

Wildlife Services

Protecting People
Protecting Agriculture
Protecting Wildlife

Factsheet

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Mobile Rabies Command Post



Wildlife Services (WS), a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts that threaten the Nation's agricultural and natural resources, human health and safety, and property.

An integral part of the WS mission is providing assistance in wildlife disease management, which includes rabies carried by wildlife.

Rabies is one of the oldest known viral diseases. It presents a significant challenge as it links issues concerning wildlife, domestic animals, and public health management. According to the Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 90 percent of rabies cases reported in the United States each year are found in wildlife. The cost of living with rabies in the United States is estimated to exceed \$300 million annually, including the use of domestic-animal vaccinations, postexposure treatments for bite victims, and prevention programs. Oral rabies vaccination of wildlife is a key component of Federal and State cooperative rabies management programs. The goal of this multi-State effort is to stop the spread of this deadly disease.

The WS program is charged with providing leadership to alleviate or minimize wildlife damage to agriculture, property, and natural resources. Other integral parts of WS' mission include protecting people from health and safety threats posed by wildlife and providing assistance in wildlife disease management.

WS has a long history of involvement with State, local, and other Federal agencies in the campaign to directly control the spread of rabies in the United States. These partnerships form the basis for coordinated rabies control programs and provide the tools needed to stop the spread of rabies.

Mobile Rabies Command Post

The mobile rabies command post is one tool the WS' National Rabies Management Program uses to manage rabies in wildlife. Operated by WS, the mobile unit is equipped with advanced technology to help coordinate aerial distribution of rabies vaccines. This one-of-a-kind vehicle, built to WS' specifications, provides continuity of operations where specialists are working to control wildlife rabies.

The command post is a self-sufficient mobile office that provides WS personnel and cooperators with seven workstations and a 40-foot-long work area that is 12 feet wide.



Oral rabies vaccination (ORV) operations require the use of fixed-wing and rotary aircraft to effectively and efficiently distribute oral vaccines over large rural areas. Coordinated vaccine placement is crucial to increase the likelihood of wildlife finding and ingesting the matchbox-sized, vaccine-filled baits.

Accurately tracking flights is critical for providing crew safety and for ensuring that vaccines are distributed in prime wildlife habitat. The mobile command post is equipped with a separate flight-following station designed to track aircraft movement through radio communication and global positioning system (GPS) technology. On an average workday, WS distributes about 300,000 oral rabies baits. In a single year, the mobile command post may track approximately 150,000 flight miles, the equivalent of circling the world almost six times.

WS frequently conducts ORV programs in remote rural areas, where communication networks are weak or absent. To address this challenge, the unit is equipped with a retractable, 50-foot transmission tower to receive clear communication signals without interference.

In addition, the command post is equipped with a meteorological station and satellite television for weather and news updates. The aircraft distributing baits fly at an altitude of 500 feet, making weather an important consideration when coordinating flight schedules.

It is also a self-sufficient mobile office that provides WS personnel and cooperators with seven workstations and a 40-foot-long work area, along with additional storage that makes the overall length of the trailer 53 feet. Traveling about 10,000 miles annually, the entire

unit is deployed using a 250-horsepower diesel-powered truck that requires a professional driver.

The mobile command unit is equipped with: hard-wired telephone lines; two-way satellite communication; backup power provided by a 25-kilowatt onboard generator; geographic information systems (GIS)-capable computers; seven networked stations for access to Internet and printing; large-format color printer; and refrigerator, microwave, storage cabinets, and a heating/cooling system.

Emergency Response Trailer

In addition to the mobile command unit, WS has a trailer designed to provide equipment, laboratory space, and communication infrastructure to assist with wildlife rabies outbreaks. The 16-foot trailer can be dispatched to serve as a Biosafety Level 2 laboratory to conduct real-time rabies surveillance and testing. A Biosafety Level 2 laboratory is suitable for work involving biologically active viruses, such as rabies, that pose a moderate potential hazard. The laboratory can be sealed off to maintain a sterile environment. Biological samples can be stored in the unit's refrigerator/freezer. An office workstation wired for telephone and Internet facilitates immediate communication capabilities in the event of a rabies outbreak.

Additional Information

For more information, please visit the National Rabies Management Program's Web site at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/rabies/index.html, or call 1-866-4-USDA-WS to contact your WS State office.



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