

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2008

Nebraska



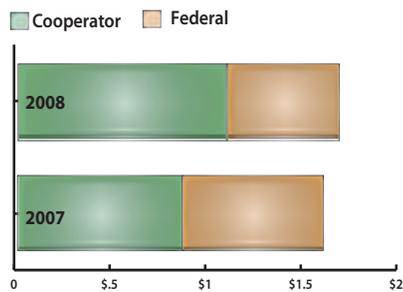
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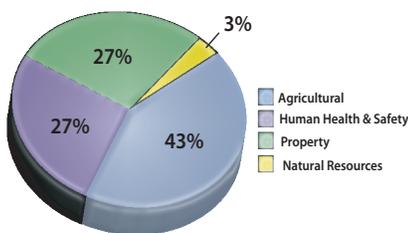
Major Cooperators

- 34 independent counties
- Metropolitan airport authorities
- Nebraska Department of Agriculture
- Nebraska Department of Roads
- Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
- Military bases
- Public utilities
- Private industries
- City governments

Total Funding (Millions)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Nebraska

Every day, farmers, ranchers, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Nebraska 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. Agriculture is Nebraska's primary source of wealth and its dominant industry. Approximately 48,000 farms and ranches utilize 45.9 million acres or about 93 percent of the State's total land area. The State ranks fourth nationally in land dedicated to farms and ranches.

In addition to agricultural lands, Nebraska boasts a diverse ecological mix of urban and suburban settings and forested and grassland environments, which are home to almost 1.8 million people. Accordingly, WS biologists work to reduce public health and safety risks and property damage associated with wildlife conflicts. WS reduces damage to livestock by predators, assists industries with various wildlife conflicts, and manages problems caused by overabundant urban wildlife such as raccoons and skunks. The program also manages wildlife populations at airports and military installations, assists agricultural producers in reducing blackbird damage at livestock feedlots, and protects the public from wildlife-borne diseases.

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) conducts studies from a Fort Collins, CO, central institute and field stations, providing leadership in and the scientific basis for wildlife damage management.

WS conducts a wide range of operational and research activities. The following in-depth examples highlight WS' role in protecting agriculture, public health and safety, and property.

Protecting Livestock from Predators—Nebraska's total cattle inventory ranks third nationally and eighteenth in total sheep and lambs. Coyotes, red foxes, mountain lions, and bobcats can cause significant losses to farmers and ranchers by attacking their livestock. At times, these losses are quite significant. The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) surveyed WS customers in 1999 and 2000 and found that, in Nebraska, predators took from these producers an estimated 3,500 sheep and lambs, having a combined value of \$217,600, and about 2,200 head of calves totaling \$700,000 in losses. Research results suggest this loss could be two to three times higher in the absence of an effective predator damage management program.

Unfortunately, these losses are felt more acutely by small farmers and ranchers. In Nebraska and other Western States it is estimated that about 75 percent of WS' cooperative agreements are with small farmers and ranchers. The average farm size in Nebraska is 930 acres.

WS recommends and uses a wide array of tools to manage problems associated with predators. Producers are encouraged to continue the use of sound livestock management techniques and to use specialized fencing, lighting, and/or livestock guard animals to protect their herds or flocks, whenever practical. In addition to using effective nonlethal techniques to address damage by these predators, the use of fixed-wing aircraft for selective management comes at an increased cost to the program. WS uses selective and environmentally safe methods to reduce local predator populations to tolerable levels. In



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Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

addition, WS' NWRC is working hard to develop new tools such as less-injurious coyote capture systems and improved electronic frightening devices. As these methods are developed and determined to be effective, they will be provided to field personnel and producers for use.

Protecting Crops, Timber, Rangeland, and Other Property—

Nebraska WS continues to receive increasing requests for assistance with beaver damage to timber and flooding of crops, roadways, and railway bridges. Losses to these resources will continue to grow as metropolitan areas expand and recreational trapping diminishes. In FY 2008, WS responded to beaver damage in 22 counties, resolving these complaints with either on-site management or technical assistance.

Protecting Air Travel—Every year, lives are endangered and dollars are wasted when birds and other wildlife collide with aircraft. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes cause more than 600,000 hours of aircraft downtime and cost the U.S. civil aviation industry in excess of \$625 million annually.

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. NWRC conducts research from its Sandusky, Ohio field station to reduce wildlife hazards to aviation and minimize risks to the public. Studies are underway at several large airports in which scientists evaluate habitat management practices and wildlife dispersal techniques. WS NWRC also maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to monitor trends and wildlife species of greatest concern to aviation.

Nebraska's busiest air-transportation centers are in Omaha and Lincoln, the State's two largest cities. There, the Nebraska WS program provides technical assistance, training, and direct operational assistance to several civilian and military airports. On-site evaluations, as well as comprehensive wildlife hazard assessments, are completed before direct management work is done.

Looking to the Future

The protection of human health and safety is a key factor in a high percentage of projects conducted in Nebraska. Many of these projects involve protection against and/or monitoring of diseases such as avian Influenza, histoplasmosis, plague, West Nile virus and rabies. Rabies remains a potentially serious public health problem in Nebraska, although reported cases have decreased from the record highs of the last couple years. A variety of professional and occupational groups in the State, including physicians, veterinarians, farmers, and ranchers, continue to be concerned with rabies. Wildlife-borne diseases such as rabies, West Nile virus, and chronic wasting disease will continue to require increased attention in the future.

Protecting air passengers is another growing concern in Nebraska. Increased air travel, coupled with growing populations of birds and mammals, have created a greater need for airport managers to deal with threats posed by wildlife. Increasing public awareness of WS' professional role in addressing both of these problems has increased the demand for damage management services. WS' ability to respond to these needs in a timely and professional manner will depend on the availability of resources.

A key area of focus will be starling and pigeon management at many of the ethanol facilities that are being established in Nebraska. Nebraska currently has 22 ethanol plants producing over 1.4 billion gallons of ethanol annually, requiring over 500 million bushels of corn. Nearly all of these facilities have problems with starling and pigeons. According to the Nebraska Ethanol Board web site there are 18 plants under consideration. Although Nebraska has already started in that direction with agreements with these ethanol facilities, there has been a lot of interest from other entities and smaller ethanol facilities that have requested WS to help them with their bird problems. WS has only been able to provide a minor amount of service at this point.

Nebraska 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 livestock from predators
- Protecting crop lands, water impoundments, trees and shrubs, and roads from beaver damage
- Protecting public health from wildlife-borne diseases
- Protecting the traveling public, military personnel, and aircraft from wildlife hazards at airports
- Protecting livestock feedlots, industrial equipment, ethanol facilities and property from bird damage

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Nebraska:

- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies, bovine tuberculosis, hantavirus, West Nile virus, histoplasmosis, and chronic wasting disease that pose risks to public health, livestock production, and wildlife populations
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing starling damage to feedlots, ethanol facilities and dairies
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Protecting agricultural crops, roadways, timber and forest resources from beaver damage