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WILDLIFE SERVICES—COLORADO

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Colorado

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

WS employees help Colorado's livestock industry reduce losses from predators. The program assists fisheries and the general public with migratory bird problems and addresses beaver problems in many counties throughout the State. WS also assists the State Health Department with monitoring efforts to detect plague and diseases that could harm endangered black-footed ferrets. In FY 2002, WS assisted in the testing of mule deer and elk for the presence of chronic wasting disease (CWD). In addition, WS works at several airports to protect air passengers, pilots, and aircraft from dangerous wildlife collisions with airplanes.



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.

While WS conducts a wide range of operational and research activities, a few in-depth examples are provided to highlight WS' role in protecting livestock, public health and safety, and natural resources.

Protecting Livestock From Predators—Livestock production is an important industry in Colorado. In January of 2000, the total value of Colorado's cattle and calves was \$2.24 billion, and the value of the State's sheep inventory was \$39.16 million. In addition to the many factors that cause economic hardships for livestock producers, predator attacks by coyotes, black bears, and mountain lions can lead to significant losses for some producers. The Colorado branch of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) reported that in Fiscal Year (FY) 2000, Colorado farmers and ranchers lost an estimated 19,500 sheep and lambs to predators. This was in spite of the fact that many, approximately 80 percent, of these same producers reported using nonlethal predator deterrent tools (NASS survey, 1997). The value of this loss was placed at \$1.49 million. Research results

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Colorado:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock, other agricultural resources, wildlife, and public safety
- Introducing infertility as a wildlife management tool
- Improving rodent damage management methods, with emphasis on repellants, barriers, and attractants

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting livestock resources from predators
- Protecting airline passengers and aircraft operations from wildlife hazards at airports
- Protecting roads, irrigation ditches, and trees from beaver damage
- Collection of samples to detect CWD
- Monitoring for diseases that could impact the black-footed ferret reintroduction effort

suggest that these losses could be 2 to 3 times higher in the absence of an effective livestock protection program.

WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) is working hard to develop alternative methods to manage livestock predation. For example, NWRC researchers are working on a remote radio collaring device that could be used to radio tag depredating black bears. The device would allow for the removal of only those black bears attacking livestock. The device would also be less expensive and more practical to use than current methods.

Protecting Air Travel—Every year, lives are endangered worldwide and billions of dollars are wasted when birds and other wildlife damage aircraft. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with airplanes cost U.S. civil aviation more than \$470 million annually.

The WS program is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. NWRC conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to control or prevent these hazards. Studies are underway at several large airports where scientists evaluate habitat management practices and wildlife dispersal techniques. NWRC also maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the Federal Aviation Administration and airports to monitor trends and wildlife species that pose the greatest threat to aviation.

Applying this scientific expertise, the Colorado WS program provided assistance at two of Colorado's busiest airports in FY 2000. In addition to providing training and advice, WS also worked on-site to resolve wildlife conflicts. For these airports, the most significant risk to human lives is the presence of wildlife lingering on or around the airfields. Therefore, most of WS efforts focus on keeping wildlife away from these areas.

Protecting Public Health and Safety—While black bears and mountain lions are two magnificent examples of Colorado's diverse wildlife populations, these large animals can pose a serious threat to public safety. They can also cause significant property damage. Colorado WS responds to safety concerns and damage complaints associated with these animals. In October 2000, WS assisted the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) when a black bear attacked two hunters. WS' efforts to track the bear helped CDOW locate the animal, which had been shot by the hunters in an act of self defense. More recently, in FY 2002, WS entered into a new agreement with CDOW to assist with black bear and mountain lion problems in Western Colorado. Following the implementation of this new agreement, WS has assisted with several incidents involving bears and lions in residential areas.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Wildlife—Over the last several years, Colorado WS has assisted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) with the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret. FWS in cooperation with WS, the Bureau of Land Management, CDOW, and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, is in the process of reintroducing black-footed ferrets into northwestern Colorado and northeastern Utah. On Nov. 15, 2001, black-footed ferrets were released for the first time into the Wolf Creek area of northwest Colorado. Before the ferrets were released, WS obtained blood samples from area predators to look for the presence of wildlife diseases that might threaten the survival of the ferrets. Researchers will now study this new population of ferrets to evaluate release techniques and methods for helping the species to recover. If the program is successful, a wild black-footed ferret population could expand throughout the Wolf Creek area.

Looking to the Future

As Colorado's population continues to grow, especially in rural and semi-rural areas, the potential for human-wildlife conflicts is increasing. WS will be involved in the on-going effort to control CWD in wild cervid populations. WS' ability to respond to this growing need for services will depend on the availability of critical resources.

Colorado 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.

