

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 24 APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON ONE HEALTH

SUBJECT MATTER: Increased Fiscal Year 2026 Funding for the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services National Rabies Management Program to Enhance Rabies Surveillance, Oral Rabies Vaccination Programs in Urban Landscapes and Request the Restocking of an Oral Bait/Vaccine Bank

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS), National Rabies Management Program (NRMP) has demonstrated that strategic implementation of cooperative oral rabies vaccination (ORV) programs targeting wildlife are cost-effective in reducing rabies transmission to protect human and animal health and reduce the cost of living with rabies. The World Organization for Animal Health determined that the most effective strategy to control terrestrial rabies targets the sources of infection (i.e., wildlife vector populations) with landscape scale control efforts. ORV programs are designed to immunize targeted wildlife species by increasing the percentage of rabies-immune animals within vaccination zones, resulting in the reduction of rabies cases, prevention of viral spread (Phase 1 goal of the NRMP), and eventual elimination of the raccoon rabies virus variant (Phase 2 goal of the NRMP). Since 1995, a comprehensive raccoon rabies management strategy has been cooperatively developed with federal, state, provincial and local partners for the elimination of the raccoon rabies virus variant in the United States (US) and Canada. The NRMP requested and received emergency Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds that can be spent over 2-3 years. The funds total approximately \$18.8 million in balances from prior USDA-APHIS emergencies to address current raccoon rabies outbreaks in multiple states, establish a sufficient stockpile of rabies vaccine baits for current and limited future use, and address current emerging, high-risk cases of rabies. In the US, more than 90 percent of the annual reported rabies cases occur in wildlife. The NRMP controls and eliminates rabies virus variants in terrestrial carnivore populations to protect human and animal health. The primary raccoon rabies management area includes thirteen eastern states. Management efforts in these states have prevented the spread of raccoon rabies beyond the eastern seaboard and to Canada by establishing an ORV zone from Maine to Ohio along the Canadian border and from Ohio to Alabama. USDA-

APHIS, National Wildlife Research Center estimates that these actions help avoid more than \$58 million in annual raccoon rabies costs. The NRMP also collaborates with the Texas Department of State Health Services to maintain an ORV zone along the border of Texas and Mexico to prevent the reemergence of canine rabies into the United States. Contingency actions are considered an emergency because a timely management response is essential to reduce the risk of further rabies spread that could require a significantly more costly response. Contingency actions include doubling vaccine bait density (increased to 150/km² versus standard bait density of 75/km²) and distributing baits twice per year (spring and fall) for three consecutive years to restore the integrity of the ORV zone. USDA-APHIS receives approximately \$28 million in annual funding through the Wildlife Damage Management line item each year for these management activities. Funding has remained flat for the past eight years (aside from small increases in employee pay costs) while fixed costs continue to increase. USDA-APHIS has been able to support contingency actions in recent years using appropriated funding, but increasing operating costs, the depletion of the previously existing bait storage, and an increasing number of contingency actions has depleted these available resources. The \$18.8 million available will address the immediate need in high-risk areas in Maine, Vermont, and Alabama; establish a sufficient stockpile of baits for current use; and address emerging cases of rabies in six states. This emergency transfer will prevent the current spread of the raccoon rabies virus. If no action is taken to increase the annual appropriation, USDA-APHIS-WS anticipates an increased likelihood of disease spread and negative impacts to human and animal health and safety, jeopardizing the investment of over \$500 million since 1995 to prevent the spread of the raccoon rabies virus variant.

The NRMP has been level funded since 2018. The requested funding of \$38 million will allow USDA to:

- Continue, refine, and improve the enhanced rabies surveillance program including support of a Wildlife Services Biologist to conduct 5,000 to 7,000 rabies field tests each year (8% of all rabies testing in the US)
- Implement contingency actions in response to rabid animals in sensitive areas
- Increase management of high risk spread corridors mostly involving urban-suburban habitats with high raccoon density
- Provide additional aviation support including both fixed-wing and helicopter to enhance existing ORV zones and refine baiting strategies in key areas of the ORV and in targeted habitats
- Continue Phase 1 of the NRMP to maintain existing ORV programs to control rabies and prevent spread in wildlife populations
- Continue the evaluation of novel and U.S.-licensed vaccines and baits
- Continue studies related to rabies control in skunks, mongoose, and vampire bats
- Enhance the operations of Phase 2 of the NRMP, to eliminate the raccoon rabies virus variant in the US
- Replenish a critically needed vaccine bank for contingency use

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) requests the 121st Congress to appropriate a minimum of \$38 million annually for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS), National Rabies Management Program (NRMP) and requests USDA- APHIS-WS enhance wildlife rabies surveillance and replenish a critical oral rabies vaccine bank for contingency use by the NRMP. USAHA also requests the American Veterinary Medical Association engage members of Congress and stakeholders on the impacts of wildlife rabies vaccination efforts on human and animal health.