

June 16, 2009

The Honorable David Obey  
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2314 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6016

The Honorable Jerry Lewis  
Ranking, Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2112 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6016

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis:

The eighty-four undersigned organizations represent a broad range of food producers, wildlife, sportsmen and resource interests that benefit from the cooperative efforts of the USDA-APHIS/Wildlife Services (WS) program. We write in strong support of this critical program and in opposition of any effort to restrict or eliminate WS funding.

Wildlife causes over \$12.8 billion in damage a year to natural resources, public infrastructures, private property and agriculture. WS works to prevent, minimize or manage this damage, and to protect human health and safety from conflicts with wildlife. Wildlife damage to U.S. livestock, aquaculture, small grains, fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products has been estimated at almost a billion dollars annually. Wildlife predators cause over \$126 million in death loss to livestock; field crop losses due to wildlife total \$619 million annually; losses to vegetables, fruits and nuts totaled \$146 million annually; and 70 percent of catfish farmers incur wildlife-related damage resulting in losses of \$10 million to \$13 million annually from double-crested cormorants in Mississippi alone. Consequently, WS is an essential program in agriculture production in the United States.

The spread of wildlife-borne diseases to humans, livestock and other wildlife is a growing concern. WS works to prevent the entry of pests and diseases in the United States, and monitors and manages pests and diseases already found in this country. WS is often the first line of defense in reducing and eliminating diseases such as the West Nile virus, avian influenza, chronic wasting disease, pseudorabies, bubonic plague, hantavirus, lyme disease, bovine tuberculosis and rabies. In fact, rabies-associated costs range from \$300 million to \$450 million annually in the United States primarily for pet vaccinations, education, diagnostics, post-exposure treatment and case investigations. WS also prevents entry or controls invasive species such as nutria, the brown tree snake, European starlings and the beaver. Feral swine are a subject of increasing concern as potential carriers of or catalysts for a variety of diseases. Feral swine estimates are at 4 million plus animals in 35 states with \$3.7 million spent in lethal control by WS and cooperators last fiscal year.

In FY2008 alone, WS conducted more than 67,580 technical assistance projects to reduce wildlife damage to property in urban, suburban and rural locations as well as airports across the country, which includes homes, schools, industrial facilities, roads, bridges, airport runways, dams and electrical and water systems. One example of this work is WS efforts in reducing deer collisions with automobiles which injure an average of 29,000 people annually and cause more than \$1 billion in damage. In addition, WS works to protect wetlands habitat, riparian habitat, tidal marsh and timber from a variety of pest species including feral hogs, nutria and beavers which alone cause millions of dollars of damage each year – more than any other U.S. wildlife species. WS expended more than \$16.1 million to protect property from wildlife damage in FY2008 and \$14.1 million in FY2007.

Protection of natural resources is a growing area of need for WS. Last year, WS protected game species including mule deer, bighorn sheep, antelope and waterfowl in eight states. In FY2008, WS spent \$7 million to protect and assist 131 threatened or endangered species in 36 states, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Cuba. In more than 95 percent of the projects, local threatened and endangered species either increased or remained stable.

More than 85,000 wildlife strikes with civil aviation have been reported since WS began keeping records in 1990. In FY2008, nearly 7,700 wildlife collisions with civil aircraft were reported, with an additional 4,900 strikes reported by military aviation costing the total aviation industry more than \$725 million annually and more than 94,000 hours in down time. WS provided direct services at 336 airports in FY2008 including population management through harassment, habitat modification or removal. Technical assistance, such as initial consultations and wildlife hazard assessments, was provided at 738 airports across the country.

It has been WS's cooperative nature that has allowed it to accomplish all of the above listed programs and has made it the most cost effective and efficient program in federal government in the areas of wildlife damage management and public health and safety. WS has over 2,000 cooperative agreements, up 20 percent from FY2000, and has 82,644 access agreements to professionally monitor and manage wildlife on private, state and federal lands.

WS cooperators include agriculture, forestry, private industry, state wildlife agencies, departments of health, schools, counties, local government, Indian nations, homeowner associations, conservation groups and others that together with WS mitigate the damage and dangers that public wildlife can inflict.

However, as important as this program is, this January the animal rights groups called on the Administration to abolish the program.

Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis, we appreciate your leadership and strong support of this essential program. Our organizations are committed to working with you to strengthen WS' resources and to ensure a continued federal partnership in the responsible management of our nation's wildlife.

WS is one of the few federal programs that have been consistently funded by 50 percent federal money and 50 percent cooperative money. In FY2007, \$56 million in cooperator dollars went to Wildlife Services while the remaining of the \$117 million budget was funded through federal appropriations. The majority of WS' budget – 43 percent – is spent on protecting human health and safety.

American Beekeeping Federation  
American Feed Industry Association  
American National Cattlemen  
American Sheep Industry Association  
American Veal Association  
Catch-A-Dream Foundation  
Conservation Force  
Fur Commission USA  
Livestock Exporters Association of the USA  
National Aquaculture Association  
National Cattlemen's Beef Association

National Farmers Union  
National Pork Producers Association  
National Renderers Association  
National Rifle Association  
National Shooting Sports Foundation  
National Trappers Association  
Public Lands Council  
Safari Club International  
Shikar Safari Club International  
United States Animal Health Association  
U.S. Cattlemen's Association

Arizona Cattle Grower's Association  
Arizona Cattlemen's Association  
Arizona Farm Bureau Federation  
Arizona Wool Producers Association  
California Farm Bureau Federation  
California Wool Growers Association  
Colorado Cattlemen's Association  
Colorado Wool Growers Association  
Corn Producers Association of Texas  
Georgia Cattlemen's Association  
Gila County Cattlemen's Association  
Idaho Cattle Association  
Idaho Outfitters & Guides Association  
Idaho Wool Growers Association  
Indiana Sheep Association  
Iowa Cattlemen's Association  
Iowa Sheep Industry Association  
Kansas Livestock Association  
Kentucky Sheep and Wool Producers Association  
Maine Sheep Breeders Association  
Maryland Fur Trappers  
Maryland Sheep Breeders Association  
Massachusetts Federation of Sheep Associations  
Meat Sheep Alliance of Florida, Inc  
Michigan Sheep Breeders Association  
Minnesota Lamb and Wool Producers Association  
Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association  
Missouri Cattlemen's Association  
Montana Wool Growers Association  
Nebraska Sheep and Goat Producers  
Nevada Cattlemen's Association

Nevada Wool Growers Association  
New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association  
New Mexico Federal Lands Council  
New Mexico Trappers Association  
New Mexico Wool Growers, Inc  
North Carolina Sheep Producers Association  
North Dakota Lamb and Wool Producers Association  
Ohio Cattlemen's Association  
Ohio Sheep Improvement Association  
Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association  
Oregon Cattlemen's Association  
Oregon Farm Bureau Federation  
Oregon Farmer's Union  
Oregon Sheep Producers Association  
Pennsylvania Sheep and Wool Growers Association  
South Dakota Cattlemen's Association  
South Dakota Sheep Growers Association  
Tennessee Sheep Producers Association  
Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association  
Texas Cattle Feeders Association  
Texas Farm Bureau  
Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers' Association  
Utah Department of Agriculture & Food  
Utah Wool Growers Association  
Virginia Sheep Producers Association  
Washington Cattlemen's Association  
Washington State Sheep Producers  
West Virginia Cattlemen's Association  
West Virginia Shepherds Federation  
Western Nebraska Sheep and Goat Association  
Wyoming Wool Growers Association