

LOOMACRES Wildlife Management

Annually on February 2nd, many people look to the familiar groundhog to predict the duration of the ongoing winter. Does the ground hog see its shadow and scurry back into its hole resulting in 6 more long weeks of wintery cold? Or, does the groundhog remain outside its den and indicating a shorter end to the cold season? While many view the emergence of the groundhog as a welcome sight, many airports should remain aware of the potential hazards the furry brown animal poses to aviation safety.



Groundhogs, also known as woodchucks, are a large ground dwelling member of the sciuridae (squirrel) family. Woodchucks are typically grizzled brown in color, but can also have white (albino) and black (melanistic) colorations. They are found throughout the majority of northeastern North America, ranging as far south as north Alabama. Woodchucks range between 5-10 pounds, feeding on a variety of vegetables, grasses and legumes. Groundhogs are a lowland species, preferring open field habitats, but can also be found along woodland edges, rock walls, road sides and along building foundations. Woodchucks excavate an extensive den system of burrows 10-12 inches wide, up to 5 feet deep in the earth and up to 70 feet in length that is easily identified by a large mound of excavated dirt at the opening.



Woodchucks and other ground squirrel species pose a hazard to aircraft when they wander out of their burrows onto runways and taxiways. Between 1990-2013, a total of 193 strikes involving members of the sciuridae were reported were submitted to the FAA. In addition, woodchuck burrows can potentially undermine runways and taxiways or cause other damages to drainage systems or mowing equipment.

Woodchucks also serve as a prey species for large more hazardous carnivores such as raptors, coyotes and red fox. They can create dig outs under an airport perimeter fence, allowing an access point for additional wildlife.

Airports should monitor their AOA for woodchuck presence and take a proactive approach to managing woodchuck populations. Woodchucks are protected by state regulations and can be lethally removed under state depredation permits. For any questions regarding woodchucks or woodchuck population management, contact Cody Baciuska at cody@loomacres.com, or visit our website www.airportwildlife.com.

" Bringing Wildlife Management To A Higher Level "

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