

Computer Maps Pests To Protect Wildlife

by Jan Suszkiw

Everybody's Science

WASHINGTON, D.C. —

Computer maps that track hungry crop pests may also chart a road to recovery for endangered wildlife species.

U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists built the computer maps so farmers could be alerted as to where boll weevils might threaten cotton crops.

In Mississippi and Tennessee, the maps are helping farmers wipe out boll weevils by tracking the insect pest's every move in cotton fields.

Now wildlife researchers are interested in adapting the scientists' maps to store timely information about the movements and behaviors of endangered species — important for strategies to protect them, or to bolster their numbers in refuges, parks and other habitats.

One endangered species, the red-cockaded woodpecker, could

be among the first to undergo such computerized tracking. Heavy cutting of southern pine and other native forests in Mississippi, Florida and other southern states over the past 90 years has reduced the woodpecker's numbers and natural habitat.

But scientists at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) are working to reverse that trend.

As part of a pilot study, the FWS scientists have enlisted the help of USDA researchers Glenn Wiygul and John Reinecke to adapt the maps to monitor a small population of the endangered woodpeckers at the Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is located about 35 miles southwest of Columbus, Miss.

"Only about 350 of the small, insect-eating birds exist in Mississippi, 125 of which are known to reside at the Noxubee refuge, the best place in the world to see one," said Reinecke, who works with Wiygul at USDA's Agricultural

Research Service.

If successful, said Reinecke, computer mapping could give federal, state and non-government organizations like the National Audubon Society an affordable new system for monitoring and protecting endangered animals and plants.

FWS scientists, for example,

plan to use the maps to set up artificial nesting sites to bolster the woodpecker's numbers at the Noxubee refuge.

Wiygul, Reinecke and colleagues at ARS' Boll Weevil Research Unit at Mississippi State, Miss., built the maps using a computer geographic information system (GIS).

The GIS sketches state and county boundaries and areas such as farms, cities, lakes and parks on the maps. It can use red, yellow and other colors to show the size of a pest population or the locale of an endangered wildlife species, Wiygul said. (Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture)

Safe Food For Meaningful Regulation

SHANNON, Ill. — American Agri-Women recently voiced its support of a scientifically based approach to pesticide policy in the United States; questioning whether our nation's pesticide regulations regarding food safety are in need of the massive overhaul being proposed by the Clinton administration.

"Clearly, we all want a safe food supply for every consumer, and especially for our children, and the need to change the outmoded Delaney Clause is very real," stated AAW President Ar-

dath DeWall. Likewise, American farmers and ranches are now consistently providing food and fiber for the worldwide market, and the productivity and safety of these agricultural products is due in large part to the judicious utilization of the most modern fertilization and crop protection chemicals by U.S. farmers.

"Therefore, the draconian call to ban all pesticides would not only limit our ability to consistently produce abundant safe food, it would cost the average household \$228/year; and including fertiliz-

ers in such a ban would raise food costs \$420/year," said DeWall. Yet the scare tactics about food safety and pesticides persist. "This is why, the government should take a reasoned, scientific approach to pesticide/food safety regulation," stated DeWall.

American Agri-Women is a national coalition of farm and ranch women's organizations, dedicated to the truthful depiction of American Agriculture. For more information, please contact Ardath DeWall, AAW President, 11841 Mt. Vernon Rd., Shannon, Ill. 61078, 815-864-2359.



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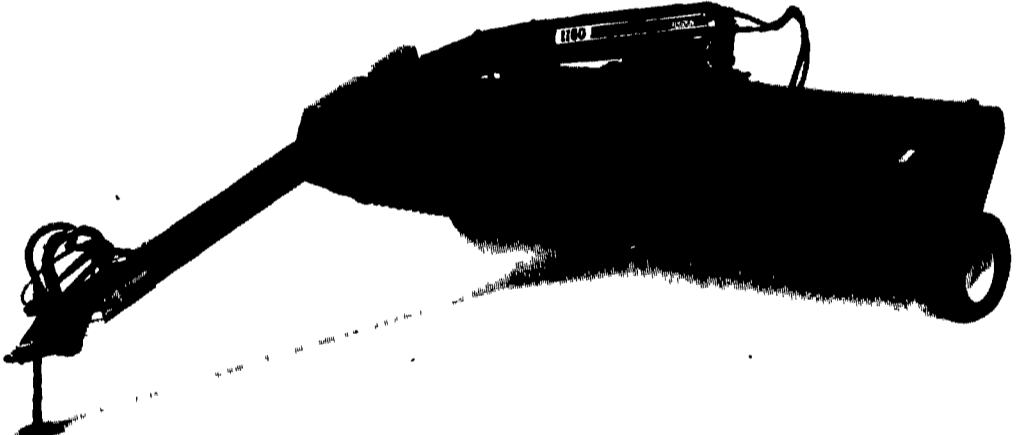
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