

PROJECT COYOTE

F O S T E R I N G C O E X I S T E N C E



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Contacts:

Greta Anderson, Western Watersheds Project (520)623-1878

Laird Lucas, Advocates for the West, 208-342-7024 ext 209

Andrea Santarsiere, Center for Biological Diversity, (303) 854-7748

Bethany Cotton, WildEarth Guardians, (503) 327-4923

Gary Macfarlane, Friends of the Clearwater (208) 882-9755

Camilla Fox, Project Coyote, (415) 690-0338

Lawsuit Challenges Government's Large-scale Wildlife Killing in Idaho

Killing Thousands of Animals Each Year Violates Environmental Laws

BOISE, *Idaho*— Five conservation groups filed a lawsuit today over the U.S. Department of Agriculture's failure to fully analyze and disclose the impact of its "Wildlife Services" program in Idaho, which kills thousands of wolves, coyotes, foxes, cougars, birds and other wild animals each year at taxpayer expense. The multimillion-dollar federal program, whose work primarily benefits the agriculture industry, relies on an array of lethal methods including aerial and ground shooting, poison, trapping and explosives.

Following a notice of intent to sue sent by the conservation groups last September, the agency agreed to prepare a new environmental analysis for its wildlife-killing activities in Idaho — an incremental step that falls short of the more comprehensive analysis required by law. Today's lawsuit seeks long-term changes in the agency's operations to adopt nonlethal methods, as well as the development of an environmental impact statement to analyze the impacts of killing wildlife across the state year after year.

"Wildlife Services spends millions of dollars each year to indiscriminately shoot, poison and trap coyotes, wolves, mountain lions, foxes, badgers, and many other wildlife species — yet it refuses to comply with our nation's basic environmental laws," said Laird J. Lucas, director of litigation at Advocates for the West. "This lawsuit will shine a bright line on this rogue agency and force it to reveal publicly exactly what wildlife killing programs it is engaged in and the adverse impacts of those activities."

"A transparent and public analysis of Wildlife Services' activities is long overdue," stated Greta Anderson, deputy director of Western Watersheds Project, adding that "Wildlife Services' wanton killing of Idaho's wildlife is morally wrong, environmentally counterproductive, and procedurally illegal."

The agency has never comprehensively examined how its actions affect grizzly bears, Canada lynx, and bull trout, all protected under the Endangered Species Act. The agency sets traps and snares across the state that accidentally capture and kill federally protected wildlife, as well as domestic pets. Bull trout are killed when the agency detonates explosives to remove beaver dams.

“Without a comprehensive analysis of Wildlife Service’s wildlife-killing activities across the state, it’s impossible to know whether it’s leading to widespread damage to other species like grizzly bears,” said Andrea Santarsiere, staff attorney at Center for Biological Diversity. “The public deserves more, and so does Idaho’s wildlife.”

“Shrouded in secrecy, Wildlife Services operates as though it is above the law, further endangering already imperiled species and wasting our taxpayer dollars,” said Bethany Cotton, wildlife program director for WildEarth Guardians. “A full accounting and scientific analysis of Wildlife Services’ cruel practices is long overdue.”

The state of knowledge about the impacts of wildlife killing has changed significantly over the years. “Current science doesn’t support the arbitrary killing of animals as a ‘management’ tool,” added Camilla Fox, founder and executive director of Project Coyote. “For example, killing wolves and coyotes indiscriminately can exacerbate livestock conflicts and is simply a waste of taxpayer dollars.”

“The long reach of this killing program kills key predators like wolves even in remote wildlands like the backcountry of the Clearwater Basin,” said Gary Macfarlane of Friends of the Clearwater. “It is past time the agency is held accountable to we the people.”

In 2013 Wildlife Services killed over 3,000 mammals in Idaho, employing methods such as aerial gunning, neck snares, foothold traps, and toxic devices known as M-44s that spray sodium cyanide into the victim’s mouth, causing tremendous suffering and releasing toxic chemicals into the environment.

Western Watersheds Project, WildEarth Guardians, Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Clearwater, and Project Coyote are represented by attorneys Laurie Rule and Talasi Brooks of Advocates for the West, and Kristin Ruether of Western Watersheds Project.

A copy of today’s filing can be read online [here](#).