

Rats chew up county vehicle, continue to wreak havoc

By Christopher M. Collins, December 6 2016, USA

It's the year of the rat in Wichita County.

Above-average rainfall and plentiful farm crops have caused the rodent population to explode both in the county and inside metro Wichita Falls, spreading disease and prompting the growth of the county's rattlesnake population.

Now the rats have begun to terrorize automobiles - on Monday, Wichita County commissioners voted to pay \$2,200 to a local car dealership for repairs to a sheriff's office vehicle that was chewed on by rodents. "Extensive" damage was done to the vehicle's internal wiring, which is a frequent target of gnawing rodents, said county commissioner Barry Mahler.

"The rats are everywhere. They're as bad as I've ever seen them," said Mahler, who also operates a farm north of Iowa Park. "I've heard of several instances where they've damaged vehicles and other equipment that's left sitting out. They can do thousands of dollars of damage at a time."

Sometimes, the rats' voracious appetite borders on the unbelievable. Mahler recently bought a bucket of rat poison pellets and stored it overnight in his shop. The next day, the thick plastic container had been chewed through. The poison was gone.

"I've never seen anything like it," he said.

At another meeting of the county commissioners, Ray Gonzalez reported that the rats were eating the bar soap in one of the buildings on his property. One day, he saw teeth marks in the soap. The next day, claw marks. The day after that, the soap was missing.

The Times Record News previously reported that the uptick in the number of rats most likely can be attributed to favorable conditions: ample rainfall and plenty of pilfered farm food.

In October, the city of Wichita Falls urged residents to be cognizant of rattlesnakes, whose own population was increasing with that of the rats. The city's animal control office was called to collect four rattlesnakes in residential neighborhoods that month. Also in October, the city confirmed one

human case of tularemia, a potentially deadly disease that can be contracted through contact with infected rodents.

With cold weather on the way, the outsized rat population could be driven indoors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends sealing holes inside and outside homes to prevent rodent entry, along with setting traps to reduce rat numbers.