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Conservation Groups Challenge Idaho Wolf-killing
USDA's Wildlife Services Has Killed Hundreds of Idaho Wolves

BOISE, *Idaho*— Five conservation groups filed a lawsuit in federal court today challenging the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services' killing of gray wolves in Idaho.

The agency killed at least 72 wolves in Idaho last year, using methods including foothold traps, wire snares that strangle wolves, and aerial gunning from helicopters. The agency has used aerial gunning in central Idaho's "Lolo zone" for several years in a row — using planes or helicopters to run wolves to exhaustion before shooting them from the air, often leaving them wounded to die slow, painful deaths.

The agency's environmental analysis from 2011 is woefully outdated due to changing circumstances, including new recreational hunting and trapping that kills hundreds of wolves in Idaho each year, and significant changes in scientific understanding of wolves and ecosystem functions.

Wildlife Services does most of its wolf-killing at the behest of the livestock industry, following reports of livestock depredation. For example, five wolves were killed outside of Hailey, Idaho in July 2015 for allegedly attacking sheep. Documents indicate that Wildlife Services has even attempted to kill wolves in the newly-designated Boulder-White Clouds Wildernesses. But Wildlife Services does not consider whether livestock owners took common-sense precautionary measures to avoid conflicts with wolves such as lambing indoors.

"Wildlife Service's wolf-killing program is senseless, cruel, and impoverishes our wild country," said Travis Bruner of Western Watersheds Project. "Killing wolves for private livestock interests is wrong, especially on public lands, where wildlife deserves to come first. In addition, new science shows that it does not reduce conflicts long-term."

"Wildlife Services has never even bothered to consider how much mortality a healthy wolf population can handle," said Andrea Santarsiere of the Center for Biological Diversity. "Recent research indicates the state may be overestimating wolf populations — something Wildlife Services must consider before killing more wolves."

"It is long past time that we base wildlife management decisions on the best available science, not on antiquated, disproven anti-wolf rhetoric," said Bethany Cotton, wildlife program director

for WildEarth Guardians. “Wildlife Services needs to come out of the shadows, update its analyses and adopt practices in keeping with modern science and values about the ethical treatment of animals.”

The agency also kills wolves for the purported benefit of elk herds, including in the Lolo zone.

“The campaign waged against the Lolo’s native wolves in the name of elk is reprehensible. Science shows that the elk decline there is due to long-term, natural-habitat changes, not impacts from wolves,” said Gary Macfarlane of Friends of the Clearwater. “It is particularly galling that Wildlife Services is targeting wolves that mostly live in Wildernesses or large roadless areas. These, especially, are places where wolves should be left alone.”

“Wildlife Services, formerly called Animal Damage Control, has been criticized for over fifty years by some of our nation’s leading predator biologists. It has a long, documented history of violating state and federal laws, and even its own directives,” said Brooks Fahy, executive director of Predator Defense. “Idahoans and the American public deserve a guarantee that federal programs like Wildlife Services are using the most up-to-date scientific information available.”

The five conservation organizations are asking the court to order Wildlife Services to cease wolf-killing activities until it prepares an up-to-date environmental analysis of its wolf-killing program. The groups — Western Watersheds Project, the Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Clearwater, WildEarth Guardians and Predator Defense — are represented by Advocates for the West and Western Watersheds Project attorneys.

Read the complaint [here](#).