



NOT-SO-NEW WORLD INVADER

More than 60 years after New World screwworms were eradicated in Texas, could the flesh-eating flies return?

By Diane Meyer

The distant hum of a light transport aircraft reached a crescendo as it roared above a pasture near Fort McKavett. A trail of small boxes followed in its wake, descending upon live oaks dotting the countryside below.

The falling cargo promised much needed reprieve from an unrelenting endemic enemy: the New World screwworm.

Similar to the common blow fly, the NWS species has a critical distinction denoted in its scientific name *Cochliomyia hominivorax*, meaning “eater of humans.” Instead of infesting dead tissue, NWS feed on living tissue of all warm-blooded mammals, including humans, livestock and wildlife.

Airborne boxes were always a welcome sight to a then-30-something Jimmie Powell and the cowboys of Six Mile Ranch.

On each release, about half a million sterile male NWS flies would swarm the area, ready to mate with female flies within a few miles of the drop zone. USDA scientists developed this form of genetic control, known as the sterile insect technique, in the early 1950s.

By 1959, the program had eradicated screwworms from the southeastern states, and efforts to rid the Southwest of the fly began about three years later.

During that time, NWS infestations cost the region's producers an estimated \$50 million to \$100 million annually. Growing up, Powell remembers riding horseback from sunup to sundown, checking cattle, sheep and goats for open wounds and infections.

“We were losing about 7% of our livestock to the screwworm,” he recollects. “If you missed a case, it didn’t take very long for that case to get bad, and the animal would lose health because of infection.”

Powell, a Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association past president who was instrumental in leading the state's eradication initiatives from 1962 to 1966, still cites screwworms as the biggest challenge he has faced as a rancher.

“I just can’t imagine anybody allowing the screwworm problem to go again like it was,” he says.

In the early 1960s, planes crisscrossed the Texas skies releasing boxes containing sterile male flies, which joined ranchers in the fight against NWS. Photo courtesy of the USDA Agricultural Research Service and National Agricultural Library.

In 2001, North America was declared screwworm-free after decades of sterile fly releases drove the wild population to the Darién Gap at the Panama-Colombia border. Reported cases spiked throughout Panama starting in April 2022, but did not trigger alarm.

Wayne Cockrell, a Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association director and chair of the cattle health and well-being committee, says such instances were not unusual, given that the incessant pests are rampant in South America, and that cattle movement is growing in previously uninhabited regions.

But over dinner during a routine visit to Panama in August 2024, Cockrell was stunned to learn screwworms had infiltrated Honduras. In the following months, efforts from USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service ramped up to slow the fly's spread across Central America. Unease peaked Nov. 22, 2024, when the agency announced a temporary suspension of "the importation of live animals originating from or transiting Mexico" after an NWS-infected cow was discovered at a checkpoint in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas near Guatemala.

In early February, at time of press, imports had resumed and screwworms remained thousands of miles south of the U.S. border.

"This is not a panic situation, to be clear," Cockrell assures cattle raisers, "but we do have serious concerns."

POTENTIAL HURDLES

While agricultural groups and governments are united in combating screwworms, Cockrell says much has changed since the eradication efforts of the '50s and '60s.

His first concern is the fall of the well-established geographical barrier at the Darién Gap. For more than 20 years, the region's impenetrable jungle has served as a natural line of defense against NWS, supported by sterile fly production at the Commission for the Eradication and Prevention of Screwworm, commonly known as COPEG, facility in Pacora, Panama.

The USDA and Panama's Ministry of Agricultural Development jointly fund COPEG, the only NWS pupae sterilization facility in North America, which normally produces 20 million sterile flies weekly. While it is now producing more than 100 million flies due to the current outbreak, Cockrell points out previous requirements peaked at 500 million flies per week.

Additionally, he shares, the massive sterile fly quotas needed to combat the current spread will rely on an untested strain. This new strain is a more aggressive breeder than the original, but it has yet to prove its aptitude in breeding copious amounts of wild female flies.

Next on his list of concerns is where more flies can be produced, and how many.



The COPEG facility in Pacora, Panama, is producing more than 100 million sterile NWS flies weekly to combat the ongoing outbreak in Central America. Courtesy photo.

Phillip Kaufman, Ph.D., professor and head of Texas A&M University's department of entomology, echoes Cockrell's concerns regarding the challenges of building additional facilities to accelerate sterile fly yield.

First, the building needs to be constructed as a quarantine facility to contain viable female flies, which are necessary for developing eggs to sustain fly production. To prevent flies from escaping, the facility must be constructed as an arthropod containment unit, which is both complex and costly.

The production process requires a high volume of high-quality water to maintain the maturing flies' artificial diets, which can be difficult to source. Additionally, the sterilization process involves irradiating the flies with cobalt, which presents safety and security challenges. Because USDA APHIS is the regulatory arm throughout the process, their personnel would need to oversee such operations, even in a foreign country.

Cockrell adds that Mexico is rumored to have an active facility later this year, while Honduras and Nicaragua are considering converting fruit fly facilities for NWS production. These options could expand production to 140 million flies per week. However, Cockrell questions, "Can 140 million flies achieve what 500 million did last time, and how long will it take?"

Kaufman says that up to 40% of COPEG's production is going to Mexico and Nicaragua to suppress these two outbreak regions, while the remainder is being dispersed among the other Central American countries.

"At this point, our best option is maximum production in Panama," he says.

With nearly 50,000 reported cases throughout Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala since the recent resurgence, time is of the essence.

Should a line of defense in Texas become necessary to protect the U.S., Cockrell is skeptical of feasibly constructing a facility in a tight time frame. Challenges such as EPA regulations, water capacity, electricity and security could hinder the project, which the USDA already estimates will take two to three years.

He also believes the eradication efforts could be lengthy, citing a 2016 Florida Keys outbreak in deer as an example. On these islands where there are no livestock, it took nearly six months to rid the Keys of NWS.

Wildlife populations are particularly at risk due to limited monitoring. Cockrell notes that the rise in absentee landowners has significantly reduced the time spent observing wild species. The wild hog population, which has grown dramatically since the 1960s, produces large litters, increasing the chance for screwworms to spread. While deer populations have rebounded, largely attributed to the eradication of screwworms, they remain vulnerable. Bucks face heightened risk due to open wounds caused by velvet shedding and rutting.

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— Wayne Cockrell, *Texas & Southwestern
Cattle Raisers Association director*



The New World Screwworm

Cochliomyia hominivorax, native to the Americas, is one of the few insects in the world with its unique parasitic behavior and the only species of its kind found in North and South America. The name "New World" distinguishes it from the "Old World" screwworm fly, which exists in Africa and Asia.

RIDDING THE NEW WORLD OF NEW WORLD SCREWORMS

Over the course of nearly a century, scientists, ranchers and governments have worked together to combat this devastating parasite that once inflicted significant economic losses on the livestock industry.

Phillip Kaufman, Ph.D., professor and head of Texas A&M University's department of entomology, outlines the rise and riddance of New World screwworms in North America.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

A hundred years ago, screwworms were primarily found in Texas and parts of Arizona — the northernmost regions where the tropical insect could survive. By the 1930s, the screwworm population had expanded eastward, reaching the Gulf of Mexico and Florida. In 1935 alone, rough estimates cited 1.2 million cases of screwworm infestation across the southern U.S. The economic toll was so severe that the USDA intervened, marking the beginning of an organized effort to abolish the pest.

"We made the decision as a country to eliminate it because of its importance," Kaufman says.

BREAKTHROUGH RESEARCH

The USDA Agricultural Research Service spearheaded efforts to control screwworms, building on decades of research. A pivotal breakthrough came with the development of the sterile insect technique, a method that used the screwworm's biology against itself. Unlike other blow flies, female screwworm flies mate only once. Scientists exploited this behavior by sterilizing male flies, ensuring that once a female mated with a sterile male, she could not produce viable offspring.

Edward Knipling, one of the key researchers, was instrumental in this discovery. His work, alongside that of Raymond Bushland, led to the establishment of the Knipling-Bushland U.S. Livestock Insects Research Laboratory in Kerrville. Their method was first tested on Sanibel Island, Florida, and later on Curaçao, an island off Venezuela.

"This had never been done in the history of the world, other than the fever tick program, which was done largely using animal movement restrictions and pesticide applications," Kaufman says.

He explains that several conditions had to be met for the eradication program to succeed. The flies needed to be mass-produced in sufficient numbers to overwhelm

the wild population, and the sterile males had to be as competitive as their wild counterparts to ensure the females would accept them as mates.

ERADICATION IN THE U.S.

After the sterile fly method proved successful on the islands, large-scale eradication efforts began in the U.S. during late 1950s (see Figure 1). In Florida, screwworms were eradicated within a few years. Efforts in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona soon followed, pushing the screwworm population back to the U.S.-Mexico border starting in 1962. By 1966, the fly was considered eradicated from the U.S., although sporadic outbreaks, like the 1972 case involving 96,000 infestations, required the release of billions of sterile flies to control.

EXPANDING THE BARRIER ZONE

Realizing that continued reinfestations posed a risk, the U.S. partnered with Mexico to push eradication efforts southward. The screwworm population was eradicated from Mexico and subsequently from Central America, with the eradication line moving steadily southward. The final barrier zone was established in Panama in 1997, where ongoing sterile fly releases maintain a protective buffer to prevent reinfestation from South America.

WHY STOP AT PANAMA?

While discussions about eradicating screwworms from South America have surfaced, the challenges of working in the dense, tropical environments of the Amazon and the associated costs make such efforts impractical. The barrier in Panama remains the most cost-effective solution, requiring continuous sterile fly releases to prevent the fly's migration northward.

ONGOING VIGILANCE

Despite eradication efforts, occasional incursions still occur in the U.S., typically when travelers or animals inadvertently bring screwworms from South America. The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has a proven track record of quickly identifying and addressing these cases, ensuring that the screwworm does not reestablish itself in North America.

As Kaufman emphasizes, the success of this program is not due to luck but to decades of research, careful planning and commitment. "They know what they're doing," he says. "It's not magic, it's a proven plan that works."



Phillip Kaufman, Ph.D.

Additionally, the growing number of cattle shipments from Central America and Mexico to the U.S. raises concerns about the effectiveness of security checkpoints in these countries.

Finally, Cockrell highlights the potential economic impact on beef processing, particularly in Texas. If a screwworm outbreak were to occur and lead to restrictions on interstate cattle shipments, the consequences would be severe.

A USDA analysis of Texas' 1976 outbreak found that 1,488,256 cattle and 332,600 sheep and goats were infected, costing livestock producers more than \$132 million. Adjusted for inflation, an outbreak of that scale today would cost Texas producers an estimated \$732 million annually and the state's economy \$1.8 billion.

ENCOURAGING ODDS

Despite the challenges ahead, both Cockrell and Kaufman remain confident that ongoing measures will address potential obstacles. Cockrell is encouraged by the cooperation and communication among organizations throughout Texas since the screwworm announcement.

A New World screwworm stakeholders group, which Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association helped form in November, has united voices from livestock,

wildlife and agriculture sectors to come together and combat the threat.

"Individually, we don't have the energy, but working together, I'm encouraged," Cockrell says.

Another factor that could potentially accelerate the spread of NWS is the sharp increase in human and pet migration into the U.S. in recent years, and efforts by a new federal administration to slow illegal immigration may help mitigate outbreak risks.

Additionally, the Mexican government is highly cooperative, understanding the economic consequences of halted cattle movement.

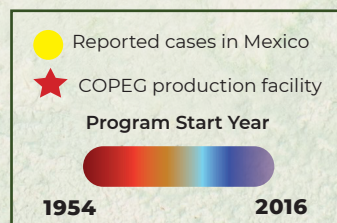
Cockrell also hopes to spark conversations about using technologies like CRISPR gene editing to eliminate screwworms across North, Central and South America, as there are no known negative ecological outcomes of total screwworm eradication.

Looking ahead, he emphasizes the importance of maintaining sterile fly production facilities as a backup plan if the Panamanian barrier is compromised again.

"We've got to stay vigilant, and we can't take these things for granted," Cockrell says. "We're all in this together, from here to the Panamanian border with Colombia."

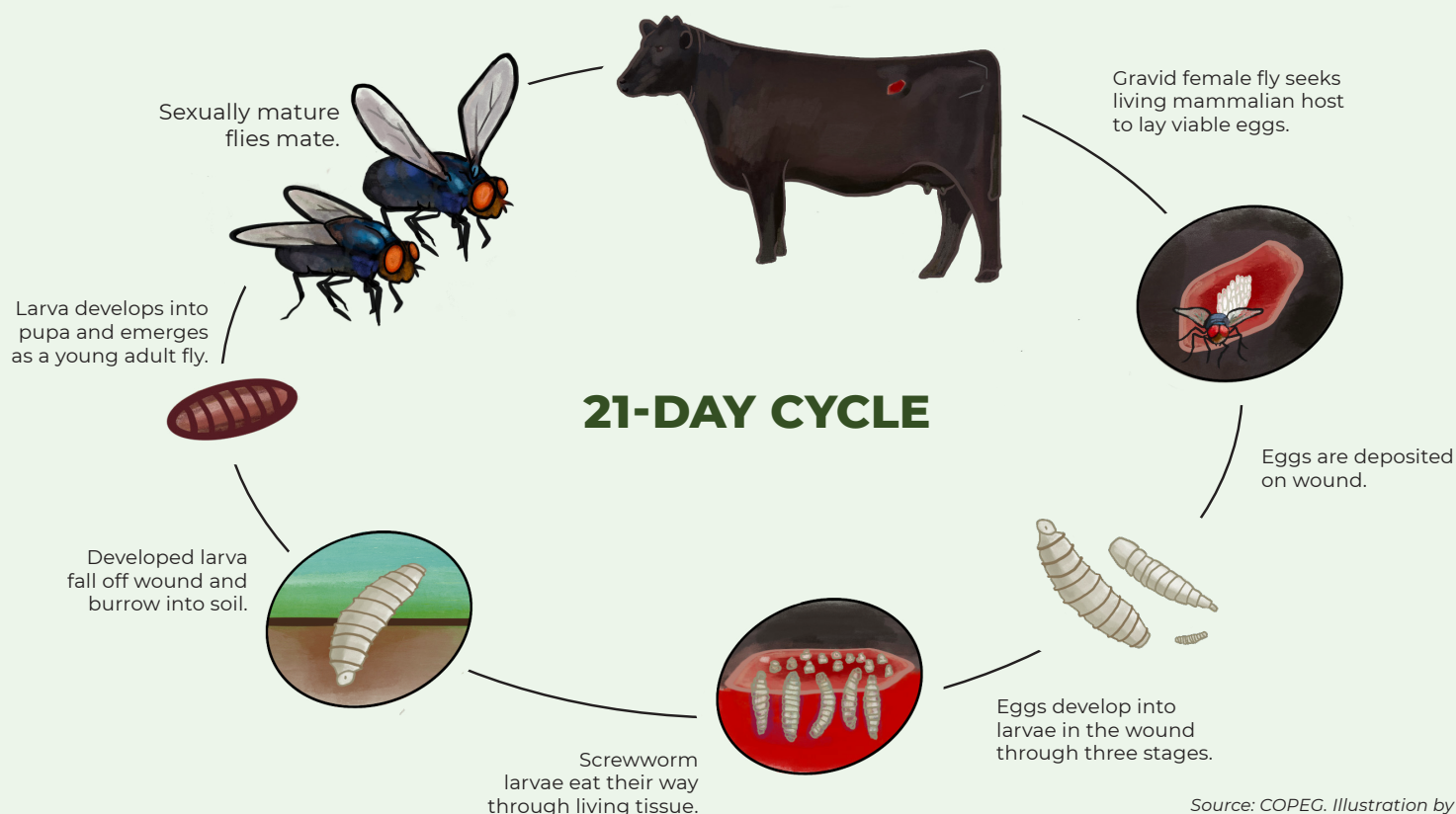
FIGURE 1 - NWS
Eradication Efforts

The decades-long effort to eradicate NWS from North America began in the southeastern U.S. in the 1950s, and from there, moved farther down the continent. Today, the initiative remains active in Central America and is tracking its way north.



Source: USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, January 2025.

NEW WORLD SCREWORM LIFECYCLE



Source: COPEG. Illustration by Christy Collins, Grant Company.

DETECTION AND RESPONSE

Fortunately, a screwworm outbreak is not fatal if infected animals are identified and treated in time. While treatment can be costly, “this is treatable,” Kaufman says.

Unlike other blow flies, which typically lay their eggs on dead animals, this species exhibits unique behavior in that the female screwworm fly will only lay its eggs in the wounds of living organisms. These larvae then feed on living tissue, burrowing into the muscle and fat of the animal.

If an open wound is not treated promptly, it can attract additional flies, leading to more egg-laying and, eventually, the death of the animal.

To prepare for a potential outbreak, especially in warmer weather, Kaufman advises producers to stay vigilant and keep an eye out for notifications from cattlemen’s groups, the Extension service and news outlets.

Texas Animal Health Commission says affected livestock will show signs of irritated or depressed behavior, appetite loss or head shaking. There could also

be evidence of a fly strike, fly larvae (maggots) present in wounds and a decaying flesh smell.

In the event of an infestation, Kaufman urges producers to contact their veterinarians immediately. A vet will remove the maggots, treat the wound and ensure it heals properly. The maggots should then be sent to the USDA for testing to confirm they are screwworm larvae.

“If anyone finds an infestation of maggots on a living or very recently dead animal, bring it to a vet and follow up to make sure the vet sends the maggots in for testing,” Kaufman emphasizes.

Additionally, he advises ranchers to have a disaster preparedness plan in place. This plan should include a monitoring strategy:

- Perform daily checks on the animals.
- Know and monitor for signs of infection.
- Determine additional training that may be needed for screwworm detection and treatment.
- Maintain a list of contacts and reporting procedures for quick action if screwworms are detected.



NWS poses a serious threat to livestock, wildlife and cattle movement, requiring meticulous monitoring to detect and contain infections. In early February, the outbreak remains thousands of miles from the U.S. border, affecting animals across Central America and recently southern Mexico. Top photo, taken in Panama, courtesy of COPEG.

Hunters will also play an essential role in early detection by reporting maggot infestations in wildlife, such as deer or wild pigs.

“Should the fly show up here, we’re going to have to do our due diligence,” Kaufman says. “Finding it early is going to make all the difference in the world in how quickly we get rid of it.”

THIS TIME AROUND

With many screwworm-free years in his rearview, Powell reflects on how fortunate he and other ranchers are not to face the daily challenges screwworms pose, a stark contrast to generations past.

Before the sterile fly technique, ranchers had to carefully time dehorning, branding and castrating cattle to the colder months when screwworm activity was minimal. Even calving seasons were strategically planned for late winter or early spring, as the umbilical cords of newborn calves were prime targets for NWS infestations.

“You can’t imagine how well off you are if you don’t have to work 12 hours a day checking for screwworms,” he says. “The sterile fly program was one of the best programs we ever had that immediately increased our income by eliminating that large loss.”

Powell credits the era’s public officials who were instrumental in securing resources under Texas-native Lyndon Johnson’s administration — especially Dolph Briscoe Jr. and John Armstrong.

Government cooperation with producer-led groups like Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association paved the way for eradication then, and it will keep the pests at bay now.

“When this was eradicated before, it really was because it was producer-led,” Cockrell says. “Ranchers got together and said enough is enough. In the end, that’s what’s going to happen in Texas, as well. Sometimes you just roll up your sleeves, raise the money, build facilities and make it happen.”

The fight against screwworms will once again require cooperation at every level — from producers and government agencies to international partners.

“APHIS is incredibly good at what they do, and we’re getting cooperation from all of our partners in Central America and Mexico,” Kaufman says. “I think we’re going to be okay, but it does require education and for people to understand that it’s going to take all of us to get through this, and we will.”

Powell remains optimistic: “I don’t have any doubt that we can get on top of it. It’s just a case of doing it.” 🇺🇸

Diane Meyer is the associate director of content for Grant Company based in St. Joseph, Missouri.



IN THE CROSSHAIRS: WILDLIFE AND NWS

Diligent surveillance efforts are crucial to protecting against New World screwworm.

By Diane Meyer

A ranch truck jolts along a dirt road, crawling to a stop as its headlights illuminate a hunting blind. In the dark morning twilight, a hunter climbs in and settles into a folding chair, rifle and binoculars ready. As dawn breaks, sunlight reveals a few fawns, does, birds and young bucks at a distant feeder.

Suddenly, a doe freezes, sniffing the air. Glassing the ridge, the hunter spots a 10-point buck emerging 200 yards out. Heart racing, he steadies his .270 Winchester, aims and fires. The herd scatters — except one.

The thrill of the hunt draws people from around the world to Texas for its abundance of game, particularly white-tailed deer. By far, white-tailed deer are the most popular species managed by the state's landowners.

A joint survey released in December 2023 by Texas A&M University's department of rangeland, wildlife and fisheries management and the Natural Resources Institute found Texas has roughly 554,900 white-tailed deer hunters who generate \$4.6 billion in annual economic output. Factoring in revenue from 198,500 landowners, that figure rises to \$9.6 billion statewide.

Today, with rural economies and landowners increasingly reliant on income from wildlife management, the stakes are especially high to protect wildlife populations. As the threat of New World screwworm approaches the U.S.-Mexico border, serious efforts are underway to safeguard Texas wildlife.

A GROWING CONCERN

A fly that feeds on the living tissue of warm-blooded animals, NWS is well known for its toll on livestock. This parasitic fly's larvae can also feed on pets, humans and wildlife. They can infest any wound, such as an umbilical cord or tick bite, leading to a condition known as myiasis.

Wildlife populations are particularly vulnerable, as they are not monitored as consistently as livestock herds. Free-ranging wildlife species — which are not kept in enclosed conditions and cannot be readily captured or examined — make disease detection and management significantly more challenging.

"All wildlife are important, but particularly when we look at New World screwworm infestations, we really need to

WHITE-TAILED DEER AT HEIGHTENED RISK

Monitoring and protecting white-tailed deer populations against New World screwworm is of utmost importance, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The ramifications of the NWS outbreaks in the '50s and '60s caused significant impacts to the state's deer populations, which took years to recover.

Today, there is even more at risk.

554,900

WHITE-TAILED DEER HUNTERS

\$4.6 BILLION

HUNTER ECONOMIC OUTPUT

198,500

WHITE-TAILED DEER LANDOWNERS

\$5 BILLION

LANDOWNER ECONOMIC OUTPUT

\$9.6 BILLION

TOTAL ANNUAL ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION



Source: A joint survey released in December 2023 by Texas A&M University's department of rangeland, wildlife and fisheries management and the Natural Resources Institute.

be cognizant of what that is going to do to our wild deer populations because of the economic impact it could have on the hunting industry in Texas," said Kory Gann, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department big game program director, during the 2025 TSCRA Summer Meeting in San Antonio, June 21.

In South Texas, Gann explained, NWS kept wildlife populations suppressed until its eradication in the late 1960s. White-tailed deer were especially impacted. While data is limited, regional reports suggest one-third to one-half of populations were lost during heavy infestation years. Fawns experienced mortality rates as high as 40% to 80% following mild winters due to their high susceptibility to navel infection.

According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, screwworm infestations were documented as early as the 1930s in eastern cottontails, jackrabbits, opossums and white-tailed deer. In one case, more than 500 flies emerged from a single infected jackrabbit in Texas.

While ranchers of that time managed infestations in livestock, wild animals — rarely captured or treated — continued to fuel outbreaks. Wildlife served as untreated reservoirs for the parasite, posing a major challenge to eradication. Screwworm elimination not only allowed deer populations to rebound, but it also laid a foundation for game ranching in the region.

Beginning in the late 1950s through the 1970s, white-tailed deer numbers increased sharply statewide, thanks in part to regulatory changes, reduced harvests and, notably, the sterile insect technique used to eradicate NWS. This method of eradication, which is being deployed today, involves releasing millions of sterilized male NWS flies to mate with wild females, resulting in no offspring and ultimately collapsing the population.

"Texas' deer populations have come a long way since the 1940s," Gann said. "We have localized reports of populations doubling and tripling the decade after eradication on properties in South Texas."

Eradication is also credited with contributing to the boom in feral hog populations — an unwelcome development for many landowners and producers due to the pigs' destructive behavior.

At time of press, NWS are spreading north through Mexico, with confirmed cases in Veracruz and Oaxaca. A key concern is the lack of wildlife surveillance in Mexico, unlike Texas, where USDA and the Texas Animal Health Commission lead monitoring efforts with support from Texas Parks and Wildlife. As eradication efforts ramp up, early detection is essential to target areas for sterile fly releases.



A Key deer grazes in Florida after the species was nearly eliminated as a result of a New World screwworm outbreak.

A CASE FOR CAREFUL REPORTING

A 2016 outbreak in the Florida Keys underscores the importance of timely reporting to contain NWS.

The most recent U.S. occurrence, which was the first confirmed, locally-acquired infection in more than 30 years, wiped out about 15% of the state's endangered Key deer population. Most deaths occurred during the rut in September and October, a period when bucks, already wounded from shedding velvet, are prone to additional injuries from fighting.

In an *AgriLife Today* article, Phillip Kaufman, Ph.D., head of Texas A&M University's department of entomology, discussed how the Florida outbreak highlights the severity of the NWS threat and the need for early action. At the time, Kaufman was an associate professor and Extension scientist for the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and a key informant on the fly's behavior.

Control measures included setting up inspection stations, conducting public outreach and releasing 188 million sterile flies. The island setting made it possible to contain and treat individual deer.

However, this incident may have been preventable, or less severe, had proper reporting occurred. Under federal law, any maggot found infesting a living mammal must be removed and submitted to USDA's Animal and Plant Health



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Inspection Service for identification. In late June 2016, a veterinarian removed maggots from a case of myiasis but failed to submit them for inspection.

In August, as deer began shedding velvet, open wounds formed at the base of antlers, which are ideal sites for NWS egg-laying. “The number of flies blew up very quickly,” Kaufman said. “It only takes a couple of weeks for that fly to go through its whole development ... and a female fly can lay more than 200 eggs at a time, typically.”

Because the deer were comfortable around people, residents soon noticed the maggot infestations. By the time APHIS was alerted in September, the outbreak had intensified. Roughly 80% of bucks of that endangered species were wiped out before eradication was declared in March 2017.

Based on this case, Kaufman urges anyone who finds an infested animal to first call a veterinarian, and second, ensure the maggots are submitted for testing.

He also recommends wildlife facilities develop herd management plans and consider tracking high-value animals. “If you are running a wildlife facility, you need to have a biosafety plan,” he said in *AgriLife Today*. “Develop a surveillance program for your ranch and have a list of veterinarians and resources on hand.”

Roel Lopez, Ph.D., director of the Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute and head of the Texas A&M department of rangeland, wildlife and fisheries management, was also a key player in monitoring deer populations during the outbreak. He noted the tremendous degree of multi-agency coordination that was needed to eradicate NWS in the Florida Keys.

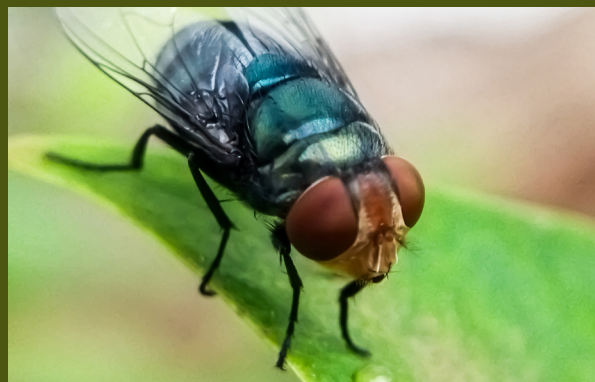
“The biggest lesson I learned was the importance of rapid, interagency coordination,” he said. “No one agency can do it themselves — it requires a cohesive effort.”

CONTAINMENT EFFORTS

Recognizing the need for collaboration, a coalition of organizations, including Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, has formed to ensure widespread awareness. The Screwworm Coalition of Texas directs individuals to report suspected infestations in pets and livestock to the Texas Animal Health Commission. Wildlife cases should be reported to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

“If you have a suspected case, contact us immediately,” Gann said. “We can authorize removal and proper carcass disposal.”

Currently, Texas Parks and Wildlife has trained 60 biologists and game wardens in South Texas on sampling procedures. “Our biologists and game wardens are getting daily calls about potential cases,” Gann shared. “We’re training staff on larval collection and sample submission and preparing for active surveillance on state parks and wildlife management areas.”



THE FIGHT AGAINST NWS

Efforts across the U.S., Mexico and Latin America are intensifying to contain the resurging New World screwworm. Under U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, USDA is investing heavily in sterile insect programs, facilities and coordinated policy responses.

Key Timeline of U.S. Efforts:

- **November 2024:** NWS detected in southern Mexico; U.S. suspends live cattle, horse and bison imports from Mexico under APHIS directive.
- **Feb. 1, 2025:** Partial reopening of imports to U.S. following new inspection and treatment protocols.
- **May 11, 2025:** USDA halts live animal imports after cases near Oaxaca and Veracruz, roughly 700 miles from the U.S. border.
- **May 27, 2025:** Rollins pledges \$21 million to renovate the Metapa, Mexico, sterile fly facility, increasing capacity by 60-100 million flies per week.
- **June 18, 2025:** USDA unveils \$8.5 million South Texas sterile fly dispersal facility at Moore Air Base, launching a five-part NWS response plan.
- **June 30, 2025:** USDA begins phased reopening of select ports in Douglas, Arizona; Columbus, New Mexico; Santa Teresa, New Mexico; Del Rio; and Laredo.
- **July 9, 2025:** Full suspension of southern border livestock imports ordered after new detection in Veracruz.
- **July 10, 2025:** USDA signals plans for Texas sterile fly drops, with continued surveillance and restrictions.

The department has also formed an internal NWS response team of wildlife, communications, law enforcement and park staff. They are developing guidance for hunters and landowners, especially those in the Managed Lands Deer Program or Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's technical guidance program.

The department awaits the Texas Animal Health Commission's response plan, currently under USDA review, which will outline protocols for positive cases. "We want to stay in lockstep with the [Texas Animal] Health Commission and USDA to determine our role in the response," Gann said.

Responses to confirmed cases will include the sterile insect technique and may involve animal movement restrictions and inspections from control zones. Wildlife breeders and rehabilitators will likely face inspection requirements for live animal movement.

Carcass movement controls are also being explored. Hunters will be advised to skin and quarter harvested deer to limit larval spread. Incineration is the preferred method of disposing infected carcasses, though chemical treatment or prolonged freezing of infested tissue are alternatives.

Texas Parks and Wildlife is also considering active surveillance on its South Texas lands, including state parks and wildlife areas. In addition, the department is developing



Landowners and hunters are urged to stay up-to-date on the latest news and recommended reporting protocol for NWS.

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Young fawns, with a high susceptibility for navel infections, are at heightened risk in the event of a NWS outbreak.

an out-of-season take authorization for disease surveillance. The existing individual take authorization — originally developed for chronic wasting disease — could be modified for NWS, allowing landowners or agents to remove animals with required reporting and testing.

Similar to the case of chronic wasting disease management, there will be flexibility to manage NWS outbreaks under the department's Managed Lands Deer Program, which is designed to promote and support responsible wildlife management and habitat conservation on private lands in Texas.

"Harvest recommendations can be adjusted at the individual MLDP property level," said Blaise Korzekwa, Texas Parks and Wildlife white-tailed deer program leader. "If NWS shows up, we can work with landowners to either issue more tags to lower deer density or recommend they reduce doe harvest, depending on their goals."

Reducing doe harvest may be particularly important in drought-stricken regions like South Texas and the Edwards Plateau, where fawn recruitment is already low.

For non-Managed Lands Deer Program participants, Texas Parks and Wildlife uses deer survey and herd composition data from deer management units based on ecological region, hunter density and population estimates. If an outbreak affects the deer population at the deer-management-unit scale, these changes will be noticed through annual surveys.

"Just like livestock producers, good surveillance and animal care will be crucial," Korzekwa said. "With Texas being such a large, privately owned state, landowners and managers will be on the frontlines. If we don't follow best practices, NWS will be much more difficult to eradicate without serious consequences." 📖

Diane Meyer is the associate director of content for Grant Company based in St. Joseph, Missouri.

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

NWS website launched for producers, landowners and wildlife managers.

Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association assisted in the launch of a website to serve as a centralized hub for producers, landowners and wildlife managers navigating the threat of New World screwworm.

Developed on behalf of the Screwworm Coalition of Texas, the site delivers reliable information to help Texans protect their herds and operations. Information is sourced from leading agencies including USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Texas Animal Health Commission and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The website features a detailed list of educational events related to NWS, with additional guidance on practical steps to minimize risk coming soon.

The Screwworm Coalition of Texas is a joint initiative organized in May comprised of 13 livestock, wildlife, equine and landowner groups, including Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas, Livestock Marketing Association of Texas, South Texans' Property Rights Association, Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, East Foundation, Texas Quarter Horse Association, Texas Association of Dairymen, Texas Cattle Feeders Association, Texas Farm Bureau, Texas Pork Producers Association, Texas Poultry Federation, Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association and Texas Wildlife Association.

The coalition will ensure consistent and accurate information is shared with Texas landowners and the agricultural and wildlife industries, including tools and resources that equip Texans with educational information needed amid the threat of the NWS.

