



Hiring a Wildlife Damage Control Company

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is legislatively mandated to preserve, protect, and perpetuate wildlife. They also have the responsibility to assure that individual animals do not pose a threat to human safety or create unreasonable damage to crops, livestock, or property.

The expanding human population and the habitat alteration (or loss) accompanying it are resulting in a progressive increase in the frequency of wildlife/human conflicts. As a result, each year WDFW receives thousands of calls from citizens seeking advice on how to deal with unwanted wild animals. Although laws give citizens substantive latitude to deal with problems, many are either unwilling or unable to handle human/wildlife conflicts.

In addition to its staff, WDFW call on the help of private citizens who have skills and training in the capture and handling of many wildlife species that commonly generate wildlife complaints. Typically these individuals are referred to as "NWCOS" (nuisance wildlife control operators) or simply "trappers." There are approximately 180 NWCOS throughout the state. Although they must be licensed through WDFW, and conform to its regulations, they are not state employees. They operate as private enterprises and set their own fees.

Under the authority of their permit, wildlife control operators are able to trap, capture, and transport animals for relocation year-round.

The WDFW website and its regional wildlife offices continue to provide technical advice and/or informational pamphlets on request to citizens who are experiencing wildlife problems. Wildlife control operators, however, provide direct assistance to landowners who are willing to pay for the cost of licensed and trained individuals to resolve their wildlife problems.

While many conflicts can be solved with information about an animal's activities, or by adopting a more tolerant stance or doing some repair work, wildlife control operators are recommended for work that poses health or safety hazards. Examples include removing a large accumulation of droppings, or removing a mother and/or her young from a precarious location.

To find a wildlife control operator, contact your regional WDFW office for names of companies or individuals that specialize in wildlife control work in your area. You may also look under "Animal Control," "Pest Control" or "Wildlife" in your local phone directory.

The wildlife control business is a new industry and companies vary widely in expertise and professionalism. How do you tell whom you're dealing with? Follow these guidelines to choose a company that suits your needs:

- Does the representative appear to be professional and care about their work, the animals involved, and your concerns?
- Does the person appear knowledgeable and take the time to explain not only what the source of the problem is, but also its causes and potential solutions?
- Is the person licensed by the state, and bonded or insured against any incidental damage that might occur?
- Is the person willing to give you names and phone numbers of satisfied customers?
- Does the person try to scare you with talk about wildlife diseases or dangerous animals, or do they simply make you aware that you need to be cautious when dealing with wildlife to avoid the risk of infection?
- Are the procedures to be used simply and concisely explained? (**Note:** Under permit, mandatory euthanization of certain species may be required. Call your regional WDFW office for current requirements.)
- Does the person have more than one recommendation to resolve the problem—including nonlethal solutions?

- Does this person's approach to the problem include making sure it does not reoccur? This should include a discussion of needed structural repairs or changes and ways you should alter your own habits (e.g., birdfeeder or trash maintenance).
- Is any part of the work guaranteed? Although the kind of guarantee will vary depending upon the species involved and the type of work being performed, getting a guarantee suggests the person might be in business long enough to back it.
- Does this person offer a written contract? This is a must!
- Does the person provide a variety of pricing options to fit your budget? For example, can you share in the work by checking cage traps to save trips to your home?
- Ask the person who is responsible for checking the traps how often the traps are to be checked. (The correct answer is that the traps must be checked daily, including weekends and holidays. If you must check the traps, then the trapper must be available to remove the trapped animals.)

And, finally but importantly:

- Just because a company charges a lot of money for its services doesn't necessarily mean that it is better or more reputable than other companies. Be cautious of low quotes; you often get what you pay for.
- Discuss the situation with someone else and do the math to make your own estimate of what you are going to pay per hour for the job. Consider the following: How dangerous is the job? (Ladder work is always dangerous.) How much travel and equipment is involved to resolve the problem? (If the person has to travel 20 miles one-way to reach your location, they will need to get paid for the time both ways.) Also consider how expensive it is to live in your area, and what kind of warranty or guarantee the company gives.
- Be wary of a company that requires all the money up front. Any reputable company should be satisfied with 50 percent down and the remaining amount due upon completion of the job.
- Be in control of all your negotiations and do not be pressured into buying the service. If it just doesn't feel right, take your business elsewhere.

Adapted from "Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest" (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living.htm>)

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