

Wildlife Services



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The Wildlife Services (WS) program is a cooperative effort between the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food and the US Department of Agriculture-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services program. The Federal State Director serves as the division Director within the Department of Agriculture and Food and State employees serve alongside Federal employees in accomplishing the mission of the Department. The cooperative effort is so successful; the program was recognized in 1998 with the Governor's Quality Service Award.

The Utah cooperative program, which includes 17 State and 16 federal employees, has served as a model for wildlife damage management programs nationwide. Personnel from the program often consult with other state and federal programs, lending expertise to developing programs and employees in all aspects of wildlife management.

Funding for the Wildlife Services program comes from several sources, including direct funds from livestock producers, county funding and federal and state appropriations. Due to declining sheep numbers, producer funding has decreased in recent years. However, a holistic approach to wildlife damage management has allowed the program to remain efficient.

Much of the current focus of the program involves protection of livestock from predators, notably coyotes, red fox, black bears and mountain lions. Coyotes cause substantial losses to the sheep industry, killing tens of thousands of adult sheep and lambs annually. Coyotes also kill calves and occasionally adult cattle during calving. Cougars and black bears kill sheep, lambs and a few calves, primarily in the summer months when livestock are grazed at higher elevations. Red fox, a non-native predator, kill lambs during the spring and are a serious predator to the poultry industry.

In addition to killing livestock, predators can impact native wildlife, especially threatened, endangered or otherwise vulnerable species. The current Wildlife Services Program considers the impacts of predators on all components of an ecosystem. In predation management environmental assessments, completed in 1996, impacts of the program on the ecosystem were analyzed. The program, while protecting livestock and wildlife, has no significant negative impacts on the environment.

The objectives of the program are to minimize livestock and wildlife losses to predators on private, state and federal lands. WS carries out this objective by integrating methods including recommending non-lethal methods for producers to implement and by removing predators when they cause damage. The predation management program targets only offending individuals or offending populations.

Methods for predation management are used a selectively as possible to minimize negative impacts to other wildlife. Methods used to control coyotes include aerial hunting, calling and shooting,

trapping, denning and M-44 sodium cyanide ejectors. In addition to removing offending predators, Wildlife Services specialists assist producers in detecting predation and, in the case of cougar and bear losses, in confirming damage for the State sponsored compensation program.

Wildlife Services continues to sponsor research into the development of methods to minimize wildlife impacts, including extensive research into non-lethal methods. Current projects in Utah include monitoring producer implemented non-lethal methods, supplemental feeding of black bears to prevent depredations and fertility control in coyotes to prevent depredations. The Wildlife Services program also assists crop and aquaculture producers in assessing and preventing damage from migratory birds. Most species of birds are protected by Federal law and professional assistance and federal permits are required. Additionally, Wildlife Services can assist producers in developing integrated strategies and locating equipment and suppliers to assist them in preventing losses.

The protection of human safety and health is an important part of the Wildlife Services program. Because of the great numbers of human/wildlife interactions in Salt Lake County, Wildlife Services has an Urban Wildlife Damage Management program there. One full time urban specialist, assisted by the full time volunteer, answer questions from homeowners and businesses on how to prevent damage, lend live traps and provide instructions on humane trapping, and pick up captured wildlife when necessary. Most of the urban calls deal with health risks associated with raccoons and skunks, but the program also has assisted in preventing wildlife diseases, rescuing wild animals, preventing the spread of rabies from bats and capturing and relocating nuisance waterfowl and porcupines. Wildlife Services also responds to several human safety concerns each year prompted by coyotes or cougars in neighborhoods.

Wildlife damage continues to decline in response to the professional Wildlife Services program. Objectives set in the 1996 EA's include keeping lamb losses to less than 5 percent, adult sheep losses to less than 3 percent and calf losses to less than 1 percent. All objectives are currently being met for those livestock protected by the program. Although predator losses are high, losses in the absence of the program would put many producers out of business. Research indicates that lamb losses in the absence of predation management would approach 28% of the lamb crop, and calf losses without management would approach 3.5%. Using conservative estimates, the Wildlife Services program prevents the loss of over \$5 million in livestock annually, with a total economic benefit of \$16 million. Protection of wildlife provides an additional \$1-3 million in benefits to the State of Utah.