

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2008

Vermont

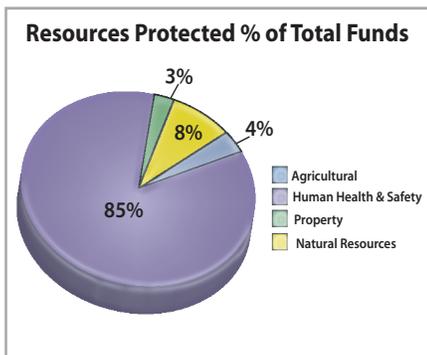
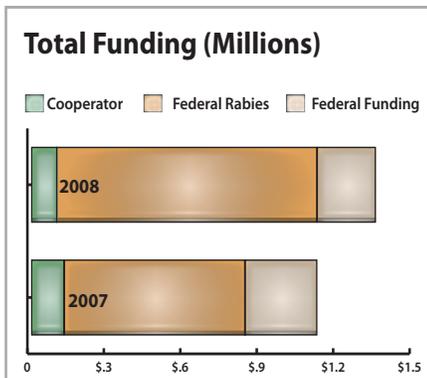


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Major Cooperators

- Vermont Departments of Fish and Wildlife, Health, and Building and General Services
- Vermont Agencies of Agriculture and Transportation
- University of Vermont and private universities
- New England Waste Services
- Burlington International Airport and State Airports
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Federal Aviation Administration
- Province of Quebec



USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Vermont

Every day residents, industries, and agencies call on Wildlife Services (WS) in Vermont for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from wildlife damage or threats. Vermont's relatively small size and continued population growth lead to frequent contact between people and wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve conflicts.

WS' program in Vermont reflects the State's diverse wildlife. It works to protect people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases; guards many natural resources from colonial water bird damage; reduces losses by game animals; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. The program also protects property and agriculture, and reduces human health and safety risks at airports, public buildings, and on State and private lands.

Specific projects conducted in Vermont by WS include wildlife disease surveillance including ceasing the northward expansion of rabies; reducing wildlife hazards at state-operated airports; managing damage caused by starlings at dairy farms; and protecting natural resources, such as the eastern spiny softshell turtle.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

Wildlife Services enables people to resolve wildlife conflicts by providing sound technical advice and the loan of damage management equipment and materials. When more complex conflicts require specialized expertise, WS may refer customers to the appropriate public or private source of assistance or conduct site visits and provide direct assistance to resolve problems. To support these efforts, WS conducts scientific research across the Nation to develop solutions to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure that WS and others benefit from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Agricultural Resources—WS assists dairy producers with addressing problems associated with large concentrations of European starlings and other birds. Damage occurs as birds consume and contaminate feed, which degrades feed quality, reduces milk production, and may be responsible for disease transmission, such as salmonella. Coordinated with the Vermont Division of Pesticide Control, the program is comprised of technical assistance, recommendations for exclusion, modification of cultural practices, and population management.

Protecting Health and Safety by Wildlife Disease Management—In Vermont, 75 positives resulted from the approximately 194 animals submitted for rabies testing in 2008. Positive cases were confirmed in all five rabies vector species: raccoons, skunks, red fox, woodchucks, and bats. In response to rabies threats and other problem wildlife, WS has operated a State-Federally funded toll-free Rabies Information and Referral Service (hotline) for 17 consecutive years. The Hotline, staffed seven days a week by WS biologists, responded to more than 2,000 requests for assistance in 2008 and provides State residents and visitors with accurate, consistent information and recommendations regarding rabies and other wildlife conflicts.

To prevent the northward spread of raccoon rabies, WS cooperated for the twelfth consecutive year to distribute over 555,433 baits containing oral rabies vaccine (ORV) in more than 2,800 square miles of northern Vermont. To date, more than 3 million vaccine-laden baits have been distributed. Over 365 biological samples were collected from raccoons and skunks in the ORV zone in 2008 to determine bait uptake, program effectiveness and monitor rabies movements.

To detect highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1, WS led a national multi-agency effort to collect samples from migratory and wild birds and the environment. WS in Vermont



United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

collected more than 800 wild-captured and hunter-harvested birds; all were negative for the H5N1 strain.

In 2008, WS continued monitoring and sampling activities for chronic wasting disease, which would present challenges to wildlife agencies if detected in wild cervid populations due to the impacts on the population itself and perceptions regarding public health. WS assisted with sampling of more than 400 deer heads collected from meat processors throughout the State.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—Bird strikes to airplanes cost the Nation's civil aviation over \$625 million annually and pose a significant hazard. WS is recognized for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the industry both nationally and in Vermont. WS' National Wildlife Research Center conducts research to develop methods to reduce hazards to aviation and maintains a national strike database used to monitor trends and species of greatest concern to aviation.

After a hazards assessment, WS conducted harassment and control at one State airport in conjunction with integrated gull harassment activities at a landfill, which serve as loafing and feeding areas for gulls less than 5,000 feet from the airport. The integrated harassment and monitoring program has reduced gull presence at this airport by over 70%.

WS continues to provide consultations, direct assistance, assessments, and training for the 10 state-managed airports and assists airports in acquiring Federal and State permits that allow designated personnel to immediately address bird and mammal hazards.

Protecting Natural Resources on Lake Champlain's State-managed—In 2008 WS cooperated with Vermont Fish and Wildlife in double-crested cormorant management activities to reduce nesting impacts to other waterbird species, restore colonial water bird diversity, and promote habitat recovery on Lake Champlain. WS biologists met the program goal of eliminating double-crested cormorant reproduction on one of the main nesting islands. Habitat recovery efforts for Young Island included soil preparation, tree plantings, and ring-billed gull management activities. Management efforts resulted in increased diversity of nesting waterbirds, including common terns and Black-crowned Night-Herons.

WS started a cooperative two-year research project using radio transmitters to evaluate Ring-billed gull response to management, movement patterns and subsequent-year nest site fidelity. A two-year feeding study was started in 2008 to evaluate and measure the effects cormorants may have on the Lake Champlain fishery.

Protecting Threatened or Endangered Species — To enhance recovery of the State-threatened eastern spiny softshell turtle, WS conducted predator (raccoon, skunk and fox) trapping activities at recovery sites adjacent to Lake Champlain in 2008 and removed more than 30 known nest predators. WS installed temporary electric fences and trail cameras and conducted habitat modification to further reduce nest predation.

Protecting Property from Pigeon Damage —WS provided technical and direct control assistance at five facilities to reduce pigeon damage to State-managed buildings in 2008. Roosting and loafing pigeons are responsible for the accumulation of unacceptable levels of droppings, which can damage property and pose threats to human health.

Addressing Damage from Canada Geese —An estimated 10,000 resident Canada geese make Vermont their home, which offers enjoyable bird-watching opportunities. Conflicts often develop as droppings accumulate, overgrazing damages landscaping, and aggressive geese attack humans. WS assists over 100 State residents and businesses annually with technical advice, equipment, and local population reduction.

Looking to the Future

WS strives to provide Vermont citizens with safe, effective solutions to diverse wildlife conflicts. It works with dairy farmers to implement effective strategies to reduce animal feed consumption, contamination, and health issues caused by birds at dairies. Wildlife diseases like rabies, avian influenza, chronic wasting disease and epizootic hemorrhagic disease represent emerging challenges that must be addressed locally and nationally. In addition, increasing populations of Canada geese, cormorants and gulls pose problems for property and natural resources.

Vermont 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:

- Wildlife disease management and surveillance (rabies, avian influenza and chronic wasting disease)
- Staffing a seven-day a week Rabies Information and Referral Service Hotline
- Protecting natural resources and property from double-crested cormorant damage
- Reducing on- and off-site safety hazards and property damage at landfills
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Vermont:

- Managing wildlife transmission of rabies
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing double-crested cormorants to protect natural resources and private property
- Managing threats to human health and safety and property caused by pigeons and starlings
- Defining and reducing agricultural losses from turkey, deer, and bear