

Cooperative Efforts to Reduce Wildlife Strike Hazards at Westover Air Reserve Base, Chicopee, MA

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BACKGROUND

On January 31, 1991 a Westover ARB C-5A Galaxy bound for Saudi Arabia struck a flock of Herring gulls at approximately 100 AGL. The #3 and #4 engines were shut down, fuel was jettisoned, and an emergency landing was made with no injuries. This birdstrike occurred at the height of Desert Storm operations, when a record number of flights at Westover ARB were documented. Due to the severity of the birdstrike and the resulting damage to the aircraft, and the risk to human safety, USDA/WS conducted a one-year wildlife hazard assessment. The purpose of the assessment was to identify all attractants on and around the base to reduce the potential hazards to aircraft. On Base, several habitat types were identified as the major wildlife attractant; and seasonal grass management was recommended as the primary habitat management technique. A high birdstrike potential existed at that time associated with the five active landfills within ten thousand feet of the runways. These landfills were identified as the primary off-base attractants, and bird harassment programs were recommended and developed at each.

Since May of 1991, USDA/Wildlife Services has been a fixture at Westover ARB through the annual renewal of a Cooperative Service Agreement to assist with Westover ARB's BASH program by managing wildlife hazards on Base. Damage management activities have become more developed through the years from identifying potential hazards on and off base to actively reducing risk through recommendations for habitat management and exclusion, and operational management activities.



In coordination with the Cooperative Service Agreement to manage wildlife hazards at Westover Air Reserve Base, USDA/Wildlife Services further supports the BASH program by assisting three landfills, two golf courses, and additional off-base entities with their development of control programs, providing technical assistance, and conducting monitoring, and/or operational management activities.

A. LANDFILLS

Of the five landfills identified as hazardous to Westover Air Reserve Base operations in the early 1990s, only three remain active today. In 1994, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection put into place a "No Gull Feeding Policy" at landfills in an effort to protect drinking water quality at reservoirs across the state. Due to both the DEP's regulation and the control efforts of the landfills, gulls are rarely found on the landfills, and are no longer the most predominant birds of concern at these locations. American crows, European starling, and pigeons were of highest concern, until a September 2002 Class C turkey vulture strike to a USMC KC-130. USDA/Wildlife Services recommended that the landfills' deprecation permits be amended to include turkey vultures. As Subpermittee on the landfills' deprecation permits, USDA/WS conducts bird harassment and operational management activities at two landfills through a Cooperative Service Agreement with Waste Management. USDA/WS provides technical assistance to all three landfills, and assists with annual permit changes and renewals. All landfills surrounding Westover ARB are actively involved in the BASH program, and are represented at quarterly meetings.



C. CHICOPEE MEMORIAL STATE PARK

USDA/Wildlife Services began regular surveillance of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's Chicopee Memorial State Park in the spring of 2004, when a Great blue heron rookery was discovered in a beaver swamp within the park. Adjacent to Westover Air Reserve Base to the south, herons often crossed base to feed at a lake to the north. The size and slow flight of the herons caused much concern on base. Because of the location of the nests within a state park, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and the DCR would not permit the removal of nests or felling of trees. On base, USDA/WS increased harassment of the herons, and amended the base deprecation permit to allow the take of five herons. A portion of the swamp was located on the Chicopee Country Club's property, and was threatening to flood the golf course. The country club hired trappers to remove beaver and installed a water flow device beneath the dam, which allowed the swamp to drain and return to a narrow stream. A spring 2006 survey of the rookery revealed a beaver meadow, a small stand of remaining snags, and few inactive heron nests. USDA/Wildlife Services and Westover ARB Civil Engineering have discussed BASH concerns with the DCR.



B. GOLF COURSES

USDA/Wildlife Services has identified two golf courses as areas of concern due to their prime waterfowl habitat which attracts nesting Canada geese annually. The Westover Golf Course, formerly owned by Westover ARB, now owned by the Town of Ludlow, and the Chicopee Country Club in Chicopee are both adjacent properties to Westover ARB and are monitored by USDA/Wildlife Services regularly. USDA/WS assisted the Westover Golf Course with acquiring its first deprecation permit in 2003 for Canada goose nest treatment and control, and is listed as Subpermittee to provide additional assistance, if required. USDA/WS assists with annual deprecation permit reporting and renewals. Technical assistance is provided to the Chicopee Country Club, and Canada goose nest removal has been conducted by USDA/WS. Both golf courses are actively involved with Westover ARB's BASH program and attend regular meetings.



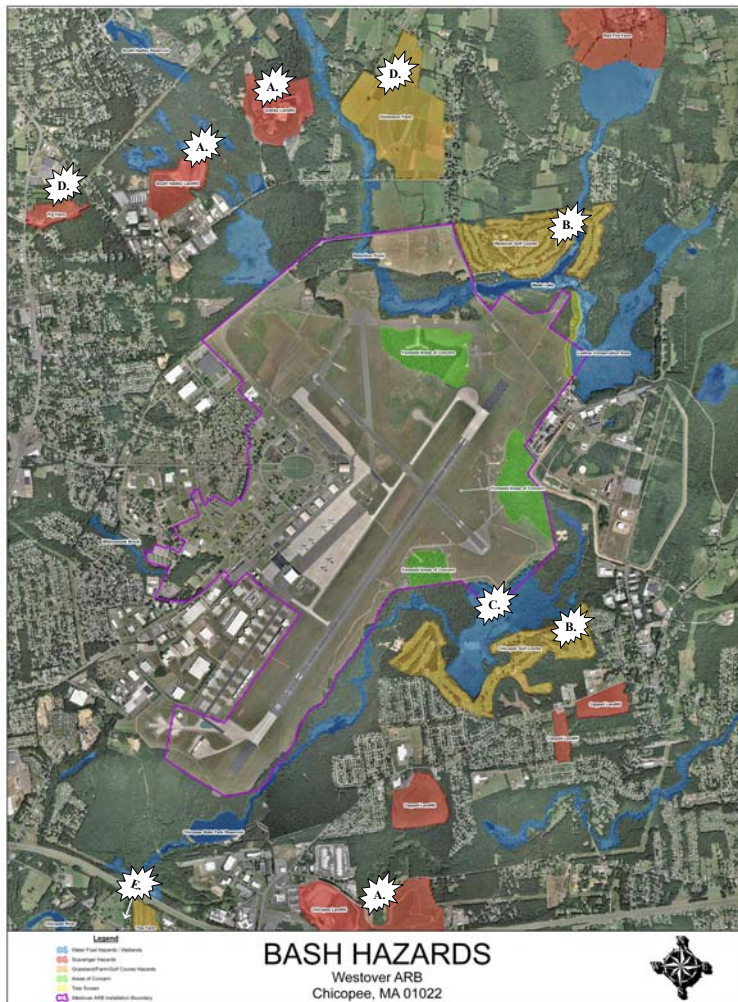
D. AGRICULTURAL USE AREAS

USDA/Wildlife Services conducts monitoring of two farms; a commercial, a four-hundred acre fruit and vegetable farm on the east side of base, and a pig farm to the north. USDA/WS monitors both several times per month for bird activity. The fruit farm draws hundreds of starling and cowbirds in the summer and crows, gulls, and geese in the winter and spring. Just south of the Granby landfill, the fields are a common staging area for gulls and crows in the winter months. While the farm employs IPM methods such as scary eyes and netting, USDA/WS received permission to harass birds from the property. The landowners prefer that no birds are killed and do not wish to have a deprecation permit. The farm is open to the public for strawberry and blueberry picking, which makes starting harassment difficult during the summer. Although USDA/WS has provided the pig farm with technical assistance, the landowners are also not interested in deprecation permits for turkey vulture or gull control.



E. WINTER CROW ROOST

The city of Springfield, just south of Westover Air Reserve Base (off map) attracts a crow roost of 15,000+ birds each winter. The crows disperse each morning to feed in open areas throughout Western Massachusetts; the Westover ARB airfield draws thousands of crows daily. USDA/WS conducted crow removal in downtown Springfield in 1998, and provided technical assistance on roost dispersal to the city in 2003. In the winter of 2004, USDA/WS provided twelve cannons to Westover ARB for use on the field to assist with the crow harassment.



I have to give credit where credit is due- to the entire MA WS program for their assistance in "my backyard". Also much thanks to the folks that make it happen- Ops Group, SE, CE and the BASH Team, for all of their assistance (especially with AFSAS!). A special thanks to Pete- I'm kicking myself over those Red Sox tickets!