

# Wildlife Services

Protecting People  
Protecting Agriculture  
Protecting Wildlife

## State Report

FY 2008

# West Virginia



### Contact Information:

Christopher Croson,  
State Director for West Virginia  
730 Yokum Street,  
Elkins, WV 26241  
Phone: (304) 636-1785  
FAX: (304) 636-5397  
Toll-Free Number 1-866-4USDAWS  
(1-866-487-3297)  
christopher.k.croson@aphis.usda.gov  
www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\_damage

### Major Cooperators

- West Virginia Department of Agriculture
- West Virginia Department Health & Human Resources
- West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
- West Virginia University
- USDA Forest Service
- U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in West Virginia

Every day residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on West Virginia 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.

West Virginia enjoys a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, and extensive forests, with the Appalachian Mountains dominating the eastern portion of the State. This ecological and geographic diversity creates a habitat for a remarkably wide range of wildlife species. WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks at airports, schools, and commercial industries. The program also protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases; guards many agricultural resources from wildlife depredations; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific projects conducted by West Virginia WS include: protecting livestock from predation; conducting sampling and monitoring for rabies; and managing damage caused by resident Canada geese, pigeons, starlings, vultures, and other wildlife.

### 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.

**Urban Waterfowl Management**—West Virginia WS regularly responds to calls from residents, industries, and local communities for assistance in addressing damage caused by high densities of urban waterfowl. WS implements integrated damage management plans that utilize a variety of harassment and population management techniques to reduce damage. Methods may include removing domestic waterfowl, spring and fall harassment, and installing physical barriers to deter geese from loafing in undesirable locations.

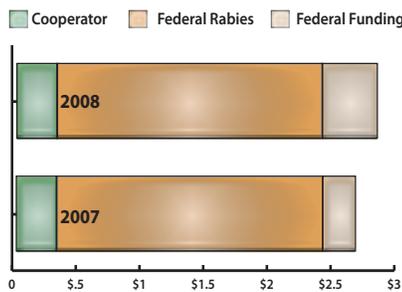
**Protecting Livestock**—Many factors cause economic losses to livestock producers, but predators, especially coyotes, cause significant losses, attacking sheep, cattle, and goats. The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) reported an increase in calf predations from 100 in 1995 to over 1,300 statewide in 2005. West Virginia producers reported to WS in 2008 that coyotes were responsible for 89 percent of all livestock predations. On a percentage basis, sheep numbers are currently declining at a higher rate than any other time in West Virginia's agricultural history.

WS provides technical and operational assistance to prevent livestock predation throughout West Virginia. Historically WS has run the program through a cooperative service agreement with the State's Department of Agriculture. With the addition of complementing Federal funds, WS now provides livestock protection service to every West Virginia county. Since it began in 1996, WS has helped reduce sheep losses from predators from an average of 28 lambs per farm to an all-time low of 1.5 lambs per farm in 2007.

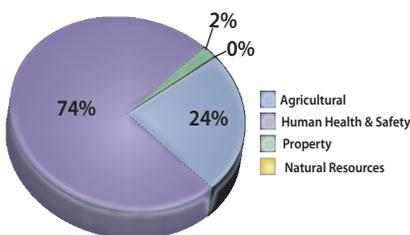
**Protecting Humans, Livestock, and Wildlife**—Rabies poses a serious threat to livestock, wildlife, pets, and public health. Virtually unknown prior to the 1950's, raccoon rabies appeared in West Virginia in 1977. More than 70 percent of the reported cases in West Virginia are the result of the raccoon strain of rabies. Human rabies deaths are rare, but the estimated public health costs associated with rabies detection, prevention, and control have risen, exceeding \$300 million annually.

In cooperation with selected Eastern States and Canada, WS in West Virginia annually

### Total Funding (Millions)



### Resources Protected % of Total Funds



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

distributes approximately 1,000,000 oral rabies vaccination baits to immunize raccoons against rabies. The program's goal is to stop the westward movement of the raccoon strain of the disease. Distribution of baits in West Virginia will reduce the risk of raccoon rabies entering the Midwestern United States, where it would increasingly threaten humans and other resources, significantly raising control costs. One measure of success for the oral vaccination program in West Virginia occurred in 2006 and 2008 when the bait zone was moved five miles eastward each year.

**Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports**—WS assists West Virginia airports whenever wildlife becomes a hazard to aircraft and passenger safety. Nearly 77 percent of West Virginia is forested and every West Virginia airport is either bordered by or very near forested land, which provides wildlife habitat. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) data indicates West Virginia has one of the highest rates involving aircraft collisions with deer.

Applying scientific expertise, WS provides direct assistance to West Virginia airports, including removing animals from areas surrounding runways. WS also provides technical assistance by conducting initial wildlife hazard consultations, conducting year-long wildlife hazard assessments, developing wildlife hazard management plans, and training airport personnel to reduce the risk of wildlife-aircraft collisions.

**Protecting Health and Safety in the Workplace**—West Virginia WS provides workplace safety through roosting bird control at industrial sites. Winter roosting birds contaminate work surfaces with droppings, which creates unsanitary conditions for workers and corrodes equipment causing breakdowns and worker injury. WS uses harassment and chemicals to disperse and reduce populations of blackbirds and pigeons that create these unhealthy conditions.

**Addressing Residential Property Damage Caused by Roosting Black Vultures**—WS is responding to increasing requests from property owners experiencing problems caused by roosting black vultures. Once established, these roosts can create a health and sanitation problem caused by their droppings. Vultures can damage roofing materials of adjacent homes and structures as they prepare to leave the roosting area. WS assists property owners with instructions on how to harass and disperse the vultures. In some cases, WS will directly assist in moving the vultures.

### Looking to the Future

WS resolves a diverse range of wildlife conflicts, and demand for services continues to grow in West Virginia. Wildlife diseases, such as rabies, are posing greater threats to humans, livestock, and pets. Lack of sport trapping, due to a decline in the fur market, contributes to the increasing beaver and predator populations and the corresponding increase in wildlife damage caused by these species.

WS is currently initiating a large-scale predator research program in cooperation with the WS' National Wildlife Research Center, West Virginia University, and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources to design more systematic and efficient livestock protection programs.

### West Virginia Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS receives financial support 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 and/or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

#### Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Protecting livestock from coyote and vulture depredation
- Protecting public property from high densities of urban waterfowl populations
- Protecting public health, livestock, and wildlife from raccoon strain rabies
- Protecting human health associated with large flocks of roosting blackbirds in urban and suburban environments and at industrial structures

#### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to West Virginia:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Increasing rabies vaccination rates in regional raccoon populations
- Monitoring wildlife diseases such as swine brucellosis and pseudorabies
- Managing problems caused by expanding vulture populations
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife

