



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and Plant
Health Inspection
Service

Wildlife Services

6213-E Angus Dr.
Raleigh NC 27617
(919) 786-4480
(919) 782-4159 fax

Date: September 26, 2019

From: USDA APHIS Wildlife Services and NC Division of Public Health

To: North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Department of Agriculture, National Park Service, Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, Tennessee Valley Authority and county/local health officials.

Subject: North Carolina Oral Rabies Vaccination Program

Beginning in the late 1970s, a strain of rabies, Eastern Raccoon Variant (ERV), associated with raccoons rapidly spread through states on the eastern seaboard of the United States. As ERV invaded new areas, there was an explosive increase in the number of rabid raccoons, with many states reporting over 500 cases in a year. Compounding the problem, raccoon rabies frequently “spills over” into other wild mammals including those species that we traditionally consider low-risk for rabies (i.e., rabbits, deer, etc.) as well as pets, livestock; and people have died of raccoon rabies through interactions with raccoons.

Prior to the raccoon rabies epizootic entering North Carolina, canine variant and bat variant rabies were the major sources of rabies infection to pets, livestock and humans. Raccoon rabies first entered North Carolina in Alleghany County in 1990 and then Brunswick, Mecklenburg, and Union Counties in 1992. By 1995, the two epizootic fronts had met in Harnett County and by 2005; virtually every county in North Carolina had recorded raccoon rabies. Canine variant rabies was eradicated from the US in 2007.

The raccoon rabies epizootic has been associated with tremendous costs resulting from post-exposure treatment of exposed and potentially exposed humans, as well as control measures implemented for exposed pets and livestock. Taking advantage of the fact that the raccoon rabies epizootic is generally limited to states east of the Appalachian Mountain ridge, the U.S. Department of Agriculture - Wildlife Services established the National Oral Rabies Vaccination (ORV) Program with the goal of limiting the westward expansion of raccoon rabies.

To accomplish the goal of the ORV program, preventing the westward spread of raccoon rabies, a “vaccine barrier” has been established extending from eastern Ohio (beginning at the border with Lake Erie) down the Appalachian ridge to Mobile County, Alabama, ending at the Gulf of Mexico. In 2019, oral vaccination bait drops are scheduled for parts of eleven North Carolina counties. **Baiting will take place October 7, 2019 - October 20, 2019 in portions of Ashe, Alleghany, Buncombe, Jackson, Haywood, Madison, Yancey, Mitchell, Cherokee, Graham and Swain counties (see [map](#)).** Tiny edible packets of the oral vaccine will be distributed by fixed-wing aircraft, and by helicopter in areas where raccoons are found. Helicopter baiting will take place in Burnsville, Marshall, Mars Hill, Waynesville and Weaverville. The goal is to prevent the spread of raccoon variant rabies into Tennessee.

Included with this letter is some information that will aid you in answering any questions you might receive from the public concerning the program. If you have any questions about the upcoming bait drop, you can contact Wildlife Biologist Seth Brown in Asheville at 919-219-6307 or District Supervisor Andy Moore in Statesville at 919-621-7843. People may also call the N.C. Veterinary Public Health program at 919-733-3419 with questions.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this effort.

Sincerely,

Steve Smith
State Director, NC
USDA APHIS Wildlife Services

Erica Berl
Public Health Veterinarians
NC Division of Public Health