

# Wildlife SERVICES

**T**he Wildlife Services unit of Texas Cooperative Extension works to alleviate damage and other problems caused by wildlife. Wildlife is important to the economy and to the aesthetics and health of our environment; yet, some types of wildlife do at times cause problems that must be dealt with. Sometimes the presence of wildlife is simply a nuisance. But animal damage to agriculture, natural resources, property, and human health and safety does cause millions of dollars in losses each year. Since wildlife is a public resource that belongs to all the citizens, government has a responsibility to respond to the problems wildlife causes while at the same time protecting this resource.

Resolving conflicts between wildlife and human interests requires wildlife damage management expertise. Just as wildlife species vary greatly in their needs and behavior, so, too, do human populations. Wildlife damage management is an integral component of professional wildlife management. The complex wildlife damage management environment includes a combination of biological, legal, socio-political, financial and technical considerations.

The goal of Wildlife Services is to protect the state's agricultural, industrial and natural resources and the public's health, safety and property from damage caused by wildlife. Wildlife Services accomplishes this goal as a member of the cooperative Texas Wildlife Services Program. This cooperative federal, state and private program includes the Wildlife Services program of USDA's

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Wildlife Services unit of Texas Cooperative Extension of The Texas A&M University System, and the Texas Wildlife Damage Management Association. Funding for these cooperative wildlife damage management activities comes from state and federal appropriations and from individuals, rancher associations and counties.

Wildlife Services is engaged in the following activities:

- **Protecting human health and safety** by helping control wildlife-related diseases such as rabies and plague, and wildlife-related hazards such as bird-aircraft strikes. The agency is a primary cooperator in the Texas Oral Rabies Vaccination Program, which orally vaccinates gray foxes and coyotes to stop the spread and reduce the incidence of rabies in these animals in affected areas of the state. Wildlife Services collects biological samples for monitoring the incidence and spread of plague and other diseases in the state. It also works with the Federal Aviation Administration and commercial and military airports to reduce wildlife hazards to aircraft.
- **Protecting facilities, structures and other property** from damage caused by rats, mice, raccoons, skunks, opossums, squirrels, beavers, birds and other wildlife. When beavers build dams they often cause roadways to flood. Their bank

burrowing weakens pond dams and levees. Large concentrations of roosting vultures can damage electrical and industrial facilities. Other birds roosting in large numbers may damage property and cause human health problems.

- **Protecting crops, timber, rangeland and other natural resources** from the damage caused by gophers, prairie dogs, feral hogs, raccoons, rabbits, coyotes, grackles, beavers and other wildlife. When building dams, beavers may cause flooding of timber and pastureland and the loss of trees and field crops. Feral hogs damage field crops, pastures and riparian habitat by their feeding, trampling and rooting activities.
- **Protecting livestock** from the depredation of coyotes, bobcats, feral hogs, birds and other wildlife. Each year Texas producers lose millions of dollars worth of livestock to predators. Properly applied predation management activities to protect livestock can have benefit:cost ratios of 3:1 to 27:1. Wildlife Services also protects livestock through its wildlife disease surveillance and monitoring programs.
- **Protecting wildlife.** Wildlife Services provides assistance when it has been determined that predator management is necessary to increase populations of native and exotic game managed for hunting. Revenue from wildlife enterprises is very important to many landowners.

Wildlife damage can be alleviated by: 1) managing the resource being damaged, 2) managing the wildlife responsible for the damage, 3) physically

separating the two, or 4) a combination of these actions. Managing a resource could include altering cultural practices such as animal husbandry or crop selection, modifying habitat, and altering human behavior. Managing wildlife could include altering behavior through harassment or scaring, relocating animals, or eliminating problem individuals. Sometimes animals can be kept away from areas where they are causing damage by fencing, netting or other barriers.

Wildlife Services provides both technical and direct control assistance. Technical assistance involves helping people solve their own problems. This assistance takes the form of advice, recommendations, information, or materials used in managing wildlife. Wildlife Services also provides direct control assistance when a high degree of professional skill and coordinated effort are required. Wildlife Services uses the most effective and flexible methods that are biologically, environmentally and socially sound. Under the federal Wildlife Services umbrella, all activities are in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act to ensure that the biological, sociocultural, physical and economic impacts of wildlife control activities have been assessed.

Those who request assistance from Wildlife Services need help protecting themselves, their animals or their property from wildlife damage. Wildlife Services receives requests for assistance from individuals, groups, counties, and state or federal agencies. If direct control is required, it is conducted according to a written agreement. Usually some level of local sharing of costs is required.

For additional information contact the nearest office of Wildlife Services.

TCE—Wildlife Services

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Edward G. Smith, Director, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.

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