

By Chris McManus  
Published: May 8, 2015

*The Independent Coast Observer*

---

# Mendocino County ponders new way of dealing with predators

Camilla Fox and Keli Hendricks of Project Coyote asked the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors Tuesday to consider alternative approaches to dealing with predators in agricultural lands. The presentation was part of a settlement in a lawsuit filed last year by a number of animal advocacy groups against the county for its Wildlife Damage Management program, operated by the USDA Wildlife Services agency under a contract with the County.

Under the settlement, the County agreed to the informational presentation about alternatives to the current program.

The current county contract “authorizes Wildlife Services, a highly-controversial federal program, to kill hundreds of animals in the county every year, including coyotes, bears, and foxes, without assessing the ecological impact or considering alternatives,” said Megan Backus of the Animal Legal Defense Fund, another of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

Last July the coalition, which also includes Animal Welfare Institute, Natural Resources Defense Council and the Center for Biological Diversity, urged the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors to terminate the contract with Wildlife Services and conduct the an environmental review. The county’s lack of response prompted the lawsuit.

Much of Fox’s presentation was on the Marin County Livestock and Wildlife Protection Program, a non-lethal, community-based program which that county adopted in 2003 at the urging of Project Coyote and others.

“The process of how we got there is really important,” Fox said. It started as a “rancorous debate,” that ultimately turned into a series of meetings between agriculture and wildlife to design and implement a program, she said.

The formal presentation was followed by about 90 minutes of public testimony, in which agricultural interests favoring lethal methods of eliminating predators greatly outnumbered those favoring non-lethal interventions. Many claimed that Mendocino County is different than Marin, wilder with different predators. Others disputed some of Fox’s contentions about the success of the Marin County program.

“People look at this from such different perspectives,” said Supervisor Dan Hamburg. “It got pretty hot.”

“I have to do more research,” he added. “I’m glad we didn’t have to make a decision yesterday [Tuesday].”

Supervisors will have to make a decision before the County’s current contract with Wildlife Services runs out June 30. The County could decide to take the Marin County approach of crafting a different, non-lethal approach to eliminating animal conflicts. If, however, the County decides to renew its contract with Wildlife Services, even a modified contract, it will have to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act, including a public comment period.

By Chris McManus

Published: Dec. 5, 2014

*The Independent Coast Observer*

---

# Animal rights groups sue Mendocino County

A coalition of animal rights and conservation organizations filed suit against Mendocino County last week for alleged violations of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) related to the county's Predatory Animal Control Program.

The Animal Legal Defense Fund, Animal Welfare Institute, Natural Resources Defense Council, Project Coyote and the Center for Biological Diversity, along with Mendocino resident Carol Becker are asking for a stay in the program, which is operated by the USDA Wildlife Services agency at a cost of \$142,356. Ultimately, the lawsuit seeks to have the county conduct an Environmental Impact Report on the program.

"The contract authorizes Wildlife Services, a highly-controversial federal program, to kill hundreds of animals in the county every year, including coyotes, bears, and foxes, without assessing the ecological impact or considering alternatives," said Megan Backus of the Animal Legal Defense Fund.

In July the coalition urged the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors to terminate the contract with Wildlife Services and conduct the appropriate environmental review. The lawsuit claims the county did not respond.

"Last year, in response to a letter from the Animal Legal Defense Fund, Sonoma County's Board of Supervisors opted not to renew its contract with Wildlife Services," said Backus. "Nearly 15 years ago, Marin County replaced its Wildlife Services contract with a nonlethal predator control program that brought a 62 percent decrease in predation at one-third of the cost," she added.

The lawsuit alleges that Wildlife Services engages in wide-scale killing of wild animals, including four million animals nationwide last year and 80,000 animals per year in California.

Citing a 2013 report by Dr. Bradley Bergstrom of Valdosta State University, the lawsuit claims that Wildlife Services' California operations have killed many different federally threatened, endangered or otherwise protected mammals and several protected bird species including California condors, golden eagles and bald eagles.

Wildlife Services also has a well-documented history of killing non-predatory domestic species, including thousands of family pets.

This concentrated killing of wildlife causes biodiversity loss, which in turn negatively impacts the environment, alleges the lawsuit. This should have triggered an Environmental Impact Report under CEQA. Instead, the Board unanimously authorized the agreement with Wildlife Services as part of its consent agenda at its June 3 meeting.

The county has until Dec. 16 to respond to the lawsuit. County Counsel Doug Losack did not respond to calls for comment by press time.

Jessica Blum, lead attorney for the Animal Legal Defense Fund, said the best case would be a resolution within six months, although the suit could take over a year, she said. If the plaintiffs win the lawsuit, the next step would be a review of the program under CEQA with public input.