

Integrated Wildlife Damage Management

History

For those of you that aren't aware, Mendocino County was sued back in 2015 by the Animal Legal Defense Fund and affiliated groups challenging the county's findings that their cooperative service agreement with the California USDA Wildlife Services office to administer the county integrated wildlife damage management (IWDM) program was exempt from CEQA. For this reason, in 2016 the county reached a settlement agreement with the challenging entities and suspended their contract with Wildlife Services and ceased to provide a wildlife damage management program. The Wildlife Services office did independently continue to provide some wildlife damage management services within the county until October of 2018. Since October of 2018, there have been no Wildlife Services staff available to assist with wildlife interaction issues in Mendocino County.

The county has had a contract with USDA wildlife services since 1989 but had varied forms of wildlife management programs in place since 1919. The cost share agreement with USDA is 2/3 county and 1/3 USDA for the two Wildlife Services employees that were working in Mendocino County prior to the lawsuit.

Recent Actions

In 2018-2019, the county developed the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in relation to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the integrated wildlife damage management program. The Board of Supervisors, at their meeting on December 17th, approved the following actions.

- 1) To certify the final EIR and related findings per CEQA requirements for the Integrated Wildlife Damage Management program.
- 2) To adopt an Integrated Wildlife Damage Management program including the authorization for the agricultural commissioner to bring back a cooperative service agreement with Wildlife Services at a later date.

As part of the second motion there was a direction to county staff to plan to place information on a webpage, most likely on the agricultural department website, related to wildlife management and various information sources related to living with wildlife, proactive measures that can be taken to reduce wildlife impacts and other non-lethal resources.

Moving Forward

Mendocino County Farm Bureau supports the Board of Supervisors decision to reinstate the cooperative service agreement with Wildlife Services. Through this agreement the IWDM program can continue to use both non-lethal and lethal means in order to assist property owners, businesses, private citizens and other agencies in resolving wildlife damage issues. Non-lethal technical assistance is needed and often helps to improve wildlife damage situations, but there are times when lethal alternatives are required. Limiting a IWDM program to only non-lethal options is a disservice to the residents of the county who could face situations with wildlife damage that are unresolvable without a lethal option administered by a trained professional such as Wildlife Services staff.

The direction from the Board of Supervisors to make additional information available to the public related to wildlife management and interaction is also supported. Mendocino County is a large, rural county and the overlap with wildlife habitat and territory is something that needs to be acknowledged. Residents should be proactive and work to reduce the number of negative interactions with wildlife to the best of their ability. For additional resources, MCFB has also recently added some information related to wildlife interaction on our website, <https://www.mendofb.org/resources/>