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## Stop Predator Poisons from Killing Wildlife and Harming Ecosystems: There's No Place for These Deadly Poisons on American Lands

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program is in dire need of reform—particularly when it comes to its practice of killing predators that play key ecological roles across the American landscape. Wildlife Services can immediately take a big step in the right direction by ceasing the use of two deadly predator poisons, sodium cyanide and Compound 1080, both of which are unnecessary, inhumane, dangerous to people, and environmentally destructive.

Primarily used at the request of private livestock owners, these two deadly poisons not only are underwritten by American taxpayers, but they also damage public land and wildlife. In 2012, these two poisons were used to kill more than 14,500 carnivores. Especially disturbing is that Wildlife Services has never weighed the true costs of these practices, in terms of threats to both public safety and wildlife, against perceived benefits accrued to a few private agricultural interests.

NRDC is urging Wildlife Services to reexamine its dangerous and destructive practices for predator control, and end its use of sodium cyanide and Compound 1080.



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### Predator Poisons: A History of Trouble

Time and time again, government reviewers have called for an end to the use of sodium cyanide, Compound 1080, and similar deadly poisons for predator control. However, efforts for real reform have so far been scuttled or short-lived.

- In 1963, the Advisory Group on Wildlife and Game Management, appointed by the United States Department of Interior (DOI), criticized predator control activities, including poisoning, as nonselective and excessive and called for a research program to find selective and/or non-lethal effective controls.<sup>1</sup>

- In 1972, the Advisory Committee on Predator Control recommended to the Council on Environmental Quality and the DOI that no poisons be used in predator control or in rodent control that might secondarily kill predators.<sup>2</sup>

- In response to the 1972 report, President Nixon banned the use of predator control poisons (Compound 1080, strychnine, sodium cyanide, and thallium) on federal lands by executive order.<sup>3</sup> This ban stood until President Reagan rescinded it in 1982.<sup>4</sup>

- A 2004 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Inspector General report found “serious issues” with Wildlife Services’ storage, security, and management of hazardous chemicals, including sodium cyanide and Compound 1080.<sup>5</sup>

### The Cost of Using These Poisons

- When predators are removed from the environment on a large scale, other publicly owned natural resources suffer as well. Healthy predator populations often prevent overgrazing and erosion by regulating the populations of grazing animals, such as deer. And predators can significantly affect their environment in even more surprising ways. A decrease in mountain lions and wolves can reduce plant and tree diversity and abundance in their ecosystems. Badgers, another animal that is targeted by Wildlife Services, offer a crucial service to their habitat by aerating the soil and distributing nutrients as they burrow underground.

- No cost-benefit analyses of predator control have been conducted independent of Wildlife Services, and the Government Accountability Office has pointed out the weaknesses of the studies that have been done within the organization. While the environmental and security risks are clear, Wildlife Services has not demonstrated how the use of these toxic poisons benefits the American taxpayer.

### Recommendation: Keep Lethal Poisons off of Our Lands

There is no place for Compound 1080 and sodium cyanide in the management of wildlife. Numerous other predator control methods are available, and it is fully feasible and within the Wildlife Services’ authority to end the use of these two killers for good.



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### Facts: How These Poisons Kill



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A spring-loaded M-44 device with bait lure.

**Sodium cyanide** is placed in spring-loaded devices with bait lures, known as M-44s. When an animal tugs on the bait, a spring shoots cyanide into the animal’s mouth.

Most often used to kill coyotes, M-44s are just as likely to kill non-problem animals—or ones that have never attacked livestock. These devices embody the “sledgehammer approach” to predator management, killing on a large scale for “preventative” purposes.

M-44s kill hundreds of non-target animals each year, including wolves, badgers, bears, bobcats, foxes, dogs, birds, and even people’s pets. And, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) records, five Wildlife Services employees and at least five unsuspecting citizens have been exposed to sodium cyanide after triggering devices or coming into contact with poisoned pets.



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**Compound 1080**, or sodium fluoroacetate, is placed in collars strapped on the necks of sheep or goats that spill the poison when punctured. The poison is so deadly it is allowed to be used in only 11 states, has been outlawed in two states, and is banned in many countries. There is no antidote to Compound 1080 exposure, and carcasses contaminated by the substance

must be handled as hazardous waste.

Death by Compound 1080 is excruciating and slow (it usually takes between 3 and 15 hours). Exposure can result in cardiac failure, progressive failure of the central nervous system, or respiratory arrest following severe prolonged convulsions.

<sup>1</sup> Leopold, A. S., S. A. Cain, C. M. Cottam, I. N. Gabrielson, and T. L. Kimball. 1964. Predator and rodent control in the United States. Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, D. C., USA

<sup>2</sup> Cain, S.A., J.A. Kadlec, D.L. Allen, R.A. Cooley, M.H. Hornocker, and F.H. Wagner. 1971. Predator control—1971. Report to the President’s Council on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Department of the Interior by the Advisory Committee of Predator Control. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

<sup>3</sup> Exec. Order No. 11643, 37 FR 2875; February 9, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Exec. Order No. 12342, 47 FR 4223; January 29, 1982.

<sup>5</sup> USDA Office of the Inspector General, 2004. Audit No. 33001-05-Hy.