



United States
Department of
Agriculture

**Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service**



Wildlife Services: The Facts About Wildlife Damage Management

1. Wildlife can cause significant damage to agriculture, property, natural resources, and threaten public health and safety.

A 2001 report by the General Accounting Office found that wildlife can pose significant threats to Americans and their property. When wildlife destroy crops, kill livestock, damage houses, and threaten public health and safety, the results can be costly. Wildlife Damage to U.S. agriculture alone is estimated at close to \$1 billion annually. Livestock losses to wildlife predators, such as coyotes and lions, exceed \$71 million annually, and wildlife damage to blueberries, corn, and sunflowers cost producers more than \$110 million each year. Deer collisions with automobiles injure an average of 29,000 people annually and cause more than \$1 billion in damages. Wildlife collisions with airplanes cost U.S. civil aviation more than \$470 million each year and put the lives of passengers and crew at risk.

2. Wildlife Services (WS) employees are highly knowledgeable and skilled wildlife damage management experts.

Ninety-nine percent of all WS State Directors and the majority of WS district supervisors have degrees in wildlife management, biology, or environmental studies from accredited colleges and universities. In addition, a 1999 evaluation by WS indicated that nearly half of all WS biologists have some form of accreditation through The Wildlife Society (TWS), which is the professional organization for wildlife biologists in the United States. TWS has a rigorous certification program that qualifies individuals as professional wildlife biologists based on selective standards for education and experience. In addition, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, which represents State wildlife agencies, has recognized and commended WS biologists for their professionalism, dedication, hard work, and efforts to assist States in addressing wildlife damage problems.

3. WS' National Wildlife Research Center is the world's leader in nonlethal research to reduce wildlife damage.

WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), is the only Federal facility devoted exclusively to wildlife damage management. In FY 2002, about \$9 million or 75 percent of NWRC's total funding was spent on efforts related to developing or improving nonlethal



methods. For example, NWRC recently developed radio-activated guard boxes that trigger sirens and flashing lights when radio-collared wolves approach livestock. NWRC also determined that the use of harmless, low-powered lasers can be effective in dispersing birds, such as gulls, from landfills and other locations. At any one time, NWRC has close to 20 innovative research projects underway to develop wildlife contraceptives, wildlife repellants, and other nonlethal methods to effectively manage wildlife damage.

4. WS works with cooperators as well as critics to resolve wildlife damage in the most effective and socially acceptable ways possible.

WS considers the opinions of all stakeholders and affected parties before implementing wildlife damage management initiatives. The National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee is comprised of a diverse membership that includes livestock producers, aviation industry representatives, public health representatives, and representatives from animal welfare and environmental interest groups. The committee provides guidance to the Secretary of Agriculture on the direction of the program. In addition, WS seeks input and feedback on the environmental impact of its activities through the National Environmental Policy Act and its public comment process.

5. WS manages wildlife damage professionally and responsibly.

WS uses an integrated approach to minimize wildlife damage, combining a number of management methods in an effort to resolve the conflict. This science-based approach includes the use of both nonlethal and lethal management methods. Frequently, a combination of nonlethal measures is effective in resolving wildlife damage.

For example, pyrotechnics and low-powered laser lights can be used to disperse a large roost of crows. In some cases, however, the use of both nonlethal and lethal management methods is necessary to reduce wildlife damage. In such instances, WS directs its activities only at specific wildlife populations responsible for the damage. A report by the General Accounting Office in the 1990's found that WS activities had no significant impact on predator populations in 17 Western States where the program's work was reviewed. In addition, WS biologists take great care in ensuring that only problem wildlife are removed. New research has improved the program's ability to target nuisance wildlife.

6. WS relocates nuisance wildlife only when practical and advisable.

WS relocates animals and disperses numerous birds each year, but only when practical and advisable. Many States are concerned about the spread of wildlife-borne diseases, such as rabies and distemper, and have laws prohibiting the relocation of wildlife. In addition, relocation is not always in the animal's best interests. Relocated animals become vulnerable in unfamiliar habitat and are more likely to fall victim to predators. They may even be seen as interlopers and killed by members of their own species. Their unfamiliarity with new surroundings can also result in severe stress or even death if they are unable to find adequate sources of food and water. In many cases, such as with bears, a relocated animal will simply return to the area from which it was removed.

7. WS offers wildlife damage management assistance only when help is requested.

WS provides assistance on a request basis to individuals who experience conflicts with wildlife. In addition to working with individuals, WS works with other Federal, State, and local governments that request assistance to minimize wildlife damage and reduce risks to public health and safety. Sometimes homeowner associations and other private groups also call on WS to resolve wildlife conflicts. These cooperators pay for a majority of the costs associated with wildlife damage management. As wildlife populations continue to grow and available habitat continues to shrink, the demand for WS' assistance is increasing.

8. Small farms and ranches depend on WS' expertise in reducing livestock losses to predators and agricultural damage.

By providing wildlife damage management assistance to reduce livestock predation and crop damage, WS helps to preserve these producers' livelihoods. This is especially critical as many small farms nationwide are struggling to survive. According to the National Commission on Small Farms, a small farm is defined as producing less than \$250,000 in gross annual receipts. The majority of these farms are less than 1,100 acres in size. In the Western United States, where livestock predation can be significant, WS estimates

that the majority of its cooperative agreements are likely with small farms, ranches, and other private entities based on acreage and income data available through the agriculture census. In the East, the average farm size is less than 1,129 acres, which means the majority of producers that WS works with in the East are likely small farmers as well.



9. WS efforts to reduce livestock predation, do not increase predator populations as suggested by some critics.

In the book "Carnivores in Ecosystems: The Yellowstone Experience," author Robert Crabtree concludes that coyote litter size at birth appears largely unaffected by levels of human exploitation. In other words, predator removal efforts do not encourage coyotes to produce more offspring. In addition, further studies indicate that the abundance of prey and habitat dictate the litter sizes of predators, such as coyotes. If killing large numbers of predators actually served to increase their numbers, then this would be a matter of practice for increasing populations of Federally threatened and endangered species, such as the gray wolf.

10. The benefits of WS' damage management efforts, far outweigh the costs.

Livestock losses to predators exceed \$71 million annually. It is also important, however, to document the amount of damage that is prevented through wildlife damage management. For example, removing depredating coyotes from a lambing pasture may cost more than the value of the lambs already killed, but may prevent future losses to the flock that far exceed the cost of predator removal. Benefit-cost analyses conducted on predator management operations have shown that for every dollar spent on livestock protection, WS saves producers as much as \$2 to \$7 in losses. For every dollar saved by WS' efforts, at least three additional dollars are generated that extend beyond agriculture to benefit all of America. While conservative, these studies highlight the importance of WS' work. In the absence of an effective predator management program, studies show livestock losses could be at least two to three times higher.