



Working with Texas Wildlife Services: A County Extension Agent's Guide

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One of the most common wildlife-related calls that a County Extension Agent (CEA) will receive is related to damage caused by wild animals. Damage may include livestock depredation, structural damage, nuisances, or human health hazards. In any case, it is the role of the CEA to educate the public on their options, help connect them with appropriate resources, and act as a liaison of knowledge for the people. Beyond this, we must call upon partners to support our clients. As Extension, we know the value of unbiased, science-based information. Who do we send clients to for appropriate technical support of damage issues? The answer is simple: Texas Wildlife Services.

Working With Texas Wildlife Services: Who You Gonna Call?

In many Texas counties, local Wildlife Services technicians are available to help provide hands-on assistance to clients experiencing wildlife damage of any type, from livestock and crop loss to structural damage or human health concerns. In counties where a Wildlife Services technician is not physically located, Wildlife Services can provide telephone, written, or personal consultations to landowners as the conflict dictates. Wildlife Services is an excellent resource for CEAs looking to assist clients with wildlife damage issues or learn about proper methods of handling wildlife damage events.

Organization

Texas Wildlife Services is a cooperative program between the federal, state, and participating counties and landowner associations. On the federal side, Wildlife Services is an agency housed with the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Their stated mission is to provide support to U.S. citizens regarding managing wildlife damage, including threats to livestock, wildlife, and human health. Texas Wildlife Services is considered a State Cooperative Program authorized under the Health and Safety Code and is housed within Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Counties and landowner associations cooperate with the program through the Texas Wildlife Damage Management Association, contributing a cost-share for employees housed within the cooperating counties. By memorandum of understanding, the cooperative program is administered jointly, with the state director being a USDA employee.

Counties may have one or more technicians, depending on the level of local investment. Investment can come directly from county budgets, private association membership dues, or other organizations. Individuals or businesses paying into the program have the support of that technician at no additional cost. While advice (called "technical assistance" by Wildlife Services) is available to any citizen, technicians do not provide "direct control" (hands-on management) for citizens in non-cooperating counties. Government subdivisions (e.g., cities or counties) with genuine human safety concerns can receive assistance from Wildlife Services.

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In addition to cost-shared local technicians, Wildlife Services also has more experienced employees—called “troubleshooters”—who provide support when local staff is overwhelmed or when a county-level position is vacant. These individuals are state or federal employees designated to provide support in your region.

Who Can I Call For Help or Advice?

When damage issues arise in your county, it is wholly appropriate to seek the advice and support of the local Wildlife Services technician, more commonly referred to as a “government trapper” or “county trapper.” If you do not already know these individuals, call the appropriate Wildlife Services district supervisor for your county.

If your county no longer participates in the Texas Wildlife Services program, you may still refer clients to the district supervisor. There are many aspects upon which they can provide clarification and advice. Additionally, they can dispatch a troubleshooter to provide technical support for a fee.

Common Services

Feral Hog Control:

Wildlife Services staff are experts at the control of feral hogs through a variety of methods. Every year, over 30,000 feral hogs are removed by Texas Wildlife Services by ground trapping or aerial shooting. Technicians may ground trap pigs using snares, cage traps, or corral traps. Additionally, technicians may require the services of a Wildlife Services aerial



shooting crew to aid in rapid, large scale removal of feral hogs. This is one of the highest growth areas for Wildlife Services and a reason that every county should consider using this staff of experts.

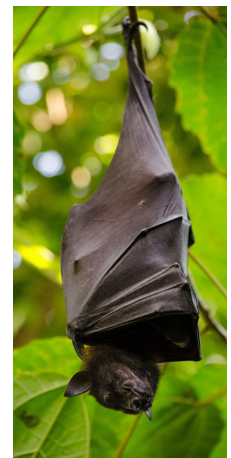


Predation Management:

Likely the most well-known service of Wildlife Services nationwide is the management of native carnivores for protecting agriculture, wildlife, and human health. Wildlife Services technicians employ a variety of trapping, shooting, and toxicant solutions to address these issues. Technicians also consult with clients about the identification of predators responsible for losses, based on forensic evidence from predated animals.

Bat Exclusion and Removal:

Managing bats can be tricky and is a common concern of clients encountering bats in homes, schools, businesses, and churches. As bats in buildings may present human health concerns, clients often wish to remove them without injuring the bats. Simply plugging a hole will likely result in the death of the pest, causing further health concerns from the decomposing bats. Wildlife Services staff can provide expertise in safely excluding and removing bats as well as assisting in the collection and testing of downed bats, which is often a sign of a rabies infection.



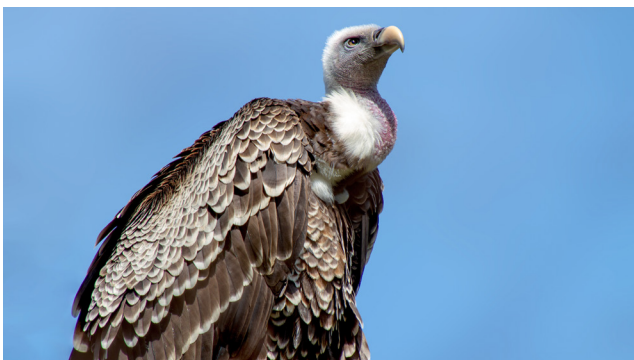


Beaver Removal and Exclusions:

Beavers can cause serious problems for landowners, municipalities, tree farmers, and agricultural producers through their ability to both destroy trees and flood land by building dams. Wildlife Services technicians can provide technical assistance in removing beavers from water structures, clearing dams, and protecting trees.

Migratory Bird Control:

Migratory birds, including vultures, hawks, eagles, and falcons are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. This law provided for the restoration of many migratory species, including migratory gamebirds. As such, individuals with damage from migratory bird species must seek permits to engage in lethal control. Wildlife Services staff can assist with documenting damage and providing permit applications. Additionally, they can employ a variety of non-lethal tools to prevent damage, many of which producers can easily use themselves after proper demonstrations by CEAs.



Human Safety Risks Associated with Wildlife:

Clients are increasingly aware of risks to human health and safety associated with wildlife. Risks include infectious diseases, such as rabies, among other things. Animals habituated to human activity and presence present a possibility of attack, especially in urban areas. Wildlife Services staff can provide consultation, technical solutions, and assistance to other agencies addressing such risks.

Capabilities and Limitations

Wildlife Services personnel have many abilities and resources to provide assistance. It is also important to understand the limits of these professional services. Whether limited due to time, funding, or regulation, understanding both capabilities and limitations will allow CEAs to make full use of this important partner agency.

Capabilities:

Wildlife Services employees are specialists in mitigating wildlife damage, including making recommendations for producer implemented non-lethal methods, designing and implementing a management strategy for a specific problem, or assisting in design to prevent the creation of a wildlife hazard or conflict. Wildlife Services provides on-site assessments, written advice, and telephone consultations as appropriate. There are approximately 180 field technicians and troubleshooters across Texas. These individuals may also be called upon to speak to clients at educational events, either in a classroom or field demonstration setting. Developing a relationship with your local Wildlife Services staff will help you best determine how to use their expertise to assist clients.

Limitations:

Wildlife Services does not generally provide “direct control” assistance where cost-share funding is not available. The exceptions include human safety concerns where a government subdivision has identified a wildlife-related risk. Wildlife Services does not

have the authority to enter a property without the written consent of the property's owner or manager. If the wildlife causing the problem resides on an adjacent property, Wildlife Services will attempt to obtain access, but they will not trespass on another's property without permission.

Like Extension, Wildlife Services offers science-based solutions to wildlife conflicts. Occasionally, a landowner may desire—or even insist on—a solution that has not been demonstrated to be safe or effective. While Wildlife Services negotiates with landowners on which methods can be used on their property, they will use their decision-making processes to find a solution. At times, this may not be the solution preferred by the landowner. For example, Wildlife Services would not cut down a tree with an eagle nest in it to discourage eagle depredations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will Wildlife Services...

Provide total, full-time control on a property?

Some resources (e.g., sheep and goats) require a greater degree of protection than others. Wildlife Services will implement resource protection consistent with the risk and will evaluate and adapt as circumstances dictate. However, full-time control is rarely utilized on any given property.

Trap within city limits?

Wildlife Services has the authority to implement management but evaluates the risks to nontarget wildlife and pets as part of its decision-making process. Traps may be set within city limits, but only if access is limited and no threat to nontarget wildlife is present.

Sell me M-44 devices or livestock protection collars?

Wildlife Services does not sell M-44 devices, capsules, or the livestock protection collar. Prospective

applicators need to check with the Pesticide Division of the Texas Department of Agriculture for license information and sources of supply. Wildlife Services does have access to some specific control materials which are manufactured by the Pocatello Supply Depot. Contact your local district supervisor for a specific request.

Remove the nuisance animals (squirrels, raccoons, etc.) from my attic?

In most Texas cities, nuisance wildlife control operators (NWCOs) are available to provide urban pest services. NWCOs also offer a wide range of services, such as removing droppings or repairing damage, which Wildlife Services does not offer. By federal statute, Wildlife Services is also prohibited from engaging in commensal rodent management.

Remove snakes from my property?

Snakes are an important part of ecosystems, and Wildlife Services does not regularly remove snakes from rural property. Urban specialists may remove snakes on a case-by-case basis if they pose a threat to human safety or if the snake is in danger. Snakes are usually relocated if a suitable site is available.

CEAs should strive to learn from every damage event they encounter to hone their skills for future incidents.

Whom to Contact

Texas Wildlife Services is arranged into eight districts, with a state headquarters in San Antonio. District supervisors oversee technicians and troubleshooters in their area of responsibility and act as a dispatcher for damage management needs. For support in your area, start by finding your corresponding district on the map on the next page, then contact the appropriate district supervisor.



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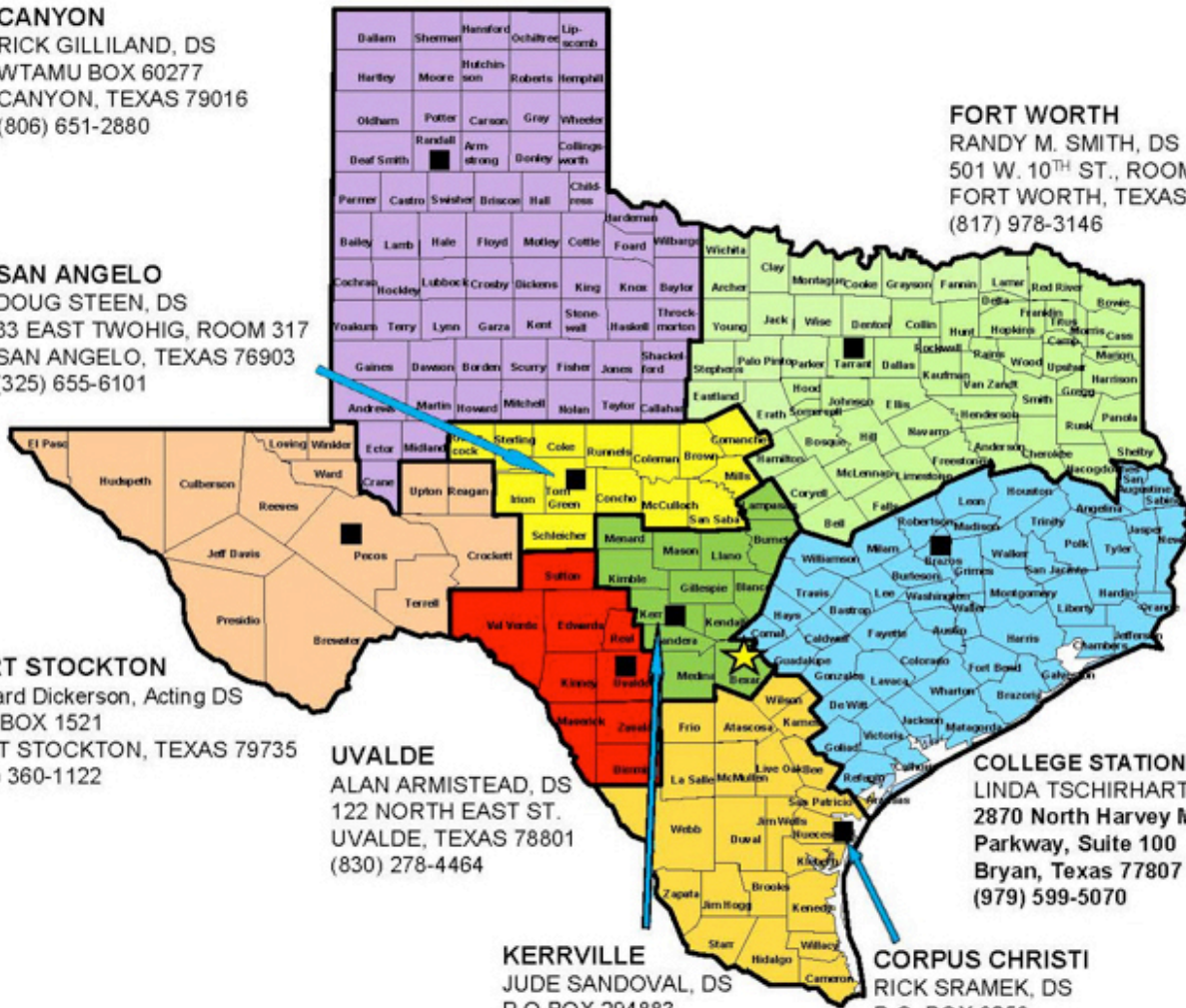
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■ **DISTRICT OFFICES**

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