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WILDLIFE SERVICES — UTAH

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Utah

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

Utah WS specialists help residents to manage damage caused by predators and overabundant urban wildlife such as waterfowl, raccoons, and skunks. WS also works at airports to reduce the risks associated with migratory birds near airport runways. Utah WS has pioneered efforts to protect wildlife populations from excessive predation when the balance between predator and prey is disrupted. WS specialists implement specific programs designed to stabilize threatened and endangered wildlife populations until the natural balance between predator and prey is restored.

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

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Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting livestock from predators
- Protecting native wildlife (including endangered species) from predators
- Protecting public health and safety and property in urban areas.
- Protecting crops, livestock, and property from bird damage
- Managing wildlife hazards to aviation

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Utah:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing coyote predation through reproductive intervention strategies
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Focusing on adult territorial coyotes to manage sheep depredation
- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies and bovine tuberculosis



Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Livestock—Utah’s sizable sheep industry is ranked sixth in the nation, and the vast majority of the sheep are grazed on open range where they are especially vulnerable to predation. Predators are the number one cause of losses to the sheep industry, inflicting more damage than disease or inclement weather. Even with WS’ assistance, losses to predators cost the Utah sheep industry \$2.1 million in 2000. Research suggests that these losses would be two to three times higher in the absence of a livestock protection program.

By working with individual livestock producers, public land management agencies, and State agriculture and wildlife agencies, WS tries to minimize livestock losses while having only a marginal impact on predator populations. Cougar (mountain lion) and black bear damage management occurs only when losses are confirmed and predicted to continue if no action is taken. WS assists Utah in verifying these predator losses for the State compensation program. Coyotes, the most significant predator of sheep and calves, are managed only where damage has occurred in the past and is expected to continue. By keeping predator losses of lambs to 5 percent and losses of adult sheep to 3 percent or less, WS contributes in excess of \$15 million to the State’s economy annually.

WS’ research arm, the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), conducts an extensive program of research and methods development to reduce and prevent wildlife predation on sheep and cattle. Studies are underway to develop more effective, less injurious

coyote capture systems, sound-activated conditioning collars for coyotes, and improved electronic frightening devices. Also, coyote territorial behavior and population modeling studies are underway to support the development of reproduction suppression strategies in areas with high predation rates.

Protecting Wildlife—Ordinarily, populations of predators and their prey develop some static balance within the environment. Changes to the environment, however, caused by man or natural phenomenon like fires, can disrupt that balance so that one species suppresses another. Many endangered species are affected either by predation or competition from other, more successful wildlife species. Utah, like many western states, has sparse mule deer populations despite an abundance of habitat. In some areas, their numbers are not increasing rapidly enough to sustain population levels. In other parts of the State, predation has severely limited opportunities to restore wildlife populations, such as black-footed ferrets and bighorn sheep.

Using research findings and methods developments, the Utah WS program has pioneered efforts to protect native wildlife from predation. WS has responded to requests from State and Federal wildlife agencies to protect nesting waterfowl, sage grouse, endangered prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets, antelope, and bighorn sheep. In areas where mule deer herds are suffering from excessive fawn predation, WS works with the State wildlife agency to increase survival rates through selective coyote removal.

Protecting Human Health and Safety—Because most of Utah’s residents live on the Wasatch front, overabundant wildlife in this urban area can affect far more people than in rural areas. Over the past decade, nonnative raccoons have moved into the Wasatch front and created great problems. Skunks, waterfowl, and pigeons also endanger public health and safety. In 2000, WS documented 299 instances where wildlife posed a direct threat to public safety. The majority of these instances involved the threat of rabies, raccoon roundworm, salmonella infections from bird droppings, and plague transmission from wild animals to humans.

Utah WS has an urban wildlife damage management program in place to address these disease threats on the Wasatch front, primarily in Salt Lake County. By providing materials, professional advice, and wildlife removal services when necessary, WS minimizes the risks these overabundant species pose to the public. WS also coordinates with local governments outside of Salt Lake County to protect public health and prevent wildlife damage to property. In

addition, WS assists with monitoring wildlife hazards at Salt Lake International Airport.

Looking to the Future

Increasing demands for wildlife damage management in Utah have created a need to expand the urban program to all 4 counties on the Wasatch front. At present, WS receives far more requests from outside Salt Lake County than it can successfully address. While existing needs already exceed program resources, projected population increases will certainly lead to more wildlife conflicts with humans and more requests for assistance.

In addition, protection of native wildlife continues to be of importance to wildlife enthusiasts Statewide. At present, priorities are set to maximize resources. This means, however, that lower priority areas are receiving no services. The net result is that wildlife populations in targeted areas respond favorably to WS’ efforts, but the lower priority areas continue to slip into crisis. Once these areas drop below 50 percent of their targeted population objectives, the costs to recover threatened species are far greater than if they had been helped at an earlier stage.

Utah 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.

