

February 27, 2018

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United State Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Hoeven and Ranking Members Leahy and Merkley:

Wildlife causes more than \$12.8 billion in damage each year to natural resources, public infrastructures, private property and agriculture. USDA Wildlife Services (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 to reach nearly \$1 billion annually. Wildlife predators cause more than \$178 million in death loss to livestock; field crop losses due to wildlife total \$619 million annually; losses to vegetables, fruits and nuts total \$146 million annually; and 70 percent of catfish farmers incur wildlife-related damage resulting in losses of \$10 to \$13 million annually from double-crested cormorants in Mississippi alone. As a result, WS is an essential program to U.S. agriculture.

The spread of wildlife-borne diseases to humans, livestock and other wildlife is a growing concern. WS monitors and manages pests and diseases in the United States. WS is often the first line of defense in reducing and eliminating diseases such as the West Nile virus, avian influenza, pandemic H1N1, chronic wasting disease, pseudo rabies, bubonic plague, Hantavirus, Lyme disease, bovine tuberculosis and rabies. In fact, rabies-associated costs range from \$300 to \$450 million annually in the United States primarily for pet vaccinations, education, diagnostics, post-exposure treatment and case investigations. In fiscal year (FY) 2017, WS collected more than 59,000 samples in their efforts to combat and eradicate wildlife disease with the majority of these directed at highly pathogenic avian influenza surveillance. WS also prevents entry of and controls invasive species such as feral swine, nutria, the brown tree snake, and the European starling. Feral swine are a subject of increasing concern as potential carriers or catalysts for a variety of diseases. It is estimated that there are more than 6 million feral swine in at least 39 states and while initial damage estimates were greater than \$1.5 billion per year, more recent reports suggest that figure is more likely between \$2 and \$2.5 billion annually with more than \$800 million of damage to agriculture resources.

In FY2017 alone, WS conducted 70,902 technical assistance projects (a 5% increase over FY 2016 figures) to reduce wildlife damage to property in urban, suburban and rural locations across the country, which include homes, schools, industrial facilities, roads, bridges, airports and airport runways, dams and electrical and water systems. One example of this work is WS efforts in reducing deer collisions with automobiles. More than 1.5 million deer-vehicle collisions occur each year, injuring tens of thousands of people, killing dozens, and causing more than \$4 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 and nutria, as well as the destruction that beaver can cause.

Protection of natural resources is a growing need for WS. Last year, WS invested resources in conservation of game species including mule deer, bighorn sheep, antelope and waterfowl in eight states. Also in FY2017, WS spent \$9.8 million for cooperative work with federal and state agencies to protect and assist 187 threatened or endangered species in 40 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In more than 95 percent of the projects, local threatened and endangered species either increased or remained stable.

Nearly 180,000 wildlife strikes with civil aviation have been reported since WS began keeping records in 1990. In 2015, there were more than 21,000 wildlife collisions with civil and military aircraft reported costing the total U.S. aviation industry more than \$6 billion since 1990. WS provided direct services at 421 airports in FY2017 including population management through harassment, habitat modification or removal. Technical assistance, such as initial consultations and wildlife hazard assessments, was provided at 864 airports across the country. Through the process, WS trained more than 5,097 non-WS personnel at 406 airports to prevent or minimize the impact of wildlife strikes.

As the “Miracle on the Hudson” demonstrated in 2009, the management of wildlife hazards on and near our nation’s airports is a critical safety priority. WS provides valuable support to the aviation community in addressing these hazards. From its assistance in preparing FAA-required wildlife hazard assessments to its help with managing hazardous wildlife populations, WS staff ensure that U.S. airports both meet the regulatory obligations under 14 CFR Part 139 and reduce the safety risks associated with aircraft wildlife strikes. WS also assists the FAA in monitoring national trends regarding wildlife populations and the hazards they pose to aviation. At a time when airports are facing significantly expanded wildlife hazard management requirements through recently issued FAA Advisory Circulars and grant assurance modifications, its role will be even more critical to the aviation community going forward.

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 the federal government in the areas of wildlife damage management and public health and safety. In FY2017, WS had more than 4,600 cooperative agreements. WS cooperators include agriculture, forestry, private industry, state wildlife agencies, state departments of health, state departments of agriculture, schools, universities, counties, local governments, Indian nations, homeowner associations, conservation groups and others that, together with WS, mitigate the damage and dangers that public wildlife can inflict.

Chairmen Cochran and Hoeven and Ranking Members Leahy and Merkley, we appreciate your demonstrated 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.

Air Line Pilots Association, Int’l
Airlines for America
American Association of Airport Executives
American Beekeeping Federation
American Dairy Goat Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Goat Federation
American Horse Council
American Sheep Industry Association
American Society of Agricultural and Biological
Engineers
American Veterinary Medical Association

Animal Health Institute
Association of American Veterinary Medical
Colleges
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Association of National Grasslands
Big Game Forever
Catfish Farmers of America
Catfish Institute
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Fur Industries of North America
Livestock Marketing Association
Mohair Council of America
Mule Deer Foundation

National Aquaculture Association
National Association of Counties
National Association of Federal Veterinarians
National Association of State Departments of
Agriculture
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Farmers Union
National Grange
National Lamb Feeders Association
National Milk Producers Federation
National Pork Producers Council
National Renderers Association
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Sorghum Producers
National Sunflower Association

Alabama Catfish Producers
Alabama Cattlemen's Association
Alabama Farmers Federation
Alabama Meat Goat and Sheep Producers
Arizona Cattle Feeders Association
Arizona Cattle Growers' Association
Arizona Cattlemen's Association
Arizona Wool Producers Association
Arkansas Cattlemen's Association
Arkansas State Sheep Council
Association of Oregon Counties
Association of Texas Soil and Water
Conservation Districts
California Agricultural Commissioners and
Sealers Association
California Cattlemen's Association
California Farm Bureau Federation
California Pork Producers Association
California Wool Growers Association
Colorado Cattlemen's Association
Colorado Wool Growers Association
Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association, Inc
Delta Council
Eastern Regional Conference of the Council of
State Governments
Empire Sheep Producers
Florida Aquaculture Association
Florida Cattlemen's Association
Florida Tropical Fish Farms Association
Garden State Sheep Breeders Inc
Georgia Agribusiness Council Inc
Georgia Cattlemen's Association
Georgia Sheep and Wool Growers Association
Hawaii Sheep and Goat Association

National Women Involved in Farm Economics
North American Meat Institute
Public Lands Council
R-CALF USA
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Rural and Agriculture Council of America
Safari Club International
Society for Range Management
Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife
State Agriculture and Rural Leaders Association
Striped Bass Growers Association
United States Animal Health Association
U.S. Cattlemen's Association
USA Rice
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Management Institute

Idaho Cattle Association
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
Idaho Outfitters & Guides Association
Idaho Wool Growers Association
Illinois Beef Association
Illinois Lamb and Wool Producers Inc
Independent Beef Association of North Dakota
Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas
Indiana Sheep Association
Iowa Cattlemen's Association
Iowa Sheep Industry Association
Kansas Livestock Association
Kansas Sheep Association
Kentucky Aquaculture Association
Kentucky Cattlemen's Association
Kentucky Sheep and Wool Producers
Association
Louisiana Cattlemen's Association
Maine Sheep Breeders Association
Maryland Sheep Breeders Association
Massachusetts Federation of Sheep Associations
Meat Sheep Alliance of Florida, Inc
Michigan Sheep Producers Association
Midwestern Legislative Conference of the
Council of State Governments
Minnesota Lamb and Wool Producer
Association
Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association
Missouri Cattlemen's Association
Missouri Sheep Producers, Inc
Montana Association of State Grazing Districts
Montana Farm Bureau Federation
Montana Public Lands Council
Montana Stockgrowers Association

Montana Wool Growers Association
Nebraska Cattlemen, Inc.
Nebraska Farmers Union
Nebraska Sheep and Goat Producers
Nebraska State Grange
Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics
Nevada Cattlemen's Association
Nevada Department of Agriculture
Nevada Farm Bureau Federation
Nevada Rangeland Resources Commission
Nevada State Grazing Board Central Committee
Nevada Wool Growers Association
New Hampshire Sheep and Wool Growers
Association
New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association
New Mexico Department of Agriculture
New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau
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
North Dakota Stockmen's Association
North Dakota Department of Agriculture
North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Northeast States Association for Agricultural
Stewardship
Ohio Cattlemen's Association
Ohio Farm Bureau Federation
Ohio Sheep Improvement Association
Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association
Oregon Farm Bureau Federation
Oregon Forest Industries Council
Oregon Outdoor Council
Oregon Seed Council
Oregon Sheep Growers Association
Oregon Small Woodlands Association
Oregonians for Food & Shelter
Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
Pennsylvania Sheep and Wool Growers
Association
Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative
South Carolina Sheep Industries Association
South Dakota Cattlemen's Association
South Dakota Sheep Growers Association
South East Dairy Farmers Association
Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife Idaho

Tennessee Cattlemen's Association
Tennessee Sheep Producers Association
Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers
Association
Texas Cattle Feeders Association
Texas Farm Bureau
Texas Pork Producers Association
Texas Sheep and Goat Predator Management
Board
Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers' Association
Texas Wildlife Damage Management
Association
The Council of State Governments – Midwest
The Port Authority of New York and New
Jersey
United Dairymen of Arizona
Utah Cattlemen's Association
Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
Utah Farm Bureau Federation
Utah Wild Sheep Foundation
Utah Wildlife Board
Utah Wool Growers Association
Vermont Sheep and Goat Association
Virginia Farm Bureau Federation
Virginia Cattlemen's Association
Virginia Sheep Producers Association
Wasco County Livestock Association
Washington Cattlemen's Association
Washington Cattle Feeders Association
Washington State Sheep Producers
West Virginia Cattlemen's Association
West Virginia Farm Bureau
West Virginia Shepherds Federation
Western Forestry and Conservation Association
Western United Dairymen
Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association
Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association
Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
Wisconsin Firearms Owners, Ranges, Club and
Educators
Wisconsin Sheep Breeders Cooperative
Wyoming Animal Damage Management Board
Wyoming Association of County Predatory
Animal Boards
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Wyoming Sportsmen for Fish & Wildlife
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation
Wyoming Wool Growers Association