



Working to protect and restore Western Watersheds

USDA WILDLIFE SERVICES REFORM

Wildlife Services (WS) is a program within the Department of Agriculture that addresses human-wildlife conflicts, primarily by killing wildlife. Much of this activity occurs on public lands in the west, ostensibly to protect livestock from predation. Millions of animals are eradicated each year by poisons, traps, snares, gas, and aerial gunning. Because of its controversial mission, the program is notoriously secretive. However, abuses have been exposed in recent years, leading to calls for change.



Reforms are needed because:

* Most people do not support lethal controls. Cultural standards for animal treatment are changing. Cruel and inhumane techniques and indiscriminate mass killing programs are no longer acceptable to most Americans. WS persists mainly due to secrecy; most people don't know it exists and would want to defund it if they did. The program needs to adapt to current scientific views of wildlife management.



* Lethal control methods are hazardous to humans and pets. Many dogs and cats are killed annually by traps or poison. Because it wants to avoid public interference, WS doesn't always warn pet owners when it is conducting lethal control operations nearby. Traps and poisons may be placed along hiking trails on public land, where they pose risks to public safety.

* Lethal control is not based on sound science. There is little evidence that killing predators to reduce livestock conflicts works long-term, and some studies suggest indiscriminate killing may actually increase conflicts. The program also fails to adequately weigh the effects of predator control on ecosystem services. And lethal methods kill non-target animals, including rare species such as eagles and wolverines. These unintended deaths are an avoidable and unacceptable consequence of using arbitrary lethal control methods.

* Killing predators does not serve the public good. Most predator control is undertaken to protect livestock on public land, but the benefits accrue only to the rancher. The public is expected to sacrifice its tax dollars and wildlife, but it receives little in return. Public lands ranching contributes just 3% to the nation's meat supply. WS is a financial prop for a special interest group that can't support itself and requires large direct and indirect public subsidies.



* WS lacks transparency and trustworthiness. Requests for information are routinely stonewalled. There are reports of inhumane and illegal misconduct by employees, behavior that is allowed or even encouraged when there is no public oversight.

Proposed reforms:

* End inhumane killing techniques. Target problem animals individually rather than destroying as many animals as possible in the control area. Require animal welfare concerns, conservation impacts, and sound science to be fully considered in decision making. Also, hold WS to higher standards of accountability and transparency. The public deserves accurate records of the number of animals killed, including non-target wildlife and pets.



* Incentivize proactive approaches to wildlife conflicts rather than reacting to problems with lethal solutions. When addressing conflicts, require that non-lethal control methods be implemented first. Lethal control should be a last resort. Fully fund development of new management methods such as domestic guard animals, increased human husbandry, birthing sheds, strobe lights, and fencing. Follow the examples in Montana, Oregon, Arizona, and Wisconsin where local Wildlife Service agents are helping livestock operators develop non-lethal management.

* Comply with NEPA. Overhaul the outdated programmatic EIS for WS, which hasn't been revised in almost 20 years. Many aspects of the natural and social environment have changed since then, requiring an updated analysis of agency actions. WS should also conduct an EIS for each state in which it operates, and prepare EAs to analyze and disclose to the public the site-specific impacts of each of its projects.

* Transfer WS to the Department of the Interior to integrate it with other federal wildlife management programs where the corporate culture and guiding documents are more closely aligned with modern views of wildlife management, including conservation.

A Decade of Killing

Funded by Your Tax Dollars

TOTAL ANIMALS KILLED: **34 million**



815,909
COYOTES



3,576
GRAY WOLVES



4,566
BLACK BEARS



3,596
MOUNTAIN LIONS



16,958
BOBCATS



4,713
DOGS



10,852
CATS



14
MEXICAN WOLVES
ENDANGERED

BUDGET: **\$1.14 billion**

Animals killed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program from 2004 to 2013; includes 16 million+ starlings. SOURCE: USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Source.

Source: Humane Society of the United States http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/lethal_wildlife_management/facts/usda-wildlife-services-inefficient-and-inhumane.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/ Accessed 4/29/16.

Photos (all accessed 4/29/16):

1. "Coyote mother and pup". Posted by Sadia Pak 5/6/13 <http://www.funawake.com/animal-wallpapers-hd-widescreen-high-quality-desktop-free-download/coyote-mother-and-pup-2/>
2. "Maggie_and_Baby." No date. Posted by Oregon Public Broadcasting <http://www.opb.org/news/blog/ecotrope/dogs-death-sparks-a-fight-over-wildlife-trapping/> ["The McCurtain family dog Maggie was killed in a wildlife trap that was set within 50 feet of the family's backyard fence."]
3. No title. 2009. Posted by wolfernation.com. <http://wolfernation.com/free-videos/?tag=coyote> [Texas Predator School, showing "the catches, and all the fun"].
4. "Joey-Coyote-1". 2016. Posted by Mahoney Outdoors. <http://www.mahoneyoutdoors.com/hunting/elite-hunter-effective-predator-control-part-2/>

For more information contact Western Watersheds Project (www.westernwatersheds.org)