

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2008

Wyoming



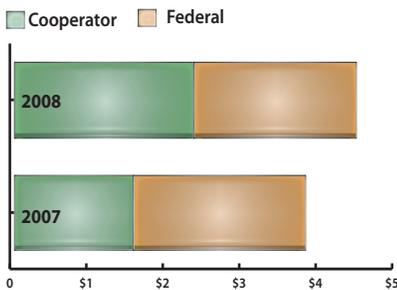
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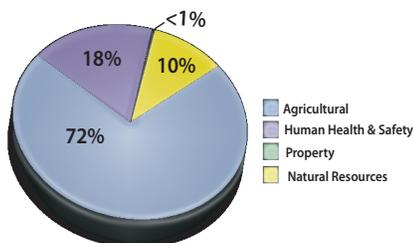
Major Cooperators

- Wyoming Wool Growers Association
- Wyoming Stock Growers Association
- Wyoming Department of Agriculture
- Wyoming Game and Fish Department
- Wyoming Animal Damage Management Board
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Foundation for North American Wild Sheep – Wyoming Chapter
- County Predator Management Districts (21)
- Wyoming Department of Health
- Wyoming Airports

Total Funding (Millions)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Wyoming

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Wyoming 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.

A significant role of the Wyoming WS program is protecting domestic livestock from predators such as coyotes, red fox, mountain lions, black bears, grizzly bears, and threatened or endangered species, such as wolves. WS' trained specialists accurately identify the cause of livestock damage and resolve the conflict in a way that minimizes impacts on wildlife. WS works with diverse cooperators, including airports, businesses, cities, counties, and individuals in both urban and rural settings, to curtail or prevent wildlife damage to a variety of resources.

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.

Protecting Agriculture—Agriculture ranks among the top three industries in Wyoming with an estimated economic impact of \$1 billion. Wyoming ranks eighth nationally in total land devoted to farms and ranches and ranks first in the average size of farms and ranches. The State's cattle industry accounts for about 75 percent of all agricultural cash receipts. Wyoming ranks third in the Nation in production of stock sheep and second in wool production. WS works with both the cattle and sheep industries to protect livestock from predators.

Coyotes remain the most significant predator and are responsible for 66 percent of sheep lost to predators. Increasing populations of grizzly bears, wolves, and other species also contribute to increased incidents of livestock depredation. Wyoming Agriculture Statistics Service (WASS) reported that in 2007, Wyoming sheep producers lost 19,600 sheep and lambs to predators, valued at approximately \$1.4 million, a significant decline from the \$1.8 million in reported in 2006. Cattle producers also lose significant numbers of new calves and some cows to predators. Wyoming produced 710,000 calves in 2007. WASS estimates the value of cattle and calves lost to predation to be more than \$1.5 million. Research has shown that without a professional, accountable wildlife damage management program in place, livestock losses could be two to three times greater.

To reduce predation, WS uses an integrated approach, relying on both nonlethal and lethal methods to remove livestock predators. An analysis of producers' operations found that 100 percent of Wyoming livestock producers who cooperate with WS use nonlethal methods to protect their livestock, which reduces predator losses and minimizes the need for lethal control. While producer-employed nonlethal strategies vary, some producers utilize as many as 18 separate nonlethal techniques throughout the year. When damage occurs despite these efforts, WS removes the offending animals.

Estimates of the economic benefit of predator management in Wyoming indicate the total benefits for livestock production ranged from \$9.5 million to \$13.9 million in 2005. While the total cost of predator management programs in Wyoming for 2005 was estimated to be \$6 million. These costs include expenditures by WS and County Predator Boards, as well as costs incurred by livestock producers employing nonlethal methods. Based on the \$13.9 million figure of benefits for livestock production, the net benefit of predator



United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

management for Wyoming is estimated to be \$7.9 million, with a benefit to cost ratio of \$2.30 to \$1.

Because of the relative size of the cattle industry when compared to the sheep industry, and the value per animal is higher for cattle, the total dollar benefit from predator management to cattle exceeds that of the sheep industry by over two times. Ranch profits decrease almost 20 percent with just a two percent increase in calf death loss because the fixed costs are unchanged. Since wolves, in areas where they occur, have a significant impact on the cattle industry, it is essential that wolf predation be responsibly managed.

Wildlife Diseases—Wyoming is one of 44 states in the WS' Wildlife Disease Program, staffing a fulltime Wildlife Disease Biologist. This individual plays a supporting role with State (WGFD and Wyoming Livestock Board) and Federal (USDA-Veterinary Services) agencies regarding relevant in-state disease issues, such as chronic wasting disease and brucellosis. The disease biologist also coordinates and conducts statewide surveillance projects at the request of various agencies (Wyoming Department of Health, Wyoming Animal Damage Management Board and Centers for Disease Control). Wyoming WS and the National Wildlife Disease Program in cooperation with CDC in Fort Collins CO, has been conducting statewide surveillance for plague and tularemia since 2005. Another statewide surveillance program examining the incidence of canine heartworm in wild canids demonstrated very low prevalence in Wyoming. Since 2006, as part of a nationwide surveillance program to detect highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), the biologist sampled shorebirds and waterfowl. Furthermore, since 2004, Wyoming WS has been cooperating with the State's ADMB and State Veterinary Laboratory in Laramie for the fifth straight year to provide striped skunks for an ongoing statewide rabies surveillance program. The disease biologist also deals with wildlife disease issues on a national scale, having been deployed to other states (South Dakota, California, Michigan and Minnesota) to assist their natural resource management agencies with various wildlife disease surveillance protocols.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species—The experimental reintroduction of gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains (NRM) occurred in 1995. Today, the gray wolf population has grown to over 1645 animals with 217 packs and 95 breeding pairs. This made 2008 the eighth year in which 30 or more breeding pairs were documented and well distributed within the 3-state area. Biological recovery criteria have been met for removing NRM wolves from the list of Endangered and Threatened Species. During 2008, wolves in Wyoming maintained a population of over 300 animals with 42 packs. When wolves turn from their natural prey species, such as elk, and attack livestock, WS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) work cooperatively to identify damage and resolve wolf depredation complaints. In 2008, wolves in Wyoming were responsible for killing at least 67 livestock. Confirmed livestock depredations included 41 cattle and 26 sheep. Thirteen additional probable sheep depredations and 3 injured cattle were reported. In response to these depredations, and at the request of the USFWS Endangered Species Wolf Program managers, 46 wolves were removed. Eight were radio-collared and released. WS also provides field services to the USFWS in monitoring and identifying wolf populations and distributions. The efficient and professional management of problem wolves builds public support/tolerance for their presence and promotes conservation of all wolves.

Protecting Air Travel at Airports—Visitors and residents of Wyoming enjoy a diverse and bountiful wildlife population that exists within urban areas as well as the surrounding countryside. The mutual tolerance comes at a risk to travel, in particular the cost of damage and threat to human life that an aircraft collision entails.

Airports in Wyoming effectively eliminated the potential of large mammal strikes by protecting the airfield with high fences that have made large mammals within the operations area a rarity. However, birds are not as easily excluded from runways and flight corridors. WS has completed initial consultations at all commercial airports and is providing wildlife hazard assessments at Cody, Cheyenne, Jackson and Sheridan as required by Federal Aviation Administration. Where wildlife permits are needed for removal, WS assists the airports in completing their permit requirements.

Looking to the Future

Wyoming WS continues to work with State and County stakeholders to increase cooperative funding and research methods to maintain and improve the economic viability and species diversity through responsible wildlife damage management.

Wyoming Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators who have a vested interest in the program: livestock 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 Wyoming statutory predators, primarily coyotes
- Participating on the Wyoming Animal Damage Management Board (ADMB) and associated wildlife enhancement and disease projects
- Controlling skunk rabies in Wyoming
- Responding to wolf, grizzly bear, black bear and mountain lion depredations
- Managing damage and threats caused by migratory and feral birds to airports, economic resources, and public health and safety

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Wyoming:

- Developing population assessment techniques to more effectively estimate statewide predator populations
- Assess the prevalence of canine heartworm in wild populations of canids
- Evaluating a theobromine and caffeine mixture as a possible tool for predation management
- Economic analysis of predator management in Wyoming
- Identify sage grouse nest predators