

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

# Overview of New World Screwworm: What is it, Why is it Important, its Biology and Potential Impact to Cattle and Wildlife in Texas

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*Photo by USDA*



# 6/3/2026 – USDA Confirms 1<sup>st</sup> NWS in Texas/USA



- Confirmed in a 3-week-old bovine in Zavala County, Texas
- USDA and Texas officials are taking immediate action to contain and eradicate NWS from the United States, following the strategies and actions outlined in the [NWS Response Playbook](#).
- This includes:
  - Forming a unified Incident Command Team with the Texas Animal Health Commission and deploying response personnel to the area;
  - Establishing a 20 km infested zone around the detection and implementing quarantines, movement controls, and surveillance in this area;
  - Expediting targeted release of [sterile NWS flies](#) by immediately deploying ground release chambers in the area, in addition to the 4 million sterile flies per week already being released aurally in the area;
  - Increasing trapping for NWS flies along the border and just outside of the dispersal area;
  - Implementing NWS surveillance and management strategies in wildlife; and
  - Conducting targeted outreach in the local area.



# New World Screwworms

- What Are New World Screwworms:
  - Fly larvae that infest **living tissue** of
    - warm-blooded animals,
    - including livestock, wildlife, pets,
    - humans and birds (rarely),
  - Causes a condition known as myiasis
- Species name ***Cochliomyia hominivorax*** = man eater
- This causes serious, often deadly damage to the infested animal



Photo by USDA





USDA

## New World Screwworms *Cochliomyia hominivorax*

- The flies spend most of their time in forests and other wooded areas but will seek out host animals in pastures and fields if available.
- They are found clustered as adults and not evenly distributed within habitats.
- NWS do NOT fly over large expanses of water





USDA

# New World Screwworms Facts

- Historically found throughout North America
  - Up to the Canadian border
  - Down through Central and South America
- Generally active between 64.4°F & 91°F
  - Peak activity around 85.8°F
  - Generally, no activity below 59°F
- Day time active



# Two Screwworms – *Cochliomyia hominivorax* (NWS) & *Cochliomyia macellaria* (secondary screwworm)

- Both adult flies are about the size of a house fly or slightly larger
- Requires a trained expert to identify
- The adult NWS fly has
  - Orange spot behind the eyes (not always apparent)
  - Metallic blue or green body (color is a poor ID feature)
  - Distinct facial hairs
- Secondary screwworm, *C. macellaria*,
  - No orange spot behind head
  - Color same as NWS
  - Distinct facial hairs
  - Widespread distribution
  - Facultative (opportunistic) myiasis



*C. hominivorax*  
New World  
Screwworm



*C. macellaria*  
Secondary  
Screwworm



# NWS vs. Common native flies



New World screwworm



*Photo by USDA*

Green blow fly



Flesh fly

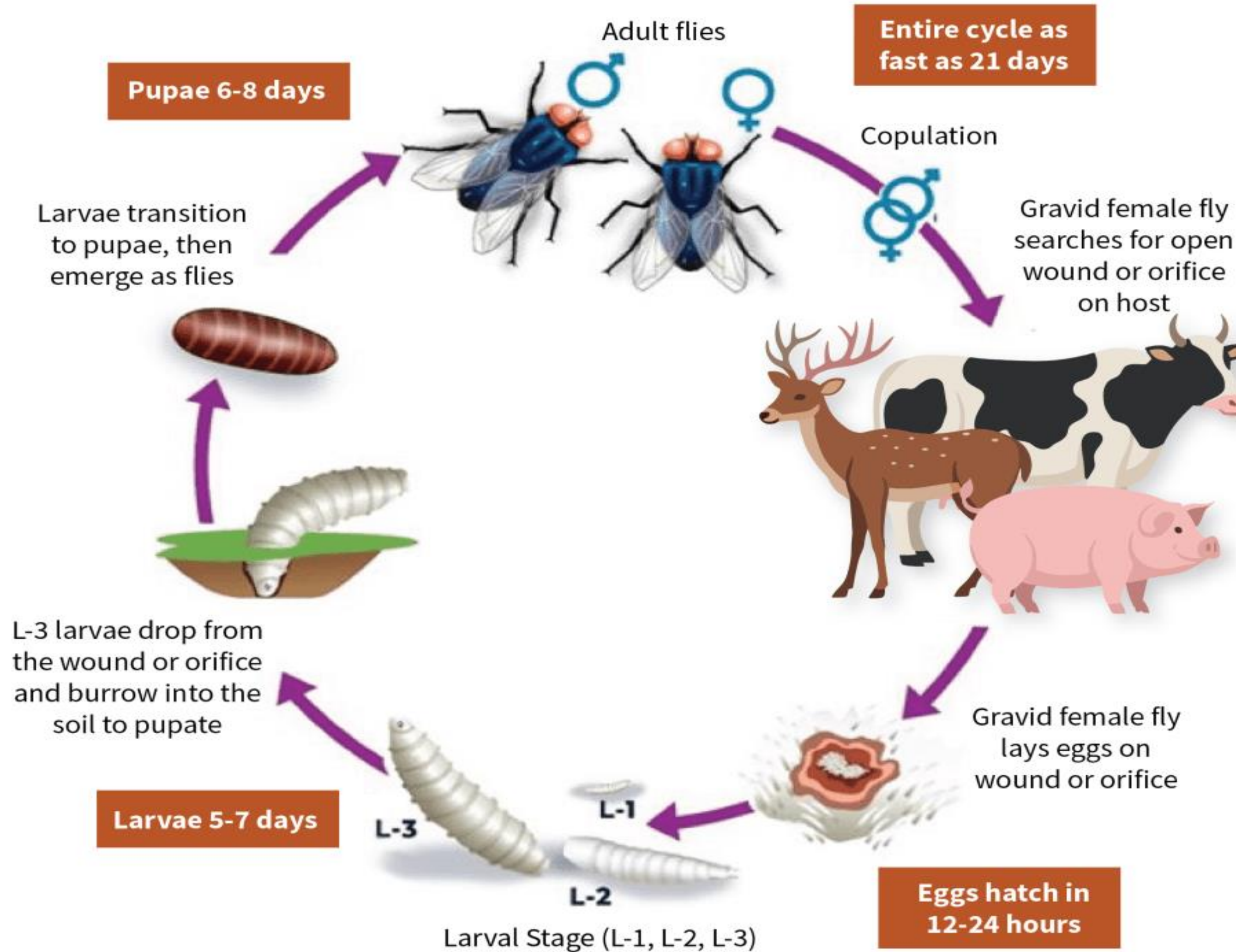


House fly





# NWS Lifecycle





# Screwworm eggs

- Females only lay eggs directly on wounds or mucous membranes.
  - Target ears, navels, castration sites, cuts, dehorning, shearing, cattle grub holes, tick bites
- Hundreds of eggs (200-300) are deposited leading to extensive tissue destruction, debilitation, and risk of death.
- Hatch after 10-12 hours (up to 24 hrs.)
- Multiple infestations in one wound are common

Photo by USDA



Clumped eggs a characteristic of NWS



# Screwworm larvae

- Larvae are obligate parasites consuming living flesh; **feed 5-7 days**
  - 6.5 – 17 mm long
- Term screwworm refers to the screw-like shape of the larvae and the way the larva burrows into the flesh.
- Primarily a pest of livestock but can infest humans and other animals.
  - Infested wound gives off a distinct odor
    - Attracts more females
  - **Left untreated, usually fatal in 7-14 days**
  - Near 100% of newborns in favorable environment (infested umbilicus)

Photos by USDA



Photo by Winthorpe Marsden





# Screwworm pupae

- Larvae drop to ground to burrow and pupate
- Pupae stage is 5-7 days
- Non-contagious
  - Importation of infected animals
- A dead animal does not equal dead larvae
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> instars will proceed into pupae
  - 1<sup>st</sup> larvae will die with the host

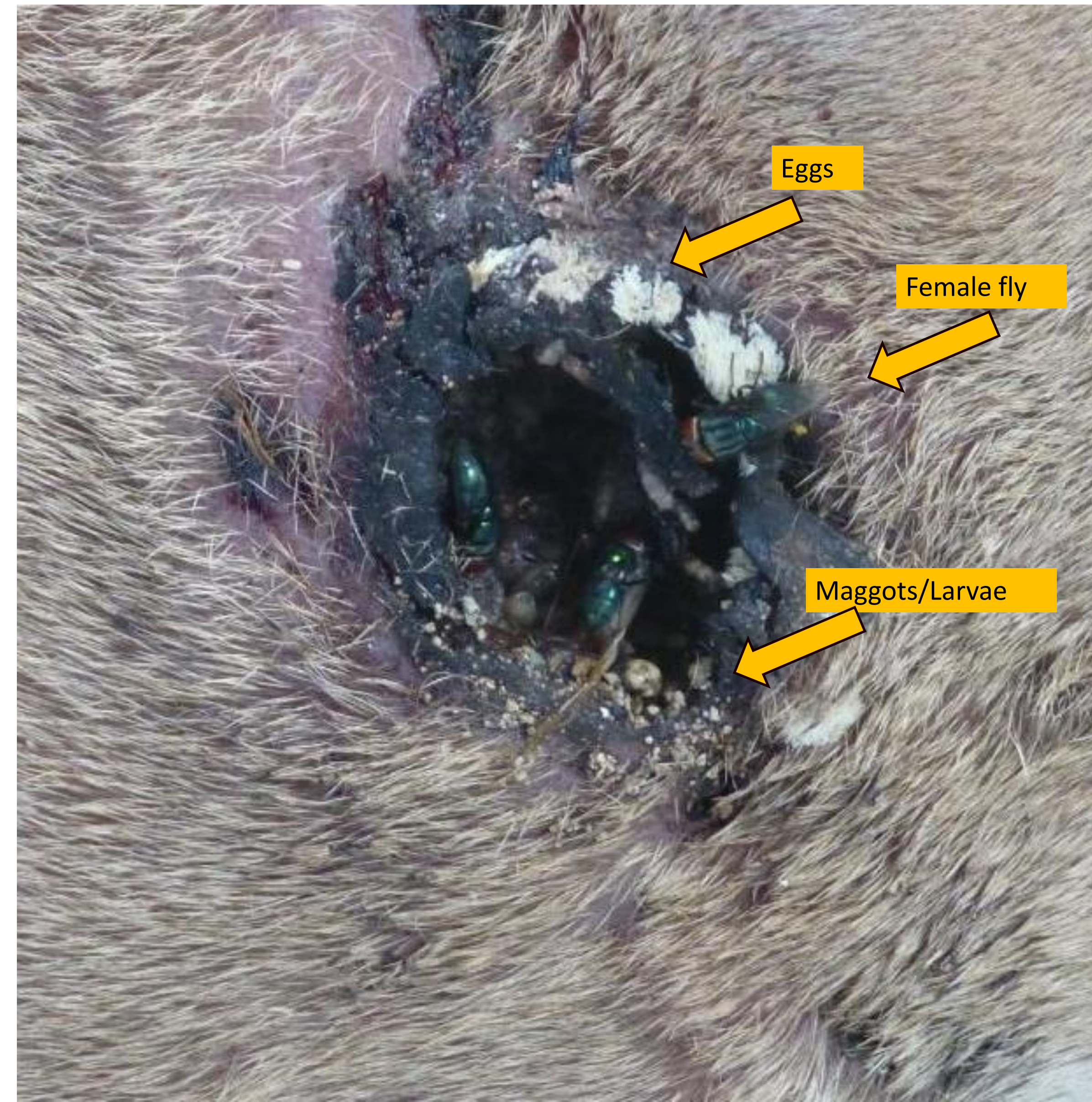


USDA



# Screwworm movement

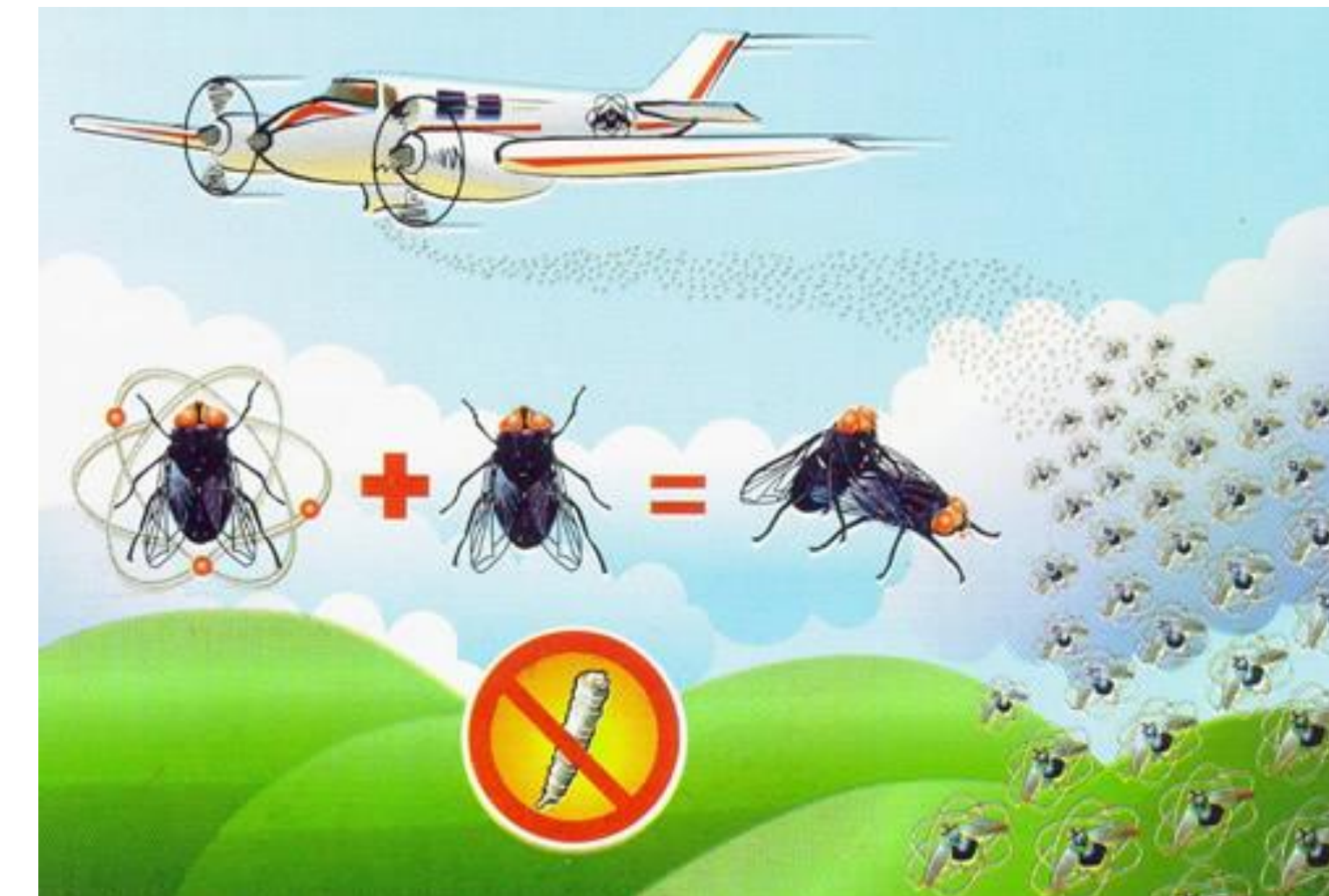
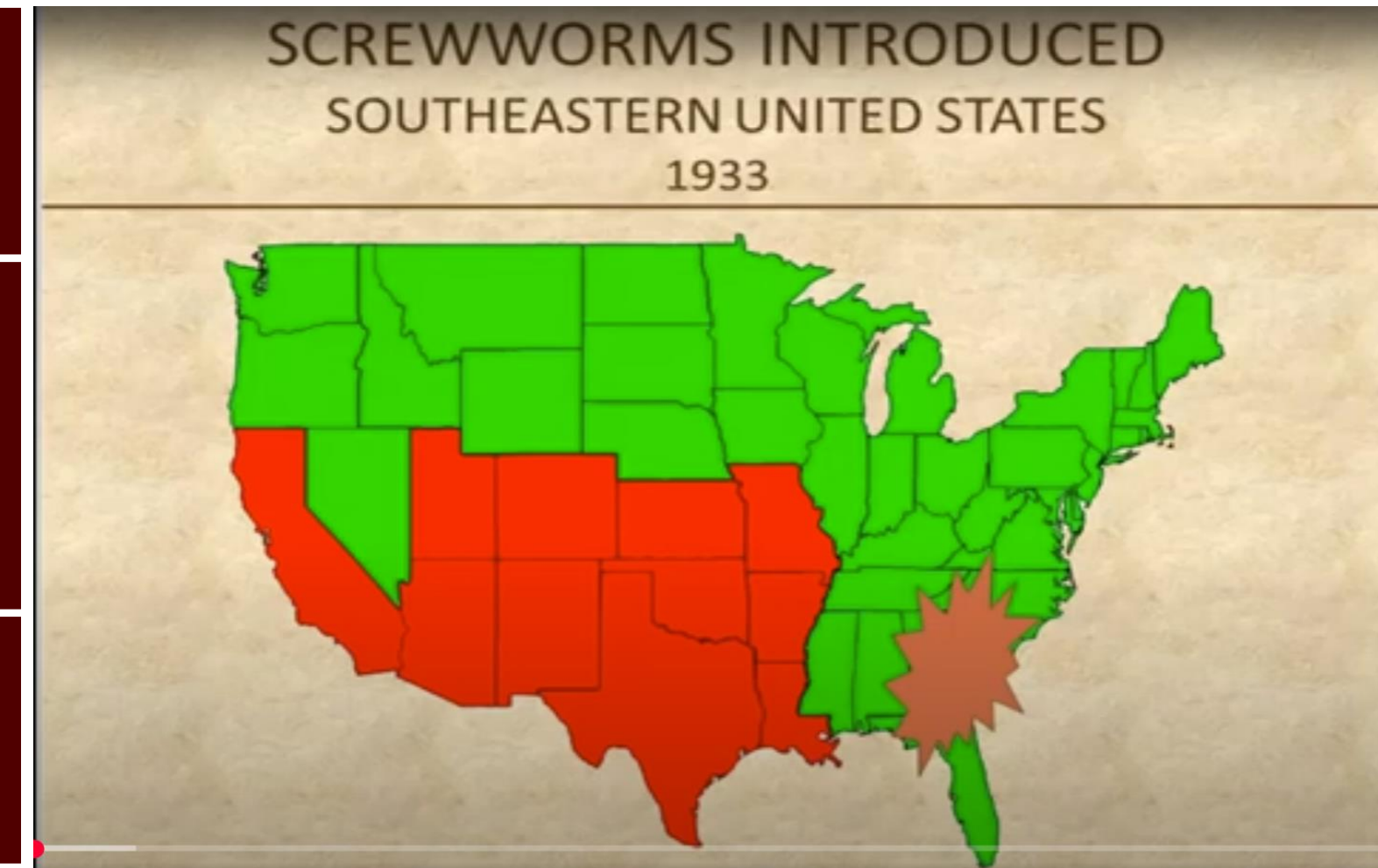
- NWS flies can travel unaided by humans up to 10 to 20 kilometers (6.2 to 12.4 miles) to find a suitable host
- All warm-blooded animals
  - Rarely infects birds
  - Human cases are possible
- The movement of infested livestock or wildlife can lead them to spread even longer distances





# History of Screwworms

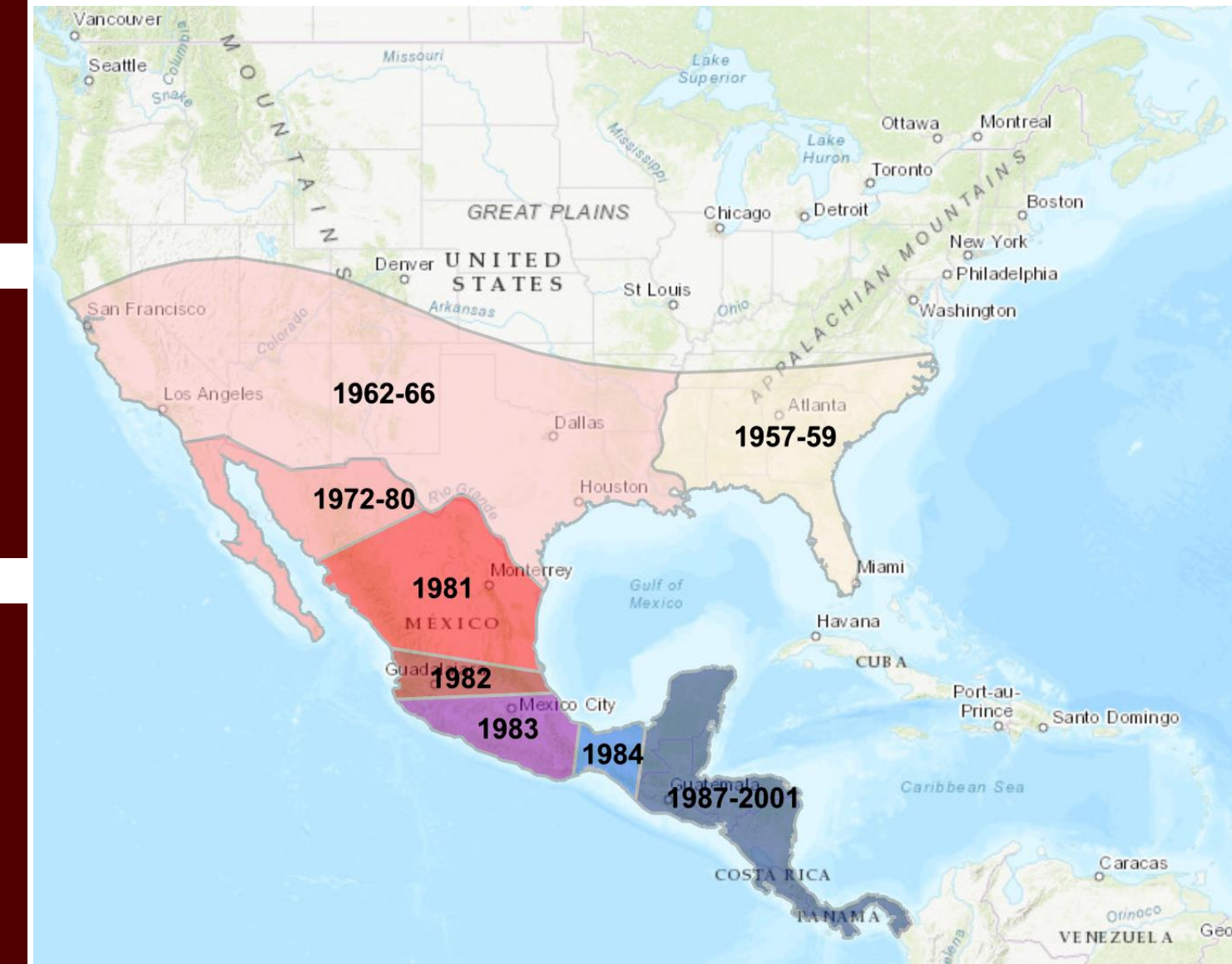
- |      |   |                                                                                                                |
|------|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1842 | { | • New World Screwworm was present in SW US                                                                     |
| 1933 |   | • Georgia-Florida populations probably introduced from Texas, overwintered in south Florida                    |
| 1936 | { | • Knipling & Bushland Developed concept of Sterile Insect Technique (SIT)                                      |
| 1955 | { | • Eradicated screwworm populations on Curacao with sterile male technique; previously tested on Sanibel Island |
| 1959 | { | • Eradicated in eastern US, up to Mississippi River                                                            |
| 1961 | { | • Eradication program in Florida completed                                                                     |





# History of Screwworms

|      |                                                                                                                                                          |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1964 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Eradication from Texas and New Mexico - reinfestations</li> </ul>                                                |
| 1966 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Eradicated from total US – reinfestations, increased winter releases in Mexico</li> </ul>                        |
| 1972 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Outbreak of 96,000 cases; 8.8 billion sterile flies released</li> <li>•Mexican-American program began</li> </ul> |
| 1991 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Eradicated all of Mexico</li> </ul>                                                                              |
| 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Complete eradication of western Panama</li> </ul>                                                                |
| 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Florida Key deer outbreak</li> </ul>                                                                             |







# NWS Outbreak in Key Deer - 2016

Elicited immediate, large multi-agency response – notified in Sept 2016

- 539 total deployments among 350 individuals
- 188 million sterile flies released across 35 release sites
- 20 medication sites with over 15,500 individual doses of medication applied to at-risk deer.
- APHIS spent \$3.2 million; overall cost of \$10 million

Re-eradicated by March 2017

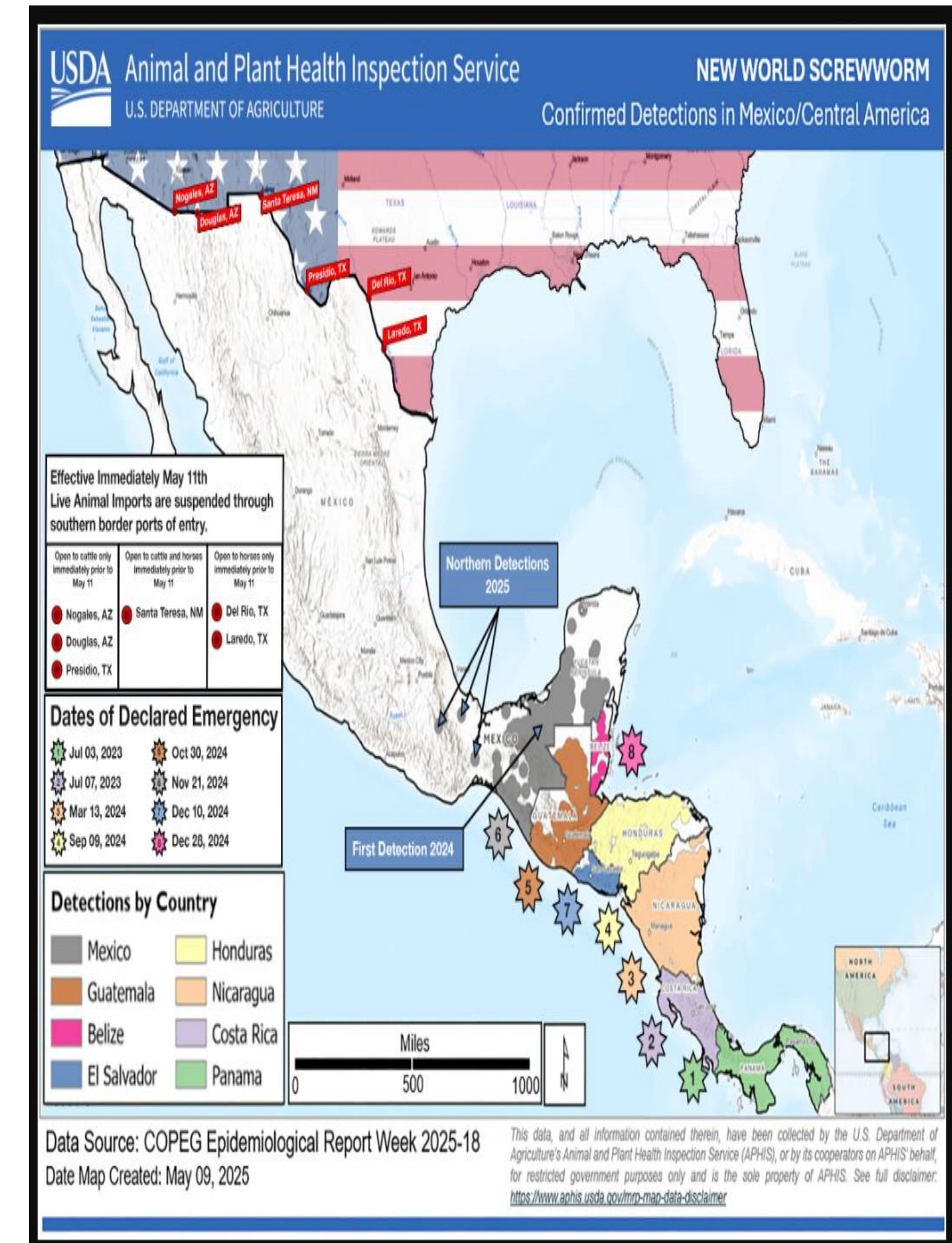
Source of outbreak never identified





# Current Outbreak

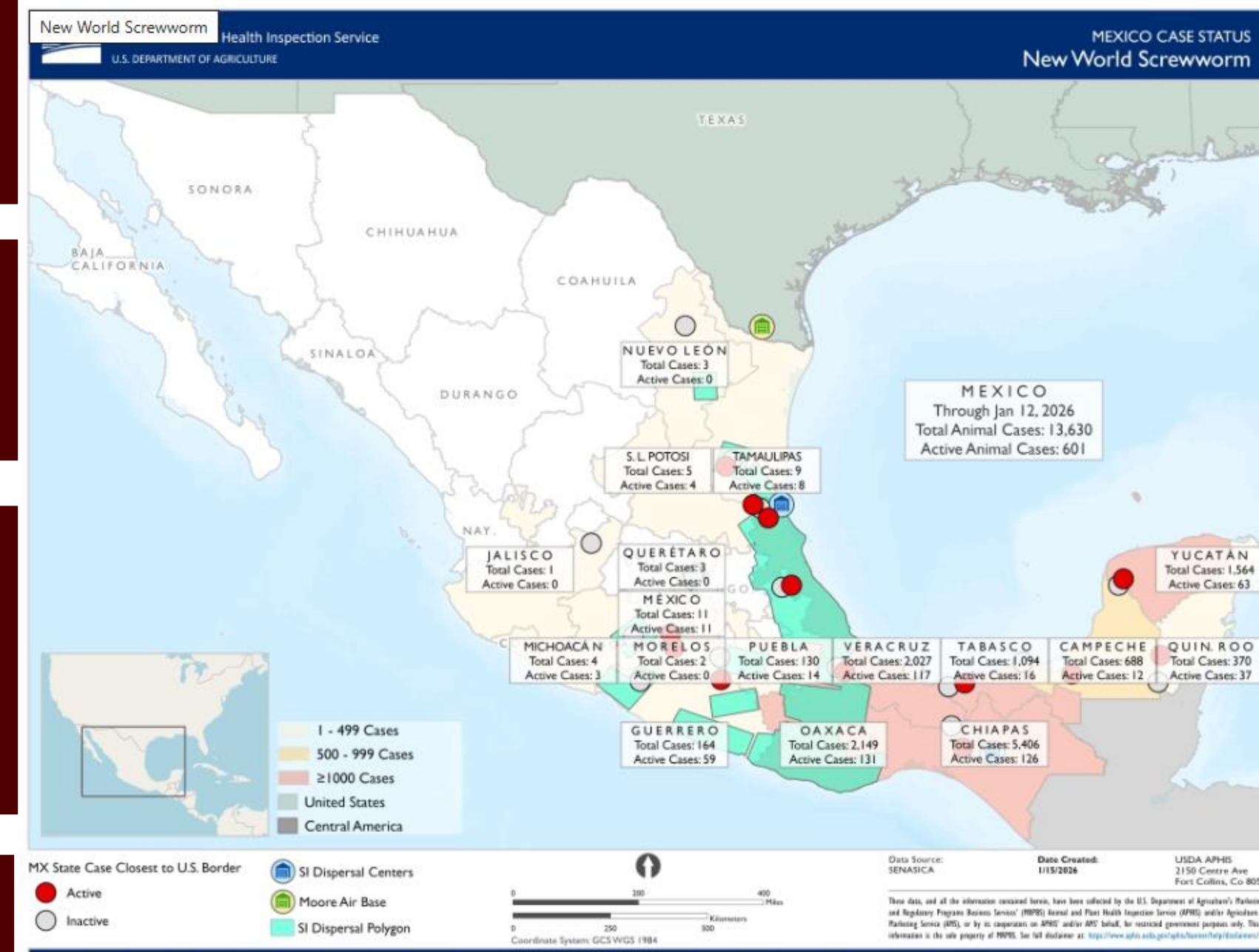
|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2022             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase of cases in Panama</li> </ul>                                                                                                                    |
| Nov 2024         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NWS detected in Chiapas, Mexico</li> </ul>                                                                                                                |
| April – May 2025 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MX states of Veracruz and Oaxaca infested</li> </ul>                                                                                                      |
| May 11           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US border closed to cattle and other livestock</li> </ul>                                                                                                 |
| July 2025        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7/7 – borders opened – Douglas, AZ</li> <li>• 7/9 – Case identified 370 miles form US border! Ports closed to cattle and other livestock again</li> </ul> |



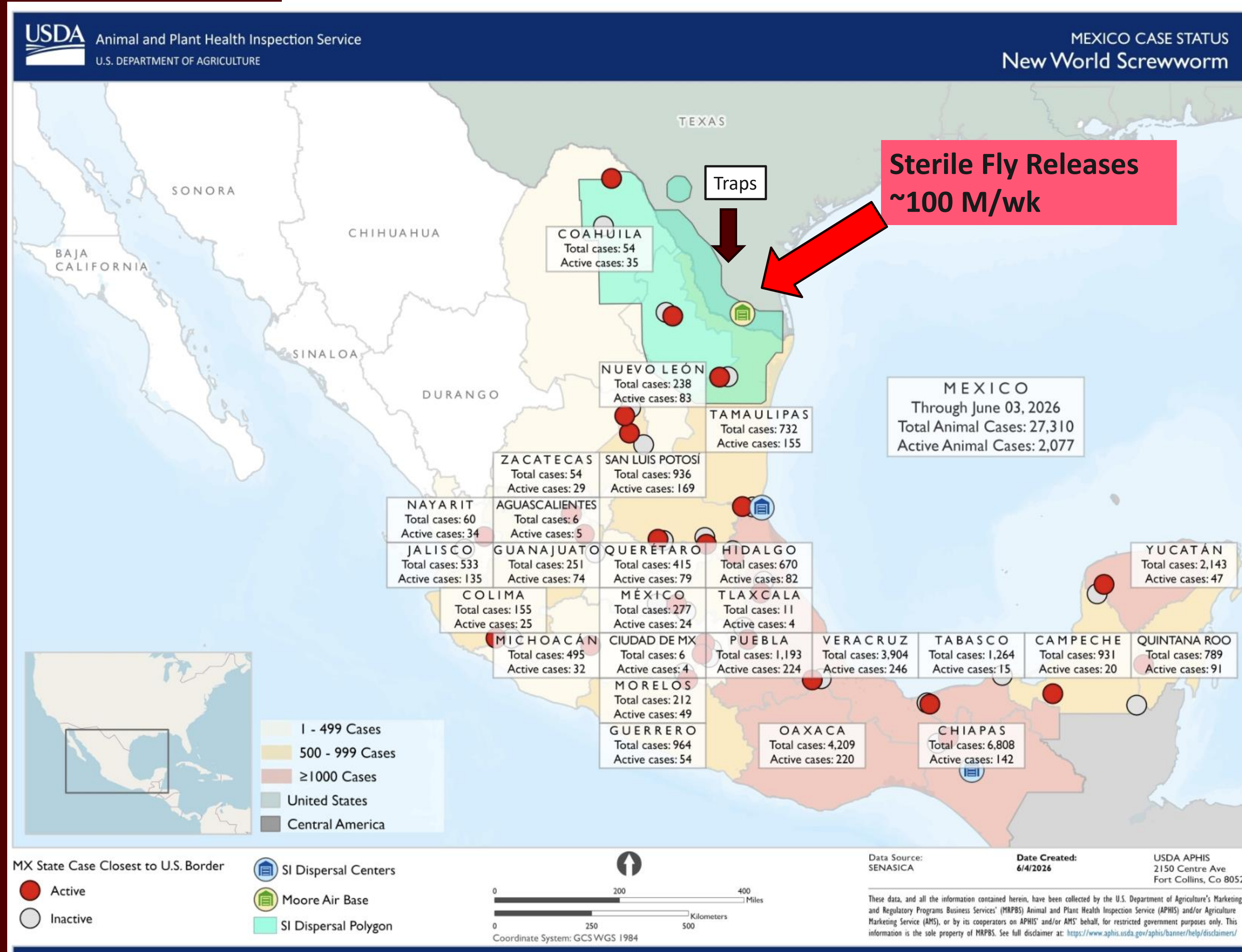


# Current Outbreak - 2025

- Aug 4(26) {
  - CDC notified USDA of case in traveler returning from El Salvador
- Sept 21 {
  - 8-month heifer found with NWS 70 miles from Laredo in Nuevo Leon, MX
- Oct 6 {
  - Calf identified with NWS 100 south o previous Nuevo Leon location
- Nov 28 {
  - 22-month-old bovine moved to Nuev Leon feed lot >120 miles south of Laredo
- Dec 26 {
  - 6-day old bovine found with NWS in umbilical lesion 197 miles from Brownsville in Tamaulipas, MX (1<sup>st</sup> detection in this state)







# Current Outbreak

## Central American countries

- 171,700 Cumulative Animal Cases as of June 2, 2026
  - Lack of wildlife surveillance and impact
- 2,070 human cases

## Current Mexico cases (June 3)

- Cumulative: 27,310 (2,077 active)
- Human cases: 292
- Closest is located in Coahuila – approximately 25 miles from the border
- 42 dispersal flights/wk

## Current USA/TX cases (June 3)

-1 calf





# **On 8/26/2025 – 1st (and only) Human case in US associated with Outbreak**

- Human case of New World screwworms identified in Maryland attributed to the current outbreak in Central America.
- US Dept of Health and Human Services and the CDC recently identified a traveler-associated human case of New World screwworm in the US.
- On August 4, 2025, Maryland Dept of Health and CDC investigated a confirmed case of NWS from a patient that had returned from a trip to El Salvador.
- Current risk to the public in the US is very low. Traps were set within a 20-mile radius of the affected area out of precaution.



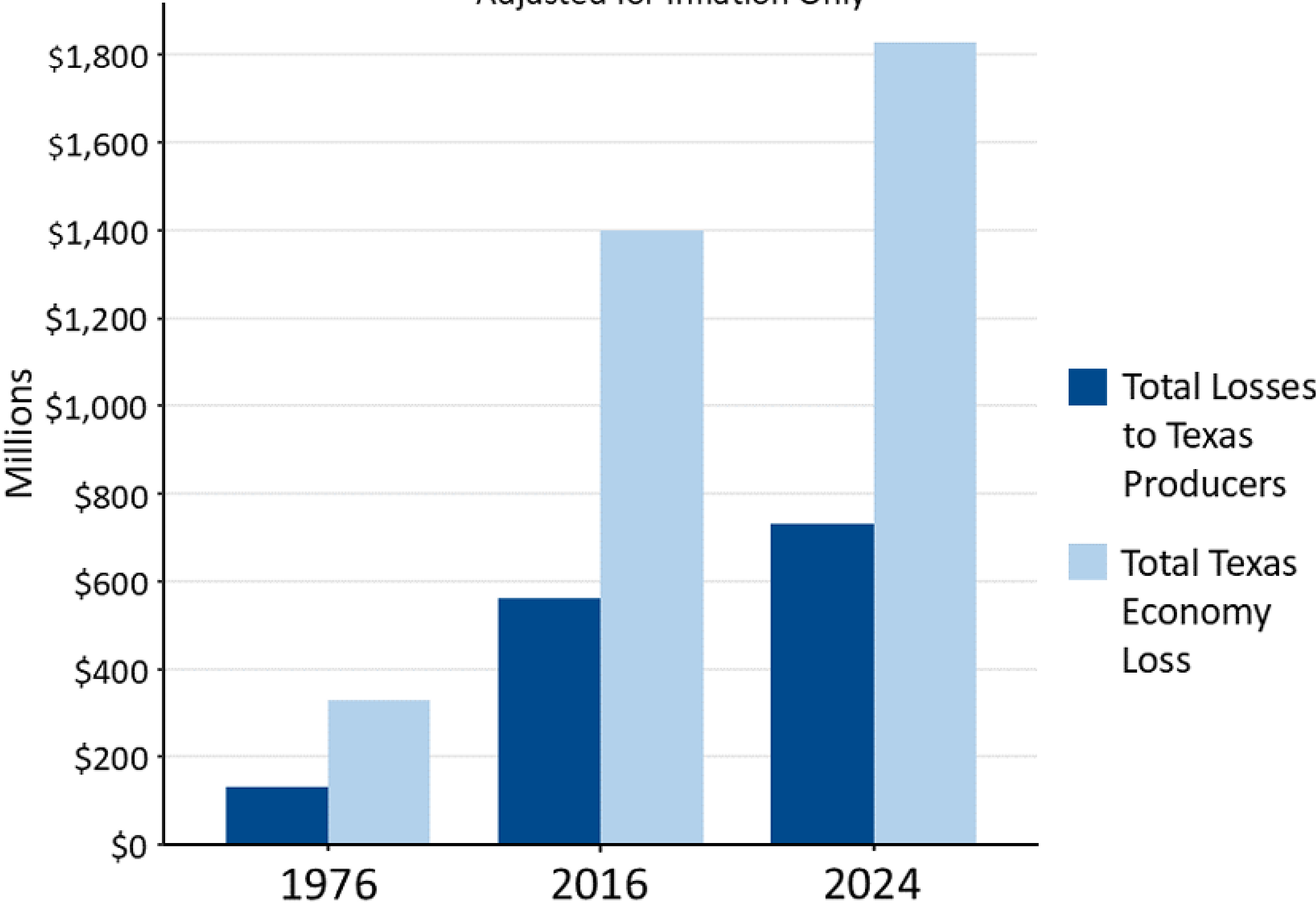
# Previous Human Cases in US & Canada

- **2007** - A 12-year-old girl with untreated scalp psoriasis presented with intense pain of the parietal scalp that began during a 1-week church mission to Palmira, **Colombia**. (142 larvae)
- **2014** – A 26-year-old traveler who presented with otalgia and bloody otorrhea after returning from a vacation in the **Dominican Republic**, where exposure to screwworm flies most likely occurred during a nap on the beach
- **July 2014** - A 15-year-old girl developed an intense focal occipital headache the day after she returned from a 3-week hiking trip to **Peru**. She had a 7-year history of Darier disease. (45 larvae)
- **2023** - A patient traveled to **Argentina** and **Brazil** and returned with an infested surgical wound on the face
- **2024** - A patient traveled to the **Dominican Republic** and returned with an infestation in their sinuses (150 larvae)
- **2025** - A Canadian male in his 80s presented to the emergency department in Toronto, Canada with a chief complaint of larvae emerging from a leg ulcer. The patient had recently returned to Canada one day prior after spending several weeks in northwest **Costa Rica**. (30–40 larvae)



# Estimated NWS Losses in Texas, 1976, 2016, & 2024

Adjusted for Inflation Only



2026 estimated impact losses of \$2.1 billion to the cattle industry and \$9 billion to the hunting/wildlife industry in Texas.

## Potential Economic Impact of NWS in 2024

| NWS Losses:<br>Texas Data | 1976 Results  | 2016 Results                  | 2024 Results    |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
|                           |               | (Adjusted for inflation only) |                 |
| Cattle Population         | 7,224,515     | -                             | -               |
| Cattle Infestation Rate   | 20.60%        | -                             | -               |
| Cattle Cost/Case          | \$81.51       | \$346.28                      | \$452.14        |
| Sheep & Goat Population   | 3,654,945     | -                             | -               |
| Sheep & Goat Infest. Rate | 9.10%         | -                             | -               |
| Sheep & Goat Cost/Case    | \$32.38       | \$137.56                      | \$179.61        |
| Total Cattle Cost         | \$121,307,258 | \$515,351,210                 | \$672,897,355   |
| Total Sheep & Goat Cost   | \$10,769,588  | \$45,752,456                  | \$59,738,286    |
| Texas Producers Losses    | \$132,076,846 | \$561,103,666                 | \$732,635,641   |
| Texas Economy Loss        | \$329,598,005 | \$1,400,235,237               | \$1,828,293,838 |

- NWS outbreak roughly the scale of the 1976 outbreak in Texas
  - Which indicated that
    - 1,488,256 cattle and
    - 332,600 sheep and goats were infested
- 2024 outbreak could cost Texas producers \$732 million per year and the Texas economy a loss of \$1.8 billion.





# Increased Cost of Production



Animal Deaths



Decreased livestock production



Increased need for veterinary services



Increased need for medication and insecticides



Extra labor and vehicle costs for the inspection and treatment



# Management of the screwworm

- Integrated Pest Management
  - Multiple techniques to reduce a population
  - Reduces chance of resistance development
- Eradication is goal
  - Reporting is critical
  - Surveillance for adults (swormlure/rotting liver)
  - Monitoring for larvae (animal examinations)
  - Inspections and limits on animal movement
  - Sterile Insect Technique (SIT)
- Sterile flies will be dropped above ranches where screwworm is identified within 48 hrs. of confirmation of an infestation and will continue until eradicated
  - This is one reason why you should report a potential infestation.
  - No report, No Releases.



Photos: Denise Bonilla, USDA



# Sterile Insect Technique (SIT)

- Flies produced in one plant in Panama
  - Normal production = 20 M flies per week
  - Current = 100 M flies/wk, 50% male
- **Larvae** reared on an artificial diet, highly controlled environment, industrial scale
- Fly **pupae** are exposed to **cobalt 90 radiation** to break chromosomes of flies, rendering them sterile, but functional



<https://copeg.org/en/processes-sterile-flies-dispersion-center/>



Photos: Denise Bonilla, USDA



# Sterile Insect Technique (SIT)

SIT works because:

- Female mates only once
- Relatively rare in number
- Fly can be mass reared
- Fly can be sterilized without changing behavior
- Flies are released in massive numbers on a regular basis
  - Ground based
  - Aerial dispersal

Idea: Overwhelm wild male population to all but guarantee a wild female mates with a sterile male

- Female will still lay eggs, but eggs do not hatch
- Renders the wild female fly reproductively "dead"



<https://copeg.org/en/processes-sterile-flies-dispersion-center/>



Photo: Denise Bonilla, USDA



# APHIS/USDA Future Plans

- 5/28 - USDA is investing \$21 million to renovate an existing fruit fly production facility in Metapa, Mexico to further the long-term goal of eradicating this insect.
- When operational, this facility will produce 60-100 million additional sterile NWS flies weekly to push the population further south in Mexico.
- 6/18 - launched an \$8.5 million sterile New World screwworm (NWS) fly dispersal facility in South Texas and announced a sweeping five-pronged plan to enhance USDA's already robust ability to detect, control, and eliminate this pest.
- 8/15 - USDA Announces Sweeping Plans to Protect the US from New World Screwworm
- *Innovate Our Way to Eradication* - will provide up to \$100 million to invest in viable innovations which could facility and accelerate the pace of sterile fly production if proven successful.
  - *Protect the United States Border* – will provide \$750 million for the Construction of a Domestic Sterile Screwworm Production Facility in Edinburg, TX, at Moore Air Force Base
  - *Wildlife Migration Prevention* - hiring USDA-employed mounted patrol officers, known as “Tick Riders,” and other staff who will focus on border surveillance.



# Management Considerations



- Well managed operations have fewer issues (reports from S. and C. America)
  - **Inspect**
  - **Collect**
  - **Protect**





# Management Considerations

## Inspect

- Signs of maggots include:
  - The smell of rotting tissue.
  - Visible burrowing larvae.
  - Abnormal looking wounds on both livestock and wildlife.
  - Suspect cases should be reported even if unsure.





# Management Considerations

## Collect

- If you suspect a NWS case, report IMMEDIATELY to the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and contact your local veterinarian.
- Contact your local AgriLife County Extension agent for guidance and assistance.
- A sample **MUST** be collected.
  - Collect and remove all larvae leaving none in the wound. (At least 10 must be submitted for identification)
  - Place larvae in a clean, secure container.
  - Either freeze until solid or submerge in isopropyl alcohol.
  - Collect samples for TAHC before applying any treatment plan provided by your veterinarian.





# Management Considerations

## Protect

- Prevent wounds
  - Maintenance of facilities to prevent injury
  - Attention to production practices like ectoparasite management – tick bites are a big one
  - Timing and observation/follow-up of other practices
- Treat wounds promptly
  - Treat umbilicus of all newborns and all other animals' wounds with products to hasten drying and healing
  - Use pesticides appropriate for NWS
    - Catron IV
    - Screwworm fly spray
    - ProZap Screw Worm Aerosol





# ECONOMIC VALUES OF WHITE-TAILED DEER IN TEXAS

2022 SURVEY: PART II



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
Rangeland, Wildlife  
& Fisheries Management



NOVEMBER 2023

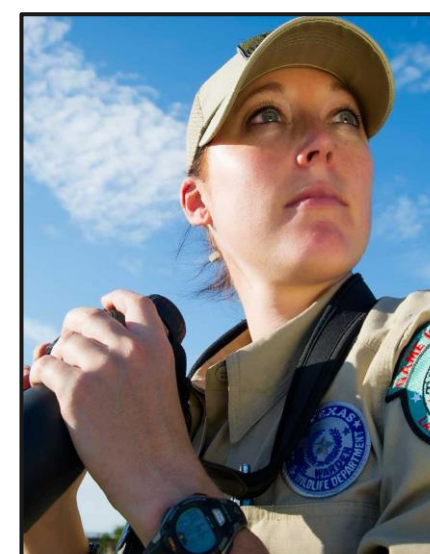
**Wildlife Reported  
to TPWD**  
512-389-4505

## NWS and Wildlife

- Texas is home to more than 100 mammal species
- > 5 million white-tailed deer
  - \$9.6 billion total annual economic contribution
- Susceptibility will vary by species
  - Activity patterns
  - Breeding and parturition seasons
  - Injury prone?



TPWD – Find a  
Wildlife Biologist



**Law Enforcement**



**Wildlife (Biologists)**



**State Parks**



# Suspected Cases

## Reporting

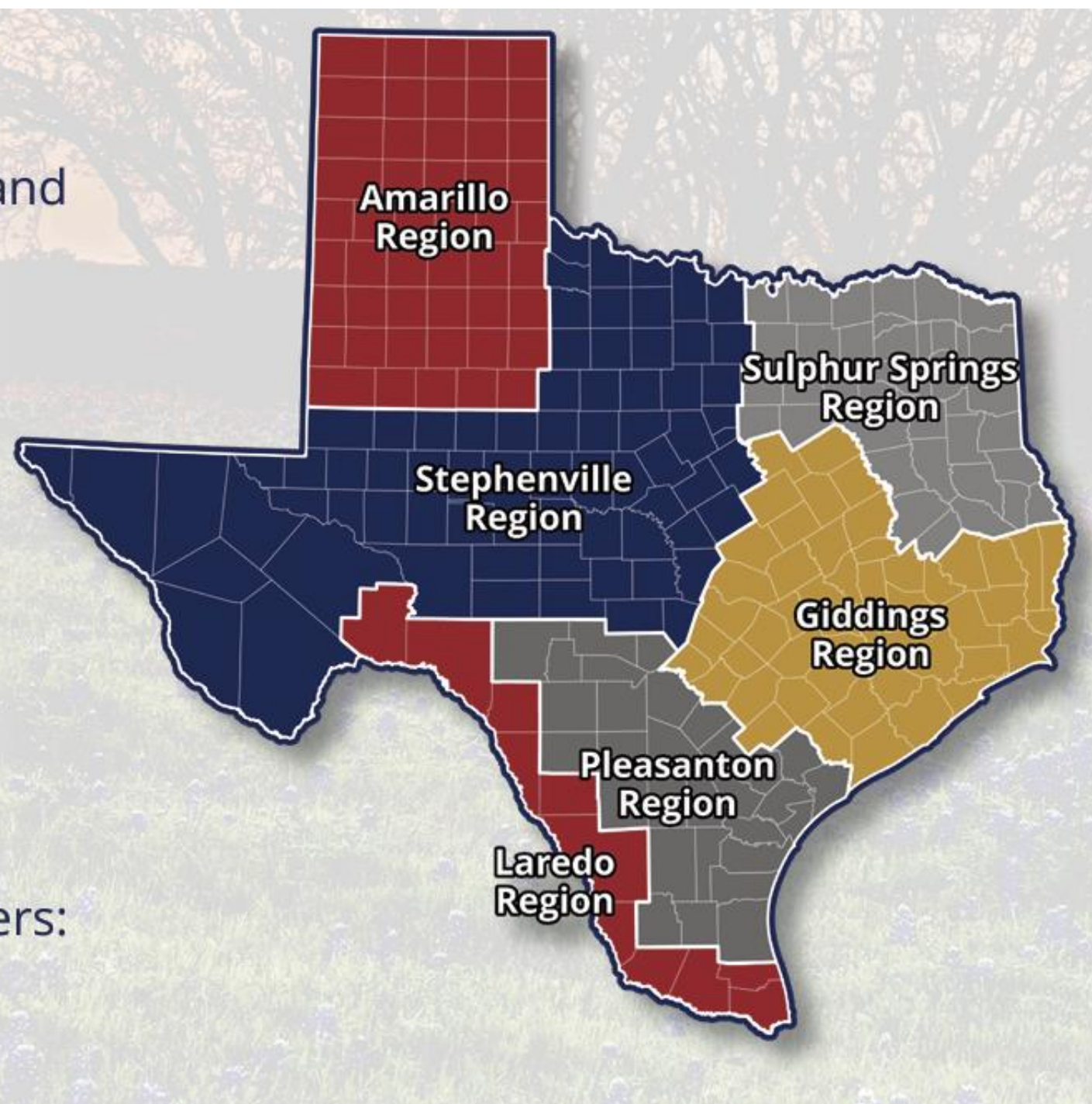
Early detection and reporting is critical. Report all suspected and confirmed cases of NWS immediately.

8:00 AM - 5:00 PM, contact a local TAHC region office:

|                      |              |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Amarillo.....        | 806-641-7000 |
| Pleasanton.....      | 361-358-3234 |
| Giddings.....        | 979-212-5440 |
| Laredo.....          | 956-568-5741 |
| Stephenville.....    | 512-556-6277 |
| Sulphur Springs..... | 903-919-3748 |

5:00 PM - 8:00 AM and on weekends, contact the TAHC headquarters:

Veterinarian on Call.....1-800-550-8242



## Immediate Actions

If you suspect screwworm infestation:

1. Contact Authorities:
  - Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) for livestock and pets: [800-550-8242](tel:800-550-8242)
  - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) for wildlife: [512-389-4505](tel:512-389-4505)
2. Notify your private veterinarian.
3. Do not delay reporting. Early detection limits spread and minimizes long-term consequences.
4. Contact Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agent

This is mandated by law to collect and submit the maggots for identification to USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa.



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**Report any mammals or birds  
(wild, livestock or  
domesticated) that have signs  
of**

- irritated behavior,
- head shaking,
- the smell of decay but alive,
- evidence of fly strike and/or the presence of fly larvae (maggots) in wounds





# Suspected human cases in Texas

## LRNS

- Assist clinical laboratories in forwarding samples to DSHS laboratory
- CDC suggests submitting 10 larvae

## DSHS Austin Laboratory

- Provide larval identification
  - Samples will only be accepted if they are submitted by healthcare provider
- Coordinate with CDC on identification
  - Will send pictures of samples to CDC DPDx for identification
  - Can repack and ship samples to CDC as necessary
  - Receives final lab report from CDC

## CDC

- Provide larval identification
  - Can provide identification based on high quality photos or video of larvae and/or flies
  - Will issue report identifying *C. hominivorax* or other species
  - For samples where pictures/video are not sufficient, can receive samples forwarded by state lab





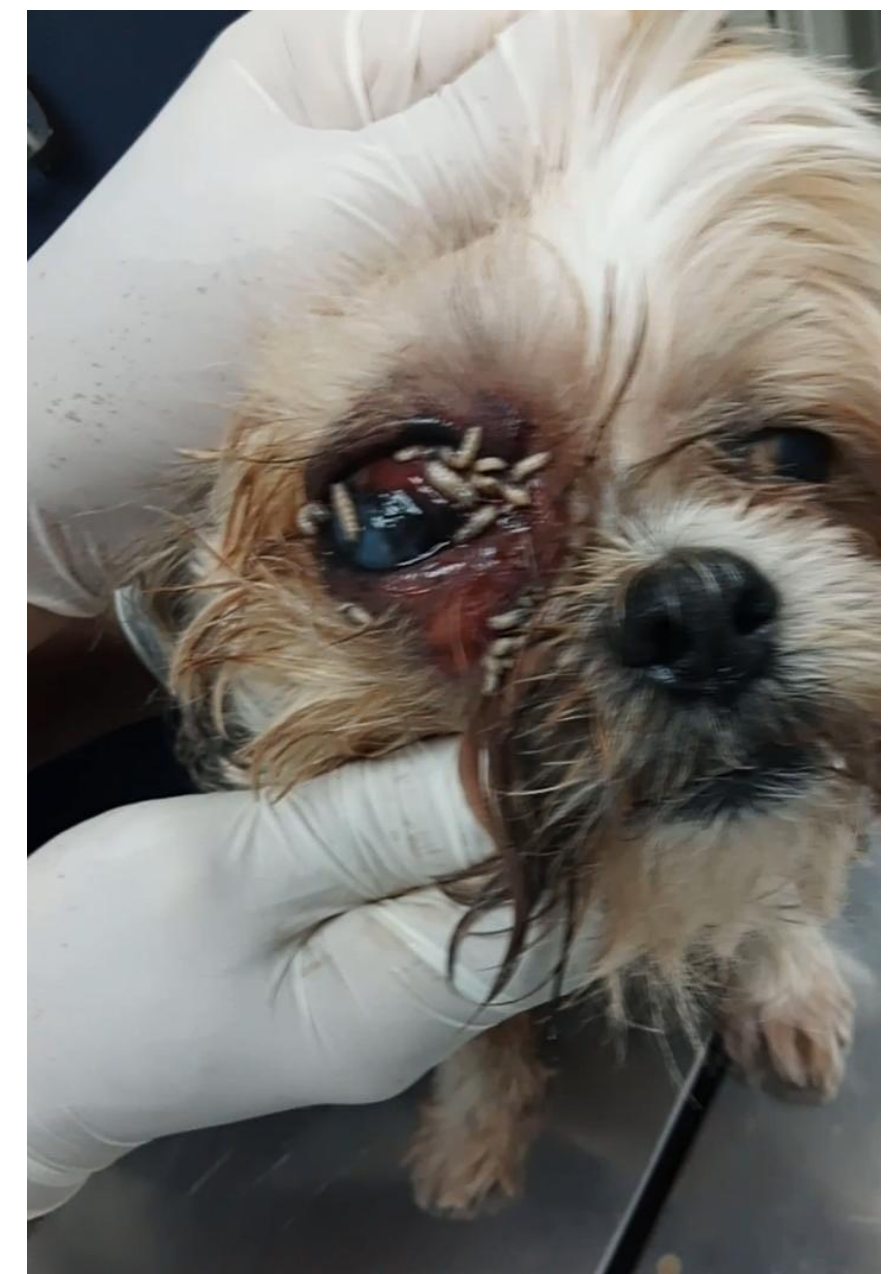
# Reporting Suspicious Human Cases

- A NWS infestation in a patient/person should be considered an urgent public health event
- If you suspect NWS, IMMEDIATELY contact your state public health department (DSHS), state public health veterinarian, or state epidemiologist.
- Contacts:
  - Epidemiologist on call list (from Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists): <https://libraries.cste.org/after-hours-contact/>
  - CDC Parasitic Inquiries: [parasites@cdc.gov](mailto:parasites@cdc.gov)
    - 404-718-4745
    - 770-488-7100 (after hours/holidays/weekends)
  - DPDx (diagnostic service at CDC for telediagnosis): [dpdx@cdc.gov](mailto:dpdx@cdc.gov)



# Impact to the US

- All warm-blooded animals are at risk
- Traveling with animals into outbreak and endemic countries puts them at risk
- People traveling to outbreak and endemic countries are at higher risk
  - Check CDC for travel restrictions and recommendations
- All states are equally at risk to NWS due to animal transportation
  - Texas sits at the front of that line due to proximity
  - But so are Arizona, New Mexico and potentially California



*Photo by Dr. Feliciano Bravo, COPEG*



*Photo by Samantha Gibbs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*



# Thank You!



## New World screwworm

### Background

The New World screwworm (NWS, *Cochliomyia hominivorax*) is a parasitic fly native to the Western Hemisphere. It lays eggs in the living tissue of fresh wounds in warm-blooded animals. The larvae (maggots) feed on the host's flesh, causing severe wounds and often death if untreated. The pest was eradicated in the U.S. in the 1960s. Since then, it occasionally reemerges and has resurfaced in Central America and Mexico. They are controlled only through the release of sterile males, known as the sterile insect technique (SIT). This approach, along with regular active surveillance and livestock inspections, has proven highly successful. As of May 2025, renewed attention to this parasite is crucial, as it may pose future risks to livestock and wildlife.

### Signs of New World screwworm in animals

The name screwworm refers to the feeding behavior exhibited by the maggots as they burrow (screw) into the wound. These maggots and their feeding cause extensive damage by tearing at the hosts' tissue with sharp mouth hooks. The wound will become larger and deeper as more and more eggs hatch and larvae feed on the living tissue. This results in serious and often deadly damage to the animal if not discovered and treated.



Figure 1. Screwworm infestation in dog

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Phillip Kaufman<sup>1</sup>, Sonja L. Swiger<sup>1</sup>, Andy Herring<sup>2</sup>

Continual and regular monitoring and evaluation of all livestock are important for herd and flock biosecurity and health considerations. Producers should be alert for possible signs associated with potential infestation including:

- Foul-smelling wounds with visible maggots
- Animals biting or licking at wounds
- Lesions in navels, ears, dehorning or branding sites
- Unusual restlessness or lethargy

In the New World screwworm, the larval stage (Figure 2) is responsible for inflicting significant injury and economic loss. These larvae inhabit the wounds of living animals, where they cause extensive tissue damage. Mature larvae can reach 17 mm in length (2/3 of an inch) and have spines that protrude from the body and wrap around in a spiral that protrude from the body and wrap around in a spiral giving them the name screwworm. Official identification of larvae is based largely on the presence or absence of dual internal breathing tubes. Confirmation of the fly identity can be determined only by a trained individual. Specimens must be submitted to Texas Animal Health Commission.

### Suspicious cases must be reported

Immediately isolate any suspected animals and contact

- Your local veterinarian
- Texas Animal Health Commission: 1-800-550-824
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Veterinary Services: (512) 383-2400

To prevent unintentional spread, avoid transport suspected animals until advised.



Figure 2. Screwworm larva

## Livestock Management Considerations for New World Screwworm

Thomas B. Hairgrove<sup>1</sup>, Jacob W. Thorne<sup>2</sup>, Ron GilP, Andy D. Herring<sup>4</sup>, Phillip Kaufman<sup>5</sup>, Sonja L. Swiger<sup>5</sup>

### Introduction

The New World screwworm (NWS), *Cochliomyia hominivorax*, once eradicated from the U.S. in 1966, remains a threat due to potential reintroduction along the southern border. These parasitic flies cause severe wounds by feeding on live tissue, leading to rapid health declines and even death in livestock. Proactive livestock management and seasonal planning are essential in reducing the risk of NWS infestation.

For more detailed background and biological information, refer to the full technical bulletin,<sup>6</sup>

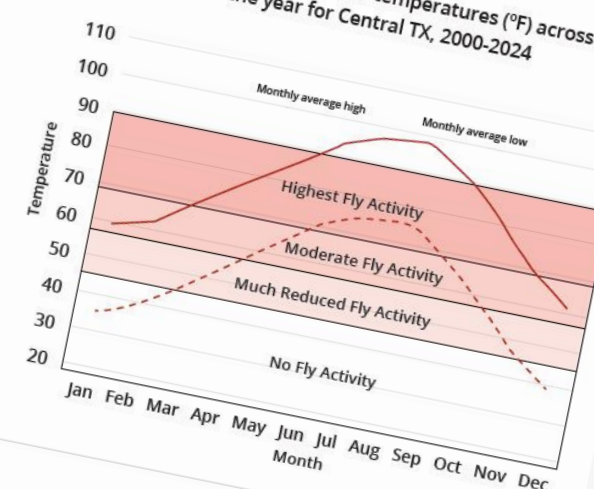


Adult New World screwworm fly (Michael Miller/Texas A&M AgriLife)

### Seasonal Management Recommendations

- NWS activity is temperature-dependent:
- **High risk:** 80°F+ with 30–70% relative humidity (life cycle in 2–3 weeks).
  - **Moderate risk:** Temperate weather (life cycle in 3–4 weeks).
  - **Low risk:** Below 59°F (life cycle in 2–3 months or less active).

Average high and low temperatures (°F) across the year for Central TX, 2000–2024



### Understanding the Threat

- NWS flies lay eggs in wounds, including those in mucous membranes.
- Larvae burrow into live tissue, leading to a condition called myiasis.
- NWS typically does not transfer from infected animals to others, however larvae will feed on the same animal for 5–7 days before dropping off to complete their life cycle in soil.
- Spread occurs mainly through human transport of infected animals.

**Phone Number**

254.968.4144

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