

# Wildlife Services

Protecting People  
Protecting Agriculture  
Protecting Wildlife

## State Report

FY 2008

# New Mexico



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### Major Cooperators

- New Mexico Department of Agriculture
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
- New Mexico Department of Transportation
- Taos Soil & Water Conservation District
- 28 County Governments
- New Mexico Cattle Growers
- New Mexico Wool Growers

### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in New Mexico

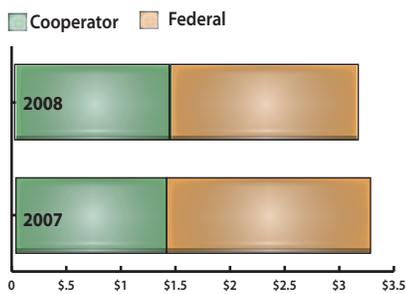
Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on New Mexico Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. WS' professional wildlife biologists respond to these requests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

Livestock protection accounts for the majority of WS' management efforts in New Mexico. Rangeland livestock production is a major component of the livestock industry in New Mexico. Rangeland grazing poses a much greater risk of livestock losses to native and feral predators compared with confined feeding operations. To protect New Mexico's livestock industry, WS assists livestock producers with an integrated wildlife damage management (IWDM) strategy.

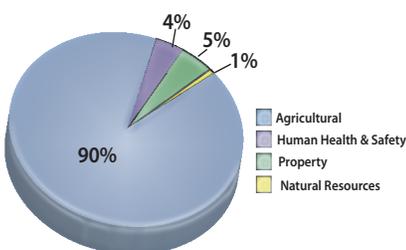
New Mexico WS also protects field crops, fruits, nuts, turf, flowers and landscaping, buildings, roads, bridges, irrigation systems, and natural resources. WS educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management, and provides the citizens of New Mexico with safe, effective, and biologically sound assistance in resolving wildlife conflicts. WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks in urban, suburban and rural settings. The program also protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases.

Specific projects conducted by New Mexico WS include monitoring for wildlife diseases including avian influenza, rabies, plague, tularemia, and classical swine fever; and managing damage caused by beavers, mountain lions, pigeons, starlings, and other wildlife.

### Total Funding (Millions)



### Resources Protected % of Total Funds



### 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. WS uses an IWDM strategy, in which multiple strategies are used to address damage, taking biological, economic and other circumstances into consideration, basing decisions on scientific principles. 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 also analyzes the environmental effects of program activities to ensure that there are no significant adverse effects on the environment.

**Protecting Agricultural Crops**—WS employees working in the middle Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico disperse sandhill cranes and snow geese from crops including alfalfa, chile, and wheat. An IWDM approach is used to reduce damage caused by approximately 30,000 sandhill cranes and 50,000 snow geese. This integrated approach includes the use of lure crops at a nearby Federal wildlife refuge and the selective placement of hunters to reinforce dispersal activities. Cultural practices, including altering planting and watering dates, or planting alternate crops are also recommended when appropriate. This highly successful cooperative effort between WS, the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish has virtually eliminated all damage due to sandhill cranes in the protected area within the middle Rio Grande Valley. Prior to WS involvement, annual crop losses to sandhill cranes were estimated at more than \$100,000. WS efforts have increased landowner tolerance of these valuable wildlife species.



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

**Protecting Livestock**—In addition to the many factors, including severe weather and disease, that cause economic losses to livestock producers, predation is also a serious concern. Coyotes, bears, mountain lions, and blackbirds cause significant losses to some producers by attacking sheep and cattle, spreading diseases, and consuming and contaminating feed. Unfortunately, these losses are felt most acutely by small farmers and ranchers. The cattle and sheep industry in New Mexico generated more than \$910 million in 2006 and accounted for more than 35 percent of the cash receipts for all agricultural commodities combined. The National Agriculture Statistics Service (2000) reported that throughout New Mexico predators killed 2,800 adult sheep valued at \$227,000 and 7,500 lambs valued at \$338,000 in 1999. In 2000, predators killed 5,700 head of cattle valued at \$2 million. Of these, coyotes were responsible for about 75 percent of the losses and mountain lions about 15 percent. Research suggests these losses would be two to three times higher without a livestock protection program in place. New Mexico WS saves about \$3 to \$4 in losses for every Federal dollar spent on predator damage management.

WS cooperates with State agencies to conduct predator damage management activities in concert with the State's wildlife management goals and objectives. WS also assures environmental impacts are kept to a minimum. For example, although coyotes are the major livestock predator in the State, WS' actions only impact about five percent of the coyote population in any one year. Accordingly, WS is able to provide livestock protection without significantly affecting the long-term viability of the predator species.

**Enhancing Wolf Recovery through Livestock Protection**—Since the 1998 experimental reintroduction of the Mexican gray wolf, the population has grown slowly. WS actively participates with other Federal and State agencies to mitigate predation on livestock. NM WS Specialists conduct over 40 investigations of reported livestock depredation by wolves annually. The efficient and professional management of problem wolves builds public support/tolerance for their presence and promotes conservation of all wolves.

**Managing Problems Associated with Feral Swine**—Feral swine pose increasing concern for wildlife damage managers across the country. These prolific invasive, or non-native, animals can carry diseases to humans and domestic livestock. Their rooting and wallowing activities damage property including irrigation and natural waterways, and they compete with native species for limited food and will eat ground-nesting bird eggs. WS personnel in NM assist private landowners and public land managers in reducing problems associated with feral swine by trapping and removing them. These swine are tested for a variety of diseases including plague, tularemia, pseudorabies, swine brucellosis, and classical swine fever. Test results are provided to agriculture producers, public health officials, and wildlife managers to aid in management decisions and increase public awareness.

### **Looking to the Future**

As the Mexican wolf population has grown, livestock predation and negative impacts on small rural economies have increased. WS actively participates in an adaptive management oversight process and makes management recommendations, along with the other agencies involved, to mitigate these problems. Continued attention in this area will be necessary.

Increasing feral swine populations in some areas of New Mexico is a major concern for agricultural producers, land management agencies, and wildlife refuge managers. WS is experiencing an increase in calls for assistance with feral swine damage management.

Increasing incidence of rabies is of growing concern as Texas and Arizona variants of fox rabies converge in southern New Mexico. WS is working with state partners to increase surveillance, distribute educational materials, and develop a management strategy to help protect people, pets, and livestock.

Conflicts with coyotes in urban and suburban areas of New Mexico are increasing where they kill pets and other domestic animals, and pose safety risks to people and children. WS is being called upon more often to provide advice and direct assistance with these problems.

### **New Mexico 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 resources from predators
- Verifying depredation and implementing management actions associated with Mexican wolves
- Protecting crops from damage caused by sandhill cranes and geese
- Protecting crops, pasture, turf, and human health and safety from damage associated with prairie dogs
- Protecting the public, livestock, and wildlife from wildlife disease

#### **Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to New Mexico:**

- Defining and reducing carnivore damage
- Managing public safety issues associated with large carnivores
- Improving rodent damage management methods, with emphasis on repellants, barriers, and attractants
- Managing wildlife transmission of rabies
- Managing property damage caused by vultures