

## Introduction

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) and Wildlife Services (WS-California), a state office within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS), intend to prepare a joint Environmental Impact Report and Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) to provide a robust and comprehensive environmental analysis of current and proposed future wildlife damage management activities undertaken across California. The EIR/EIS will evaluate impacts associated with wildlife damage management activities performed by CDFA and California Counties under CDFA's proposed Wildlife Damage Management Program (WDMP) as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and by WS-California as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These activities would be undertaken in a collaborative effort between WS-California, CDFA, and California Counties to prevent damage to agricultural resources and infrastructure, protect natural resources, and promote human health and safety. Additional information about the proposed WDMP and WS-California's current wildlife damage management activities is provided below.

## Objectives of the California Wildlife Damage Management EIR/EIS

The California Wildlife Damage Management EIR/EIS is intended to:

- ✓ Provide comprehensive statewide CEQA review of the current and proposed future wildlife damage management activities conducted throughout California by CDFA and Counties under the WDMP framework. This EIR/EIS will serve as the basis for additional environmental analysis, if any is needed, at the County level.
- ✓ Provide comprehensive NEPA review of the current and future wildlife damage management activities WS-California conducts throughout California, including activities performed pursuant to agreements with Counties, other public agencies, and private landowners.
- ✓ Promote broader understanding and awareness about wildlife identification, biology, life history, damage impacts, and management activities through the statewide environmental review process.
- ✓ Develop measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to California's important natural resources, including watercourses, protected species, and natural habitats from wildlife control materials, technologies, and methods.

## California Wildlife Damage Management EIR/EIS Implementation Process

The CDFA and WS-California are implementing a 60-day public scoping period to solicit input from the public, Native American tribes, sister state and federal agencies, and local agencies regarding the development and scope of the EIR/EIS. The scoping period will begin on September 10, 2020 and end on November 10, 2020. The CDFA and WS-California will be hosting two (2) virtual public scoping meetings (webinars) during the scoping period. These meetings will be held on October 13 and October 27 from 5:30 – 8:30 p.m. The CDFA and WS-California encourage agencies and members of the public to submit comments concerning the scope and contents of the EIR/EIS on or before November 10, 2020.

Following the close of scoping, CDFA and WS-California will jointly review and consider all comments and any other relevant materials to prepare a Draft EIR/EIS. The CDFA and WS-California will continue to consult with Native American tribes and public agencies (including responsible, trustee, and cooperating agencies) throughout the EIR/EIS drafting process. Upon completion of the Draft EIR/EIS, a notice announcing its availability and an opportunity to comment will be published in the Federal Register, the State Clearinghouse, County clerk offices, and on the EIR/EIS website ([www.CaliforniaWDM.org](http://www.CaliforniaWDM.org)). The CDFA and WS-California will also provide notice to any person that provided comments during the scoping period or that requested updates regarding the EIR/EIS. The Draft EIR/EIS will undergo public review for 60 days. The CDFA and WS-California will jointly review and respond to all written and oral comments received on the Draft EIR/EIS during the public review period to prepare the Final EIR/EIS.

To learn more about the scoping meetings, the EIR/EIS process, the wildlife damage management activities currently performed in California, and how to provide comments during the EIR/EIS process, please visit the California Wildlife Damage Management EIR/EIS website at: [www.CaliforniaWDM.org](http://www.CaliforniaWDM.org).

## CDFA's Wildlife Damage Management Program

### About

The CDFA's proposed WDMP would describe and formalize a framework for managing wildlife proving injurious to California's agricultural industry. The EIR/EIS will inform decision makers and the general public about the potential impacts of wildlife damage management activities that would be considered under the WDMP framework. Activities within this framework would be carried out by CDFA, California Counties, and WS-California, with collaboration and consultation from other local, state, and federal agencies. All activities to be conducted under the framework will be analyzed in and informed by the EIR/EIS.

### Authority

The CDFA is mandated to "promote and protect the agricultural industry of the state." This responsibility encompasses the prevention of wildlife damage to agriculture, livestock, and various agricultural and public infrastructure (roads, water conveyance structures, buildings, etc.). The CDFA proposes implementation of the WDMP to protect California's agriculture from damage caused by wildlife, to promote human health and safety, and protect natural resources.

### Objectives of the CDFA Wildlife Damage Management Program

The WDMP is intended to:

- ✓ Inform the implementation of wildlife damage management activities conducted by state and local agencies throughout California.
- ✓ Provide rapid response to high-risk wildlife damage scenarios to prevent harm to the agricultural industry, human health and safety, and natural resources.
- ✓ Support the development and implementation of measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate unintended impacts to California's important natural resources from wildlife management materials, technologies, and methods.
- ✓ Build upon existing resources, including WS-California's data reporting system, to develop a statewide information management, reporting, and data sharing system for wildlife damage incidents and management activities that will allow a robust evaluation of all management activities to support an integrated and adaptive wildlife damage management approach.

### Elements of the WDMP

The WDMP includes the following functional elements. Implementation of each element would be informed by the comprehensive environmental analysis included in the EIR/EIS.

- 1. Statewide Wildlife Management Protocols.** The CDFA shall develop guidelines and recommendations to inform and guide implementation of management activities conducted by CDFA and local agencies such as County Agricultural Commissioners (County-Level Activities).
- 2. County-Level Activities.** Participating Counties would continue to carry out most wildlife damage management activities at the local level, with the support of WS-California as mutually agreed, and will be able to work with and receive support from CDFA if they so desire.
- 3. Rapid Response.** The CDFA would respond to high-risk wildlife damage situations calling for rapid response activities (e.g., to address the introduction or spread of invasive species). The CDFA would do so in coordination and collaboration with the Counties, WS-California, and other state agencies.
- 4. Information Processing and Adaptive Management.** The CDFA and WS-California would collect data on wildlife damage management activities conducted throughout the state to evaluate the efficacy of those activities and consider changes in activities, materials, and methods that will improve their efficacy and prevent impacts on natural resources and the environment.
- 5. Program Education and CEQA Support.** The CEQA process for the WDMP would promote broader understanding and awareness about wildlife identification, biology, life history, damage impacts, and management activities.

# WS-California's Wildlife Damage Management Activities

## About

The WS-California uses an integrated approach to recommend and apply a range of legally available nonlethal and lethal techniques to manage wildlife damage and conflicts. The WS-California provides advice on wildlife damage prevention and management, information on sources of wildlife damage management materials, depredation investigations, training on the use of management methods, equipment loans (technical assistance), and assistance with the implementation of management methods (operational assistance). The WS-California conducts these activities both independently and jointly with federal and state agencies, California Counties, Native American tribes, and private landowners.

## Authority

Federal law authorizes WS-California to conduct a program of wildlife damage management services and to conduct activities for the control of (except for urban rodent control) nuisance mammals and birds, as well as mammals and birds that are reservoirs of zoonotic diseases. The WS-California is authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with California Counties, state and federal agencies, environmental groups, and other private and public groups to perform these activities and protect agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety.

## Objectives of WS-California's Wildlife Damage Management Activities

The WS-California currently uses an integrated wildlife damage management approach that is intended to:

- ✓ Implement standardized procedures for evaluating complaints of wildlife damage, undertaking management strategies, and evaluating the effectiveness of management strategies.
- ✓ Utilize USDA APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) national directives, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biological Opinions of WS actions, and WS-California policies to develop and implement measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to agriculture, natural resources, property, and human health and safety from wildlife control materials, technologies, and methods.
- ✓ Support the development and implementation of measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate unintended impacts to California's important natural resources from wildlife control materials, technologies, and methods.
- ✓ Build upon existing resources, including WS-California's data reporting system, to develop a statewide information management, reporting, and data sharing system for wildlife damage incidents and management activities that would allow a robust evaluation of all management activities to support an integrated and adaptive management approach.

## Elements of WS-California's Wildlife Damage Management Activities

The WS-California activities include the following functional elements in support of Wildlife Service's mission to protect agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety. Future implementation of each element would be informed by the comprehensive environmental analysis included in the EIR/EIS.

- 1. Cooperative Resource Protection.** The WS-California is authorized to enter into cost share agreements with California Counties and other land/resource owners to implement wildlife damage management activities that resolve or minimize wildlife damage impacting agriculture and property (including infrastructure). The WS-California provides various services under these agreements, including education, technical assistance, and direct control (including the deployment of trained personnel and specialized equipment).
- 2. Airport Wildlife Hazard Management.** The WS-California performs wildlife damage management activities pursuant to APHIS' Airport Wildlife Hazards Program to resolve wildlife conflicts that threaten the flying public's health and safety. The WS-California employs a network of trained and certified biologists that provide airport site visits and consultations, develop wildlife hazard assessments and wildlife hazard management plans, and conduct operational wildlife management on airfields.
- 3. Endangered Species Protection.** The WS-California works in collaboration with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), conservation organizations, and other land/resource managers to protect threatened and endangered wildlife and plants from the impacts of predation, invasive species, and disease.

- 4. Human Health and Safety.** The WS-California conducts wildlife damage management in protection of human health and safety. These activities include responding to wildlife that pose a risk to human health and safety through direct contact (e.g., bites/attacks) and disease transmission (e.g., zoonotic diseases and food contamination).
- 5. Invasive Species.** The WS-California works in collaboration with USFWS, CDFW, conservation organizations, and other land/resource owners to implement wildlife damage management activities to control the spread of invasive species and mitigate the impacts to California’s ecosystems, native wildlife, and other resources.

## Frequently Asked Questions



### **Will the public have the opportunity to provide input on the California Wildlife Damage Management EIR/EIS?**

Yes. As part of the CEQA/NEPA process, CDFA and WS-California will host virtual public meetings (webinars) and undertake a dedicated scoping period specifically for the CEQA/NEPA process. The scoping period will begin in September 2020.



### **Will the WDMP and EIR/EIS benefit Counties?**

Yes. The WDMP and EIR/EIS would provide Counties with information, technical assistance, and practical recommendations needed to undertake wildlife damage management activities in an effective and environmentally responsible manner. The EIR/EIS would also provide comprehensive environmental review for wildlife damage management activities conducted throughout the state, including those implemented, funded, or overseen by the Counties. Pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines, Counties would not need to perform additional CEQA review for county-level wildlife damage management activities that are “within the scope” of the EIR/EIS. CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(c)(2).



### **Will the wildlife damage management activities evaluated in the EIR/EIS benefit farmers and ranchers? And if so, how?**

Yes, the wildlife damage management activities evaluated in the EIR/EIS would provide farmers and ranchers with information and technical assistance to reduce wildlife conflicts and damage to agricultural products. In addition, private landowners and resource owners can contract with WS-California to perform wildlife damage management activities.



### **Will the wildlife damage management activities evaluated in the EIR/EIS benefit natural resources?**

Yes. The EIR/EIS process would support and facilitate the development and implementation of mitigation measures to avoid and minimize the effects of wildlife damage management activities on natural resources and native wildlife, and would promote protected, threatened and endangered species and their habitats.