

This estimated loss would be two to three times higher if WS did not use nonlethal harassment methods to reduce predation. Two bird species, the double-crested cormorant and the American white pelican, are responsible for most damage to the aquaculture industry in Mississippi. Populations of both species have increased over the last decade.

A tremendous amount of research has been conducted on fish-eating bird problems through NWRC's research station in Starkville, MS. Currently, research is being done using satellite telemetry to track cormorant movements within their flyways. Data from this study will be used to assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in developing a population management strategy for double-crested cormorants.

In addition, WS conducts aerial surveys of cormorant night roosts in the Mississippi delta every two weeks, from October through April. Areas of heavy cormorant concentrations are noted and aquaculture producers close to these locations are notified, so they can plan appropriate harassment activities. WS specialists also educate producers about nonlethal harassment methods to disperse other species of fish-eating birds, and when necessary, help producers obtain depredation permits from FWS. WS has also begun to survey American white pelicans from the ground and the air, in order to help producers plan ahead for harassment activities.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species—Although black bears were thought to have been almost extinct in Mississippi, over the last 10 years, sightings of these animals have been on the rise along with damage caused by them. WS assists the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks and FWS to resolve damage and other problems associated with bears. In cooperation with WS, Mississippi State University has completed numerous studies regarding black bears.

Most bear issues are handled using nonlethal methods such as harassment and electric fence exclusion. Using these approaches, WS assists the Mississippi Bee Keepers Association with problem bears around their hives. The program also helps private citizens who experience bear damage to their property and crops. WS is actively involved with the Mississippi Black Bear Restoration Task Force and the Black Bear Conservation Committee. Recently, WS efforts have focused on educating the public about bears.

Looking to the Future

There are several issues that are emerging within the State as wildlife populations continue to grow and thrive in Mississippi. Feral hogs are damaging greater quantities of agricultural crops. In addition, pseudorabies, a swine disease, poses a greater threat to the domestic hog industry as numbers of feral swine climb. Canada Geese that have taken up residence in urban areas are also becoming a growing concern for property owners, as are black bears. Concern over wildlife-borne diseases such as rabies and West Nile virus (WNV) is increasing as well. Mississippi WS has begun working with the Mississippi Department of Health to monitor for both rabies and WNV. Finally, as the Mississippi Gulf Coast becomes increasingly developed with resorts and casinos, it is expected that wildlife will be displaced from their natural habitats and become a greater nuisance to humans.

Mississippi Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

