

# Wildlife Services

Protecting People  
Protecting Agriculture  
Protecting Wildlife

## State Report

FY 2008

# Montana



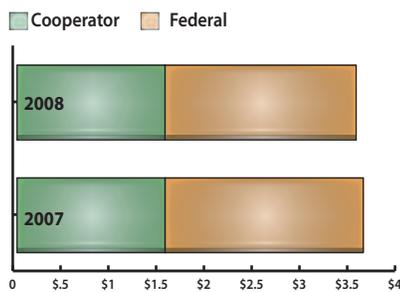
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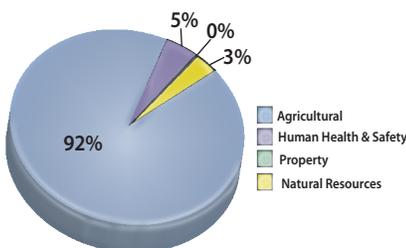
### Major Cooperators

- State agricultural associations
- Montana Department of Livestock
- Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- County governments

### Total Funding (Millions)



### Resources Protected % of Total Funds



### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Montana

Every day, Montana's residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on 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.

Although Montana has one of the lowest populations of any State in the Nation at less than one million people, only one other State surpasses it in farm and ranch land at almost 60 million acres. Agriculture, particularly cattle and sheep production, is vital to the State's economy. Montana's diverse and abundant wildlife populations are another important resource.

The WS program in Montana focuses most of its efforts on managing the interface between livestock and wildlife. The recovery of two threatened and endangered (T&E) species, the grizzly bear and the gray wolf, both predators of livestock, add a significant measure of complexity to WS' job. WS cooperates with the Montana Department of Livestock (MDL); the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTDFWP); and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), as well as various livestock organizations to protect livestock from a variety of large predators, including T&E species. At the same time, WS cooperates with the FWS and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in aiding the recovery of several T&E wildlife species.

### 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.

While WS conducts a wide range of operational and research activities, a few in-depth examples are provided to highlight the variety of work WS is doing in Montana.

**Protecting Livestock from Predators**—In 2007, predators caused an estimated \$1.2 million in losses to Montana's sheep industry (up 16 percent from 2006). Cattle losses to predators, although not reported annually, have increased significantly over the last six years as well. Because predators have a significant impact on the livestock industry, all Montana livestock producers contribute funding to support WS' livestock protection efforts through a State per capita tax.

WS is recognized by the Montana livestock industry and State agencies as the lead in managing predator damage to livestock and other personal property. These predators include red foxes, coyotes, mountain lions, black bears, grizzly bears, and gray wolves. The MDL has given WS full authority to administer the Department's aerial operations as a tool to protect livestock from predators such as coyotes and red foxes. In addition, the MTFWP has authorized WS to conduct wildlife damage management activities to protect agricultural resources in the state from big game species such as black bears and mountain lions. The FWS has authorized WS to conduct grizzly bear and gray wolf damage management in accordance with the Endangered Species Act and management plans that have been accepted for the State of Montana.

In addition to the direct assistance that WS employees provide to Montana farmers and ranchers, WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRRC) conducts an extensive program of research and methods development to reduce and prevent predation by



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

wildlife on sheep and cattle. Studies are underway to develop more effective, less injurious coyote capture systems, sound-activated conditioning collars for wolves, improved electronic frightening devices, and new exclusionary methods such as turbo fladry. Also, coyote territorial behavior and population modeling studies are underway to help develop reproduction suppression strategies for high predation-rate areas.

**Protecting Air Travelers**—The WS program is recognized by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for its expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS has provided both technical and direct assistance to airports throughout Montana to identify and reduce potential safety hazards to the flying public and to the airlines. Whenever an airport perceives a wildlife problem, they call WS to assess the problem and give recommendations on what can be done to reduce the threats caused by wildlife at any particular airport. WS also provides assistance to airports considering new runways or other expansion plans to see how those changes might be affected by wildlife in the area.

WS NWRC also conducts research from its Sandusky, OH, Field Station to reduce wildlife hazards to aircraft and reduce risks to the public. Studies are underway at several large airports where scientists evaluate habitat management practices and wildlife dispersal techniques. WS NWRC also maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the FAA and airports to monitor trends and wildlife species of greatest concern to aviation. Any and all research findings that prove to be applicable in reducing risks at Montana's airports will be considered as additional tools to prevent wildlife collisions with aircraft.

### **Looking to the Future**

With the successful reintroduction and recovery of gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains, Montana WS anticipates the growing demand for its expertise in handling livestock predation issues caused by wolves. The livestock industry and State agencies are expecting WS to provide this service. WS, however, may be somewhat limited in its resources to manage this damage. The presence of threatened and endangered species in an area places greater restrictions on the types of methods that can be used to manage predation by bears, coyotes, lions, and other wildlife. Many of the less expensive and most effective methods used to manage livestock predation are not permitted. This situation will create significant challenges for both livestock producers and WS managers in the future.

In addition to the recovered wolf population, two grizzly bear populations in Montana are recovered or are nearing recovery goals (Greater Yellowstone Area population and the Northern Continental Divide population). As grizzly bear numbers increase, WS will receive additional requests for assistance from livestock producers in dealing with grizzly predation on livestock. The recovering and recovered grizzly bear populations and associated increase in the WS workload to deal with grizzly/livestock conflicts will pose additional challenges to WS managers in Montana in the near future.

### **Montana Wildlife Services Funding**

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, Montana WS also receives money from cooperators who have a vested interest in the program such as livestock producers, private individuals, businesses, and other Federal, State, and local government agencies. All Montana livestock producers contribute funding to support WS' livestock protection efforts

through a State per capita tax. In addition, sheep producers in 49 counties and cattle producers in 16 counties provide additional funds for livestock protection through county livestock taxes. In many cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems.

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

- Protecting sheep, cattle, goats, and other livestock from predation
- Protecting agricultural crops from damage caused by birds and small mammals
- Protecting Federal threatened and endangered species and other wildlife resources
- Protecting aircraft and airline passengers from wildlife strikes at airports
- Monitoring of wildlife-borne diseases including plague, tularemia, avian influenza, rabies, etc.

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

- Managing coyote predation through reproductive intervention strategies
- Managing predators to protect livestock and wildlife
- Focusing on adult territorial coyotes to manage sheep depredation
- Developing improved exclusion methods, including turbo fladry, to exclude predators from livestock pastures
- Improving assessment sampling and economic methods for wildlife damage