideration for WS in Mississippi. Historically, a valuable economic and natural resource, the lower demand for beaver products led to a decrease in trapping and subsequent increase in population. Beaver now occupy nearly all watersheds in the State. This population escalation has resulted in some benefits derived from beaver activities: increased wetland habitat, reduced downstream sedimentation, and improved water quality. Detrimental impacts from beaver activities have also increased.

Typical assistance requests involve damage to roadways and bridges, agricultural and forest resources, and personal property and landscaping, as well as flooding of municipal sewer and water treatment facilities. The Beaver Control Assistance Program (BCAP) was established to address some of these problems. BCAP assists the Department of Transportation (DOT), city and county governments, soil and water conservation districts, private landholders, and others with beaver problems. WS routinely uses explosives to remove beaver dams that are flooding property. WS personnel are trained and certified in the safe and effective use of explosives prior to conducting any explosives work.

WS runs BCAP through a cooperative service agreement with several Mississippi Departments (Agriculture and Commerce; Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks; Transportation) the Forestry Commission, Mississippi Association of Supervisors, Delta Council and the Mississippi Farm Bureau and Extension Service. Funding comes from State, county, Federal, and private sources. Beaver damage costs the citizens of Mississippi several million dollars a year and WS prevents several million more dollars in damages from occurring through its beaver control program.

Looking to the Future

In Mississippi, public safety concerns wildlife managers, particularly at airports. Additional attention must be given to this very specialized area of work.

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

Mississippi Wildlife Services Funding

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

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting property and public health and safety from beaver damage
- Managing fish-eating bird damage to the aquaculture industry
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Teaching college and continuing education courses on wildlife damage management
- Responding to private property complaints involving resident Canada geese, bats, vultures, and other species

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Mississippi:

- Managing bird predation to the aquaculture industry
- Establishing methods to monitor beaver populations and determine economic damage impacts to resources such as roads and timber
- Establishing the State's feral swine population
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Wildlife disease issues

NWRC Research Station in Mississippi

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The WS NWRC Starkville, MS field station primarily studies both captive and free-ranging birds to determine the local and regional population status of fish-eating birds, the extent of the damage they cause, and effective management methods. The tremendous growth of aquaculture over the past quarter-century has been an important development in American agriculture and the field station seeks alternative strategies that can be integrated into a comprehensive management plan for cost-effective reductions in damage to the industry caused by fish-eating birds. Located in Mississippi, research is conducted throughout the Eastern United States.