UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

2026 Resolution

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RESOLUTION NUMBER: 12 APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON ONE HEALTH

SUBJECT MATTER: Fiscal Year 2028 Funding for the National Rabies Management Program, United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services to Maintain Rabies Surveillance, Oral Rabies Vaccination Programs, and Rabies Case Reporting

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) requests that the 120th Congress appropriate a minimum of $38 million annually to the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services, for the National Rabies Management Program. USAHA further urges Congress and other stakeholders to maintain funding at levels sufficient to support continued rabies surveillance and management efforts in the United States.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Rabies is the most lethal zoonotic disease worldwide, with a human case-fatality rate of approximately 100 percent. In the United States (US), the virus persists in wildlife reservoir species, with spillover into humans and domestic animals. It is the only disease globally proven to be preventable at scale through repeated vaccination of humans, domestic animals, and wildlife.

The National Rabies Management Program (NRMP), administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS), has demonstrated that the strategic implementation of cooperative, multistate oral rabies vaccination (ORV) programs targeting wildlife reservoir species in the US is cost-effective in reducing rabies virus transmission. These efforts protect human and animal health and lower the cost of living in geographic areas affected by wildlife rabies.

In the US, more than 90 percent of annually reported rabies cases occur in wildlife. ORV programs are designed to immunize targeted wildlife species by increasing the percentage of rabies-immune wild animals within vaccination zones. This results in a reduction in wildlife rabies cases and spillover into domestic species, thereby preventing viral spread (Phase 1 goal of the NRMP) and ultimately leading to the geographical elimination of

specific rabies virus variants (Phase 2 goal of the NRMP). Since 1995, this comprehensive rabies management strategy has been cooperatively developed with federal, state, provincial, and local partners to prevent the spread of the raccoon rabies virus variant.

The primary raccoon rabies management area of USDA-APHIS-WS-NRMP includes regions within 13 eastern states. Management efforts in these states have prevented the further spread of raccoon rabies beyond the eastern seaboard by establishing an ORV zone from Maine to Ohio along the Canadian border and from Ohio to Alabama. The USDA-APHIS-WS National Wildlife Research Center estimates that these actions help avoid more than $58 million in annual raccoon rabies-related costs.

The USDA-APHIS-WS-NRMP also collaborates with the Texas Department of State Health Services to conduct an annual ORV program along the Texas-Mexico border that eliminated the dog-coyote rabies variant and the Texas gray fox rabies variant from the US. In 2027, baiting efforts in Texas will include a new ORV zone in central Texas near San Antonio and Austin targeting a new rabies virus variant emerging in gray foxes.

The USDA-APHIS-WS-NRMP has been essentially level-funded since 2018 at approximately $28 million annually, while both expected costs, such as personnel salaries and benefits, and unexpected costs have continued to rise. Examples of unexpected cost increases in Fiscal Year (FY)26 include a 7 percent increase in ORV bait costs (approximately $386,000), a 13% increase in helicopter distribution costs (approximately $64,000), and a 57 percent increase in Jet-A fuel costs for fixed-wing bait distribution (approximately $319,000). Fuel costs alone are expected to increase considerably in FY27.

As costs continue to rise without corresponding increases in funding, fewer USDA-APHIS-WS-NRMP resources can be devoted to critical rabies prevention measures, such as vaccine bait distribution, potentially resulting in a higher incidence of rabies in endemic areas. Without corresponding increases in annual appropriations in line with rising operational costs, USDA-APHIS-WS-NRMP anticipates a heightened risk of wildlife rabies transmission, which could lead to additional cases in humans and domestic animals and pose a threat to human health and safety.

The requested $38 million in funding for USDA-APHIS-WS would help ensure that US rabies control efforts remain functional and effective as a critical public safety network for rabies prevention and surveillance. This funding would support USDA-APHIS-WS personnel conducting enhanced rabies surveillance, personnel training, rabies laboratory testing, ORV bait distribution, and field responses to rabid animals detected in critical at-risk areas. It would also support the USDA-APHIS-WS-NRMP Phase 2 operational goal of eliminating the raccoon rabies virus variant from the US.