



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

**Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service**

FY 2002



## WILDLIFE SERVICES—VERMONT

*Contact Information:*

*Dennis Slate, Vermont Wildlife Services State Director*

*59 Chenell Drive, Suite 7*

*Concord, NH 03301-8548*

*Phone: (603) 223-6832 FAX: (603) 229-1951*

*Toll-Free Number: 1-800-4RABIES 1-800-472-2437*

*E-mail: dennis.slate@aphis.usda.gov*

*Web Site: www.ws.aphis.usda.gov*

### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Vermont

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

Vermont is a diverse ecological mix of farmland and wood lots, mountainous forest, and urban and suburban environments. Vermont's relatively small size and continued population growth lead to frequent contact between people and wildlife. Most of these interactions result in positive, memorable experiences for residents and visitors to the State. However, conflicts between people and wildlife are increasing. To address these human-wildlife conflicts, WS biologists employ adaptive management, education, and research strategies to meet increasing wildlife damage management demands.

Through the cooperative State-Federal rabies Hotline managed and staffed by WS biologists, citizens are provided advice to effectively address threats associated with raccoon, fox, and bat rabies as well as other wildlife problems. WS is also cooperating in an oral rabies vaccination project in northern Vermont to stop the spread of raccoon rabies.

WS protects aircraft, air passengers, and pilots from wildlife damage and threats at all Vermont airports. WS also protects threatened species, reduces colonial water bird damage to natural resources and



property, reduces on- and off-site bird conflicts at a solid waste treatment facility, and protects the public, domestic pets, and livestock from wildlife diseases including chronic wasting disease and West Nile virus.

### 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.

**Protecting Public Health and Safety**—Raccoons were responsible for 75 percent of the 87 rabies cases reported in Vermont during 2002. In response to rabies threats and other problem wildlife, WS operates a State-Federally funded toll-free Rabies Information and Referral Service hotline. The hotline is staffed 7 days a week by WS biologists and provides Vermont citizens and visitors to the State accurate and consistent information and recommendations regarding rabies and other wildlife conflicts. During 2002, more than 3,500 requests for assistance from the public were addressed on the hotline.

WS cooperated with the Vermont Department of Health, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Province of Quebec, and Cornell University to distribute more than 350,000 baits containing the oral rabies vaccine (ORV) to stop the northward spread of raccoon rabies. When raccoons ingest the bait, they become vaccinated against rabies. The 25-30 mile wide vaccination zone was expanded in 2002 to include the Burlington area. This on-going effort, is part of a larger program to contain raccoon rabies in the eastern United States. Its success has helped to keep Quebec raccoon-rabies free. More than 350 biological samples were collected from raccoons within the ORV zone to determine bait



#### Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Reducing the spread and human exposure to rabies
- Staffing a seven-day a week Rabies Information and Referral Service hotline
- Protecting air passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife
- Reducing on- and off-site safety hazards and property damage at landfills
- Protecting natural resources and property from double-crested cormorant damage

#### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to New Hampshire

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Controlling wildlife transmission of rabies
- Reducing starling and blackbird damage to feedlots
- Managing double-crested cormorants to protect aquaculture and natural resources
- Reducing goose damage through avian infertility

uptake, assess program effectiveness, monitor rabies movements, and characterize raccoon populations. WS' role continues to be coordination of ground activities and field-sampling activities.

To promptly detect the presence and spread of West Nile virus in 2002, WS conducted sentinel surveillance projects by collecting blood samples from 180 live birds. WS also submitted more than 80 dead birds from across the State for testing, and coordinated the effort to address more than 1,000 West Nile virus-related requests for assistance. WS also conducted sentinel surveillance live-bird training seminars for State agency personnel.

**Protecting Threatened or Endangered Species**—To enhance the recovery and reproductive success of the State threatened Eastern spiny softshell turtle, WS conducted trapping activities at a State park and wildlife management area to reduce raccoon predation on turtle eggs in nests.

**Protecting Air Travel**—Wildlife collisions with airplanes cost U.S. civil aviation more than \$470 million annually and pose a significant hazard to air passengers. WS is recognized for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry both nationally and in Vermont. WS' National Wildlife Research Center conducts research to develop methods to reduce hazards to aviation and maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the Federal Aviation Administration and airports to monitor trends and wildlife species of greatest concern to aviation.

WS completed a long-term wildlife hazard assessment at the privately-owned Burlington International Airport (BIA) in 2002. WS continues to provide consultations, direct assistance, and training to BIA personnel. In cooperation with the Vermont Agency of Transportation, WS also conducted hazard assessments at all State-operated airports in 2002. In addition to providing formal hazard reduction recommendations, WS performed Canada goose control, habitat modification, and harassment activities at individual State airports. As part of this effort, WS conducted harassment, control, and hazard assessment at one State airport in conjunction with integrated gull harassment activities at a nearby landfill. The landfill and airport, which serve as loafing and feeding areas for gulls, are both expanding, which will result in less than 5,000 feet of separation between the 2 facilities. WS' assistance activities helped reduce gull presence at the airport by more than 50 percent in 2002.

WS also assists airports in acquiring Federal and State permits that allow designated airport personnel to immediately address bird hazards at these facilities.

**Protecting Property, Natural Resources and Livestock**—To restore island vegetation and waterbird diversity, WS worked cooperatively with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, the U.S. Fish and



Wildlife Service and the University of Vermont in the annual colonial waterbird survey and egg oiling activities to reduce cormorant reproduction on Young island, Lake Champlain. WS also conducted cormorant management and monitoring activities on privately owned islands on Lake Champlain and Memphremagog.

In 2002, WS also assisted dairy producers in addressing problems associated with large concentrations of starlings. Damage occurs as birds consume and contaminate feed, which reduces milk production. Starlings may also be responsible for the spread of salmonella. The successful starling management program has expanded over the past two years.

## Looking to the Future

WS strives to provide citizens and visitors to Vermont with safe, effective solutions to a diverse range of wildlife conflicts. WS continues to work with dairy farmers on the development and implementation of more effective, integrated management strategies to reduce consumption and contamination of animal feed by birds, and to resolve other human and animal health issues caused by starlings and other birds at Vermont dairies. Wildlife diseases like West Nile virus, Lyme disease, salmonella, and chronic wasting disease represent emerging challenges that need to be addressed. In addition, increasing populations of geese, cormorants, and gulls pose problems regarding the protection of property and natural resources, and create challenges for WS and others who are responsible for protecting public health and safety.

## Vermont 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.

