

For Immediate Release, June 21, 2017

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Lawsuit Filed Against Federal Wildlife-killing Program in California

SAN FRANCISCO— Conservationists [sued the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program](#) today over its outdated wildlife-killing plan for Northern California.

The lawsuit, filed in San Francisco federal court, seeks an updated environmental analysis of the program's killing of native wildlife including coyotes, bobcats and foxes.

"Wildlife Services' cruel killing practices are ineffective, environmentally harmful and totally out of touch with science," said Collette Adkins, a Center for Biological Diversity attorney representing the conservation groups involved in the lawsuit. "It's long past time that Wildlife Services joined the 21st century and updated its practices to stop the mass extermination of animals. Nonlethal methods for dealing with human-wildlife conflicts have been shown to work. We have no choice but to sue the agency and force a closer look at those alternatives."

Wildlife Services is a multimillion-dollar federal program that uses painful leghold traps, strangulation snares, poisons and aerial gunning to kill wolves, coyotes, cougars, birds and other wild animals — primarily to benefit the agriculture industry.

Last year the program reported that it killed 1.6 million native animals nationwide, including 3,893 coyotes, 142 foxes, 83 black bears, 18 bobcats and thousands of other creatures in California. Nontarget animals — including protected wildlife like wolves, Pacific fisher and eagles — are also at risk from Wildlife Services' indiscriminate methods.

"Killing native wildlife at the behest of the ranching industry is morally unconscionable and scientifically unsound," said Erik Molvar of Western

Watersheds Project. "Carnivores play an important ecological role, and exterminating them upsets the balance of nature. We should leave the wildlife alone and change ranching practices instead."

"Wildlife Services is acting in clear violation of the law," said Tara Zuardo, Animal Welfare Institute wildlife attorney. "The agency cannot be allowed to continue haphazardly and cruelly kill thousands of wild animals in Northern California each year without weighing more humane alternatives."

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Wildlife Services to rigorously examine the environmental effects of killing wildlife and to consider alternatives that rely on proven nonlethal methods to avoid wildlife conflicts. But the wildlife-killing program's environmental analysis for Northern California is more than 20 years old. According to the complaint filed today, Wildlife Services must use recent information to analyze the impacts of its wildlife-killing program on the environment and California's unique wild places.

"NEPA requires that federal agencies use the best available science in analyzing the impacts of their programs, and we believe Wildlife Services has failed to do this and has in fact cherry-picked their science to meet their goals," stated Camilla Fox, founder and executive director of Project Coyote. "Moreover, they must consider alternatives to indiscriminate killing and analyze the site-specific and cumulative impacts that killing large numbers of wild animals has on the diversity and integrity of healthy ecosystems."

Today's lawsuit is brought by the Center for Biological Diversity, Western Watersheds Project, the Animal Legal Defense Fund, Project Coyote, the Animal Welfare Institute and WildEarth Guardians. It targets Wildlife Services' program in California's North District, which includes Butte, Humboldt, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Nevada, Plumas, Sierra, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sutter, Trinity and Yuba counties.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.3 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

The Animal Legal Defense Fund was founded in 1979 to protect the lives and advance the interests of animals through the legal system. To accomplish this mission, the Animal Legal Defense Fund files high-impact lawsuits to protect animals from harm; provides free legal assistance and training to prosecutors to assure that animal abusers are punished for their crimes; supports tough animal protection legislation and fights harmful legislation; and provides resources and opportunities to law students and professionals

to advance the emerging field of animal law. For more information, please visit aldf.org.

The Animal Welfare Institute (awionline.org) is a nonprofit charitable organization founded in 1951 and dedicated to reducing animal suffering caused by people. AWI engages policymakers, scientists, industry, and the public to achieve better treatment of animals everywhere—in the laboratory, on the farm, in commerce, at home, and in the wild.

Project Coyote is a national nonprofit organization and a North American coalition of wildlife educators, scientists, ranchers, and community leaders promoting coexistence between people and wildlife, and compassionate conservation through education, science, and advocacy. For more information, visit www.projectcoyote.org.

Western Watersheds Project is an environmental conservation group working to protect and restore western watersheds and wildlife

WildEarth Guardians works to protect and restore the wildlife, wild places, wild rivers and health of the American West.