

National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC) Recommendations Report

Executive Summary

The committee is established under agency authority to support the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services' (WS) program, hereafter WS, which operates under the Agriculture Act of March 2, 1931 (commonly known as the "Animal Damage Control Act" or "ADCA"), 7 U.S.C. §§8351-8354, amended by Pub. L. 115-270, October 23, 2018, 132 Stat 3765. The Committee is managed in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), 5 U.S.C. App. 2, as amended. This Committee is in the public interest.

The purpose of the Committee is to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on policies and program issues necessary to manage damage caused by depredate wildlife to protect America's agricultural, industrial, and natural resources and to safeguard public health and safety.

The Committee put forth 21 recommendations (listed below in no particular order) for USDA's consideration pertaining to several key program and operational functions.

1 Funding

Recommendation: *We recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture that baseline funds to support integrated wildlife damage management be substantially increased by a request in the President's budget. Failure to do so would be a failure to fulfill the mission of the program. Any new mandates or directives should be accompanied with new funding in the President's budget.*

We recognize that WS is a sought-after leader in the management of conflicts related to wildlife, and that their services are increasingly in-demand in a world where human-wildlife conflicts are increasingly common and diverse.

We further recommend that the Secretary of Agriculture proactively collaborate with the Secretary of Defense on areas of shared responsibilities. Regarding continued delivery of program mission to the American people, we recommend that any increase in implementation or maintenance of programs or policies required by the Department (i.e. information technology, vehicles and vehicle monitoring, etc.) be supported by new funds from the Department that are not part of existing WS funds. Failure to do so would force a reduction in mission delivery or increased costs to cooperators by an unfunded mandate, which is unacceptable to the spirit of the program's mission.

We further recommend that all programs be evaluated for necessary increases to funding in the President's budget based on increased costs of goods and services, as well as inflation, since the time of the last increase to base funding. We recognize the cooperative nature of the program but recommend that the Secretary of Agriculture carefully consider and evaluate the balance of cost-sharing, where some cooperators bear a disproportionately high cost for delivering the mission. We recommend the Secretary of Agriculture seek additional funds in the President's budget to address these funding needs. Special attention should be focused on, but not limited to:

- *Livestock Protection*
- *Airport Wildlife Hazards Program*
- *Property Protection*
- *Human Health and Safety*



NWSAC recognizes that the success of the mission relies on recruiting and retaining the right staff, and developing those staff. NWSAC further recommends that the Secretary pursue opportunities to improve recruitment and retention of a superior workforce by increasing rates of pay across the program through new funds requested in the President's budget. NWSAC also recommends careful attention be paid to site-specific position complexities, scope, and level of contacts as related to position descriptions.

NWSAC further recommends that the Department review and revise human resources policies that are limiting workforce development and succession planning, such as leadership training and lack of career ladder opportunities.

2 Registration of Wildlife Toxicants

Recommendation: *We recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture that WS continue the process of development and registration of wildlife toxicants and expedite the process where possible.*

3 Communication

Recommendation: *We recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture to develop, execute, and evaluate a time limited and multi-faceted outreach campaign to proactively communicate to the broader American public the relevancy and value of Wildlife Services.*

4 National Rabies Program

Recommendation: *Considering the National Rabies Program has not received a base funding increase since FY2017, We strongly recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture to seek new funding above the current level in the President's budget for the management of rabies in the United States in the interest of human and animal health and safety, including but not limited to raccoon rabies in the east, canine rabies on the Texas-Mexico border, and vampire bat rabies risk in southern border states. In addition, the NWSAC recommends sustained, additional funding for research, development, and use of more efficient and effective vaccines with the goal of control of terrestrial rabies and elimination of raccoon rabies by 2063.*

5 Tribal Nations

Recommendation: *We recommend the Secretary of Agriculture, in securing their trust responsibilities and in compliance with executive order 14112, sections 4 and 5, continue to work with the Office of Management and Budget to identify and provide additional and accessible funding and programming through WS to federally recognized Native Tribal governments and Native Tribal organizations to fulfill the Federal government's trust responsibilities and address the wildlife damage and disease management research, training, and communication needs of tribal nations.*

6 Department of Interior Interagency Agreement

Recommendation: *We recommend the Secretary of Agriculture engage the Secretary of Interior to seek an increase in Department of the Interior (DOI) funding for WS above the existing agreement level through an existing interagency agreement framework for conflict resolution involving large predator management in furtherance of restoration of species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The NWSAC specifically recommends additional resources be allocated for conflict resolution involving large predators, including, but not limited, to grizzly bears and wolves.*



Recognizing the success of the current program and the increased demand for services, NWSAC recommends financial support for program enhancement, technology and training for safety and efficiency, and a continued commitment to program support for the 5-year post delisting period.

7 Aquaculture

Recommendation: We recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture the continued resources and efforts to assist farmers with the lethal and non-lethal management of migratory and non-migratory birds that prey on aquaculture.

Specifically:

- To continue ongoing efforts in the control of Double Crested Cormorants
- To add additional focus to the American White Pelican and the Great Blue Heron in the non-lethal and lethal management program
- To support regional resource management and additional funding for the management of these species by leveraging resources and working in a cooperative environment with all state and federal agencies, tribal governments, and tribal organizations.
- To enhance, maintain, and assist in the innovation of non-lethal control methods (Roost dispersal, drone utilization, lighting technology)
- To work in conjunction with USFWS to determine and further implement the most efficient methods of population control to help reduce further bird depredation, disease introduction/spread, and ecosystem disruptions and habitat degradation that the Double Crested Cormorants and American White Pelican are directly attributing to in the aquaculture and natural resources environment.

8 Avian Predators

Recommendation: We recommend and encourage the Secretary of Agriculture to continue working with the Secretary of the Interior to mitigate livestock depredation and property damage by avian predators. NWSAC recommends the Secretary seek new funds in the President's budget to support management of wildlife damage from avian species.

The NWSAC further encourages the Secretary of Agriculture to continue working with the Secretary of the Interior to mitigate livestock depredation, crop depredations, and property damage by avian predators and wild birds damaging agricultural resources following an integrated wildlife damage management approach. Additionally, we encourage both Secretaries to aid and facilitate the joint WS-USFWS staff biologist position for the management of complex migratory bird issues.

We recommend that the Secretary of Agriculture create, fund, and support a comprehensive wildlife damage management program to address damage caused by black vultures. Such a program would include technical assistance, habitat management, non-lethal conflict prevention and lethal control.

9 One Health Initiative

Recommendation: We recommend that the Secretary of Agriculture encourage WS to continue to recognize that the health of animals, people, and the environment are inextricably linked and enhance One Health initiatives within strategic planning and implementation of Wildlife Services' programs. We appreciate and commend the current program efforts and partnerships between the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, tribal governments and organizations, states, universities, non-governmental organizations, and others. The NWSAC recommends using this collaborative approach to advance program



priorities, such as helping to prevent the rise in zoonotic disease outbreaks in animals and people and addressing other program challenges.

We recommend the Secretary of Agriculture direct sufficient additional funds from avian health, emergency response, and other budget line items and sources outside of WS, to WS to enable full staffing, equipping, and training of their national disease program. We specifically recommend increasing the number of permanent disease biologists to at least 45 nationwide and providing adequate resources to support both the biologists and incident management teams.

10 Aviation Center

Recommendation: *We recommend the Secretary of Agriculture advocate for the sustainment of the Wildlife Services Aviation Training and Operation Center (WS-ATOC) in Cedar City, Utah. Support should be commensurate with the growth and expansion of the WS Aviation Program, the modernization and standardization of the WS aircraft fleet, the development and implementation of new and innovative training techniques, and pilot recruitment and retention.*

NWSAC further recommends the Secretary of Agriculture work to acquire additional aircraft from military or other agencies and seek substantial increases in funding to support the Wildlife Services program's aviation operations in the President's budget.

11 Spring Loaded Ejector Devices

Recommendation: *We recommend that the Secretary of Agriculture continue to support the use of spring-loaded ejector devices (SLEDs) as a delivery method to mitigate wildlife diseases, manage wildlife damage, and other uses.*

12 Research

Recommendation: *We recommend that the Secretary of Agriculture encourage the development of studies and reviews that integrate economic and ecological effects of wildlife damage management for the protection of American agriculture and natural resources, including objective science-based reviews that consider the value of wildlife management for the promotion of healthy ecosystems and society.*

NWSAC also encourages WS research on emerging wildlife conflict issues and techniques to minimize conflicts including the use of animals in livestock protection, wildlife deterrence, detection and monitoring.

13 Chronic Wasting Disease

Recommendation: *We recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture that WS:*

- *Work collaboratively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey to assist state and tribal agencies tasked with managing Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).*
- *Recognize the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) as a premier research facility for applied research on CWD in wild cervids.*
- *Seek new funding for research including methods to increase the timeliness of test results for both specimens collected from living and dead cervids, vaccine development, and other research priorities related to CWD.*
- *Work towards planning 5th International CWD Symposium in partnership with other involved agencies*



14 Feral Swine Damage Management

Recommendation: We strongly recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture to seek new funding in the President's budget to expand the feral swine damage management program to address the increasing need for management of this species. We also urge the Secretary of Agriculture to explore new technologies for feral swine damage management and eradication, including methods of inhibiting reproduction in feral swine.

WS is encouraged to continue work with state feral swine task forces, tribal agencies, and the National Wild Pig Task Force to deliver state specific and national objectives for feral swine monitoring, surveillance, research, damage control and eradication.

NWSAC commends WS for the exemplary work done in the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program under the 2018 Agriculture Improvement Act, and strongly encourages improvement and expansion under future Agriculture Improvement Acts.

NWSAC recommends that WS works towards the development of objective metrics to increase funding above base for states identified as "Level 5" feral swine management states. We further recommend that WS institutes a 5-year review period for states identified as "Level 1," to ensure that adequate work toward eradication is conducted.

NWSAC further recommends the establishment of new funding in the President's budget for expanded monitoring for feral swine along international borders to allow for early detection and management of new feral swine invasions.

Also, the NWSAC recommends the Secretary of Agriculture to continue work to convey the risks associated with feral pork for those that hunt, process, and consume feral pork, as feral swine have been shown to be the hosts for numerous zoonotic diseases and parasites.

15 Workforce Planning

Recommendation: We recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture that WS identify opportunities to strengthen its workforce. This should include programs and additional funding in the President's budget to attract a diverse group of new, early-career individuals, including seasonal and volunteer opportunities, and retain and advance existing personnel by encouraging and providing access to career development and training, and recognizing and rewarding individual and team performance and achievements.

Furthermore, the NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture direct WS to continue to systematically review and evaluate current position descriptions to allow for deviations and revisions that reflect job scope, complexity, and level of personal contacts.

16 Data Science Support Unit

Recommendation: We recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture that WS support and secure additional critical funding in the President's budget for a data science support unit that furthers current WS efforts in collaboration with the NWRC. Specifically, we recommend resources for acquiring additional capacity that supports data analytics, geo-spatial technology, and associated modelling to integrate internal and external data sources and conduct integrated modeling and syntheses.



17 Large Predator Conflict Mitigation

Recommendation: *The NWSAC recognizes Wildlife Services' leadership in promoting successful nonlethal wildlife coexistence resolution measures in managing livestock and predator conflicts. As a result, many livestock producers report significant reduction in losses due to proactive measures in an integrated fashion, such as human presence (e.g. range riders), carcass management, livestock protection animals, lighting, sound deterrents, fencing, fladry, and more.*

We recommend the Secretary of Agriculture engage the Secretary of Interior to seek additional Department of the Interior (DOI) funding for WS through an existing interagency agreement framework for proactive measures to minimize potential conflicts involving large predators. These measures can include but are not limited to site evaluations of high risk or chronic depredation conflicts, recommendations, and assistance implementing non-lethal deterrents.

The NWSAC recommends the Secretary encourage collaboration between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and WS regarding coordination and implementation of programs such as Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to improve wildlife damage management.

18 Disaster Response

Recommendation: *We recommend the Secretary of Agriculture establish an expedited approval process for WS personnel to provide disaster response upon request from a designated official in a local/state/Federal disaster within 24hrs; and work to secure funding from either, or both, the Commodity Credit Corporation and Supplemental Disaster Programs to support such response.*

19 Support for Airport Wildlife Hazards Program (AWHP) and Associated Research

Recommendation: *The NWSAC commends the work at airports and research on methods to mitigate wildlife hazards to civil and military aviation.*

NWSAC strongly recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture to seek new funding in the President's budget to fortify and expand the Airport Wildlife Hazards Program support to address current and increasing need for management and research to reduce wildlife hazards to aviation.

We recommend that the Secretary of Agriculture further support ongoing NWRC studies to develop economic modeling that measures return on investment of airport wildlife biologists, and risk modeling to gauge total bird strike risk at military airports. These models will enable cooperators to defend annual WS support agreement budgets and prioritize resourcing of emergent requirements.

The NWSAC also recommends that NWRC continue focused research on identification of effective mitigation procedures for large avian hazards, especially black and turkey vultures.

Finally, given the wide scope of efforts across many WS programs to mitigate severe vulture hazards to aviation, livestock, and infrastructure; recommend WS host a vulture damage management summit to identify the scope of vulture management risks and costs, ongoing mitigation procedures and projects, new research desired, and any sources of potential funding.



20 Wildlife Biosecurity Assessment Program

Recommendation: *Given the ongoing outbreak of HPAI in wildlife and commercial poultry, we recommend the Secretary of Agriculture expand the current Wildlife Biosecurity Assessment (WBA) Pilot Program to a nationwide program available to all states with commercial poultry production. Creation of this WBA program would significantly reduce the risk of disease (e.g., HPAI and others) introduction.*

Additionally, the Secretary of Agriculture should expand WBA to other animal production industries (e.g., domestic swine, bovine) to proactively prepare for possible introductions of other diseases (e.g. African Swine Fever).

We further recommend the Secretary pursue new funding in the President's budget to support these activities.

21 Wildlife Disease Diagnostic and Archival Capacity

Recommendation: *We recognize the growing impact of wildlife diseases on society and the environment. We further recognize that WS has established a highly collaborative and premier Wildlife Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (WDDL) and Biological Archive Storage (BAS) facility integral to regional, national, and global One Health Initiatives.*

We strongly recommend the Secretary of Agriculture seek new funding in the President's budget to expand and sustain the WDDL and BAS facility to address the increasing need for research and management of wildlife diseases. Specifically, we recommend the following:

- *Research grade and support wildlife disease scientists to further WS mission to support regional, national, and global needs. Research is critical to support monitoring and surveillance to mitigate threats posed to agriculture and human and animal health.*
- *To ensure long-term funding to support maintenances costs of WDDL operations*
- *Increased ultra-cold storage capacity and supporting infrastructure to meet increasing national demand to serve sample archival purposes for up to 5 million samples.*
- *Bioarchivists and technicians to manage and maintain database emphasizing sample and data governance.*