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WILDLIFE SERVICES—MICHIGAN

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Michigan

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

The efforts of the Michigan WS program reflect the diversity of wildlife in the State. Michigan WS works to reduce wildlife hazards to aviation, prevent wolf conflicts with livestock, resolve starling damage at dairies, halt the spread of bovine tuberculosis, and protect human health at industrial facilities.

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.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Assisting Federal and State agencies to eradicate bovine TB
- Reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing starling damage at dairies and feedlots
- Reducing wildlife conflicts at industrial facilities
- Managing wolf conflicts with humans and livestock

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Michigan:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing blackbird damage to feedlots
- Managing bird predation to aquaculture
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies and bovine TB



Eradicating Bovine Tuberculosis (TB)—Bovine TB is a disease of cattle, captive cervids, bison, and goats that has had a serious economic impact on Michigan's livestock. Michigan lost its bovine TB-free status after the disease was detected in the State's cattle and free-ranging deer. The projected impact of the disease on the State's producers is estimated at \$121 million over 10 years.

WS is assisting livestock producers in preventing the infection from passing between livestock and wildlife, primarily deer. Fencing has been provided to livestock producers in an attempt to develop enclosures that are both effective and practical in excluding deer from feed storage sites. To assist WS field personnel, WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), is trying to better understand how livestock and deer interact. WS scientists are also researching ways to detect TB in wildlife and improve barriers between livestock and deer.

Managing Wolf Conflicts—Since 1997, the endangered gray wolf has been expanding its population across the Upper Peninsula by more than 20 percent each year. As wolf numbers increase, so will conflicts between livestock producers and wolves. Critical to the successful coexistence of people and wolves is the prompt and effective response to incidents of wolf depredation of livestock. This effort to manage wolves is part of a cooperative program between the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and WS.

The program provides for a full-time WS specialist to investigate suspected incidents of predation and determine if wolves are the source of predation. Once a link has been established, the specialist can take appropriate action such as trapping and relocating the responsible wolves. Other activities include trapping wolves so they can be radio-collared and helping to establish an accurate count of wolves in the State.

Reducing Starling Damage at Dairies—In the winter, starlings congregate at dairies and feedlots for food and shelter. Damage occurs as the birds consume and contaminate feed, which in turn reduces the milk production of dairy cows that eat the feed. Starlings are thought to be responsible for the spread of salmonella. Michigan WS conducts a program to manage starling damage that is effective, selective, and environmentally safe. This successful starling-control program has expanded very rapidly over the past three years as producers call on WS for assistance.

Enhancing Aviation Safety—Wildlife collisions with airplanes cost civil aviation more than \$470 million annually in the United States and pose a hazard to flight crews and passengers. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has recognized this threat to air safety and elicited the expertise of WS. NWRC scientists conduct research from the Center’s Sandusky, OH field station to reduce hazards to aviation and risks to the public. Studies are underway at several large airports where scientists evaluate habitat management practices and wildlife dispersal techniques. WS also maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the FAA and airports to monitor trends and wildlife species that pose the greatest concern to aviation.

Michigan WS employs a specialist who provides full-time assistance in reducing wildlife hazards at one of the State’s major airports. In addition, WS has provided support to approximately 35 civilian and military airports, primarily by providing information on management alternatives and assistance in obtaining depredation permits. Since 2001, WS has conducted year-long wildlife hazard assessments at 13 Michigan airports.

Looking to the Future

It is likely that wolves will continue to expand across the Upper Peninsula and eventually cross into the Lower Peninsula. This will result in an increased demand for prompt and professional support from WS.

Double-crested cormorant populations are also increasing dramatically in the Great Lakes region and concern exists that the birds are negatively impacting sports-fishing, habitat, and tourism. In the future, WS may be asked to provide leadership and expertise to manage damage caused by cormorants. In addition to the cormorant, starlings are another bird species causing damage in Michigan. WS is already providing its expertise to reduce this damage, but the demand for WS’ assistance continues to grow.

Michigan Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

