

Wolf's poisoning raises questions about Wildlife Services

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

A Northeast Oregon wolf died after it bit a spring-loaded cyanide powder trap set by USDA Wildlife Services in an apparent violation of an informal agreement it had with state officials not to use the devices in areas frequented by wolves.

OR-48, a 100-pound male from the Shamrock Pack, died Feb. 26 after it bit an M-44 device, which fires cyanide powder into a predator's mouth when it tugs on a baited or scented capsule holder. Wildlife Services set the trap on private land in an attempt to kill coyotes. The federal agency kills predators or other wildlife that damage or pose a threat to property, livestock or humans. The agency's website describes the M-44 as an "effective and environmentally sound wildlife damage management tool."

It's primarily used to kill coyotes, wild dogs and foxes. The agency's website said animals that trigger the device fall unconscious and die with-



Courtesy of Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

An Oregon gray wolf. OR-48, a 100-pound male from the Shamrock Pack, died Feb. 26 after it bit an M-44 device, which fires cyanide powder into a predator's mouth when it tugs on a baited or scented capsule holder.

in one to five minutes. Sodium cyanide powder in the capsule reacts with saliva in the animal's mouth, producing deadly hydrogen cyanide gas.

Predator Defense, a nonprofit wildlife activist group based in Eugene, has repeatedly called for M-44s to be banned. Executive Director Brooks Fahey said the devices are "notoriously dangerous," indiscriminately kill canids,

including dogs, and pose a threat to children or others who might run across them.

Use of M-44s was prohibited in areas of known wolf activity when wolves were listed as endangered under Oregon law. After wolves were taken off the state endangered species list in 2015, U.S. Wildlife Services said it would continue to avoid using M-44s, ODFW spokesman

Rick Hargrave said.

He said Wildlife Services held an Incidental Take Permit that allowed it to conduct wildlife control operations in protected wolf areas but prohibited M-44s. The Incidental Take Permit expired when wolves were de-listed, but Wildlife Services indicated it would continue following the permit rules, Hargrave said.

"We discussed our concerns specifically regarding M-44s," he said. "We didn't want those devices in those areas."

"We believed it was clear what our concerns were," Hargrave said.

In a prepared statement, ODFW Wildlife Division Administrator Doug Cottam said the wolf's death shows the risk involved when Wildlife Services conducts such operations.

"This is a situation we take seriously and we'll be working with Wildlife Services with the goal of preventing it from happening again," Cottam said in the statement released by ODFW.

Also in a prepared state-

ment, Dave Williams, state director for Wildlife Services in Oregon, said the agency has begun an internal review to "see if any changes to our procedures are necessary."

Fahey, the Predator Defense executive director, was harshly critical of USDA Wildlife Services and its tactics in the West. His group produced a film, "Exposed: America's Secret War on Wildlife," in which critics say Wildlife Services indiscriminately and carelessly kills wildlife. Fahey alleges Wildlife Services routinely does not follow safety guidelines when placing M-44s, even when killing coyotes near residential areas.

For example, Fahey alleged Wildlife Services does not put up required warning signs when placing M-44s because the agency doesn't want the public to notice them and fiddle with them out of curiosity. Wildlife Services also is worried animal rights or wildlife activists might try to remove the devices, Fahey said.

"I don't think the public really understand how these

things are all over the West," he said. "I find it mind-boggling after the history of these devices that we haven't banned them completely."

Fahey said Oregon 4th District congressional Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Eugene, has prepared legislation that would ban M-44s. Fahey acknowledged such legislation faces an uncertain reception, given the political division over the Trump administration.

"No doubt it's a real tough atmosphere," he said. But he said some ranchers have lost stock or guard dogs to M-44s and favor banning the devices.

"It's still early in this administration," Fahey said.

OR-48, the wolf that died, was believed to be almost two years old. Hargrave, the ODFW spokesman, said OR-48 was not the Shamrock Pack's breeding male, and may have been dispersing from the pack and establishing its own territory, as young adults do. The incident site was on the edge of the Shamrock Pack's territory Willamette County.

Oregon lawmakers consider limiting biodigester tax credits

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon's anticipated budget shortfall has prompted lawmakers to consider limiting tax credits for processing livestock manure into energy in biodigesters.

Biodigesters break down manure, releasing methane gas which is used to generate electricity. The remaining solids have many uses. They are expensive, and farmers have used the tax credits to offset the costs.

Under House Bill 2853, tax credits would only be available for manure processed in biodigesters that were operational before the end of 2016.

The credit effectively costs Oregon about \$4 million a



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Steve Smith, a technician for Farm Power Tillamook LLC, explains the functioning of a dairy biodigester near Tillamook, Ore., in this Capital Press file photo. Lawmakers are considering limiting tax credits for biodigesters to facilities operational before 2017.

year in forgone tax revenue and has the potential to grow more costly due to the proposed construction of a large

dairy, said Rep. Phil Barnhart, D-Eugene, during a March 7 hearing on HB 2853.

Barnhart said he's not

"wedded" to the idea of disqualifying biodigesters that became operational in 2017 or later from tax credits and would appreciate alternative suggestions from the House Agriculture Committee.

"If we don't do anything, this credit is going to increase significantly over the next couple years," he said.

The question pertains to how Oregon encourages the adoption of biodigesters, said Barnhart.

The tax credit is one approach, but Oregon could simply require large "confined animal feeding operations" to cover the cost instead of using the general fund, he said.

Lawmakers should consider the extent to which the tax credit encourages the development of new large CA-

FOs, Barnhart said.

"They have a number of problems associated with them," such as air and water pollution, he said.

Representatives of the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association, the Oregon Farm Bureau and Threemile Canyon Farms — a dairy near Boardman, Ore. — testified against HB 2853, arguing the tax credit has promoted air quality and contributed to renewable energy development.

By relying on regulation rather than incentives, the government would effectively impose a new tax on dairies as well as their customers, said Len Bergstein, a representative of Threemile Canyon Farms.

"There's a reason we've

decided to go in a different direction in Oregon," Bergstein said.

By limiting the tax credit, lawmakers would unwittingly be playing into the anti-dairy agenda of certain activists who oppose new facilities in Oregon, he said.

Dairy producers already made a sacrifice last year, when they agreed for the tax credit to be reduced from \$5 per wet ton of manure to \$3.50 in exchange for keeping the incentive until 2021, Bergstein said.

However, Bergstein said other options were possible, such as setting a cap on the amount of tax credits that can be earned from biodigesters or reducing the per-ton credit amount over the life of a project.

Applications sought for Ag Fest agricultural education awards

SALEM — Oregon Ag Fest is soliciting applications for its fifth annual Agricultural Education Award.

The purpose of the award is to reward student organizations, nonprofit groups or

classrooms that promote and educate Oregonians about agriculture and extend the Oregon Ag Fest mission beyond its annual, two-day, interactive event.

Applications are due

March 15 and can be downloaded from the Oregon Ag Fest website: http://oragfest.com/dev/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/AgEducationAwardForm_2017.pdf.

Cash prizes totaling up to \$2,000 may be awarded to as many as three winners annually. Awards will be presented on stage during Oregon Ag Fest on April 30. Award prizes will depend on quality of applications submitted.

"As Oregon Ag Fest celebrates 30 years of growing awareness for the importance of agriculture in our communities, we are proud to continue to support the agricultural education outreach efforts of nonprofit and student organizations this year," said Tami Kerr, Oregon Ag Fest chairwoman, in a press release. "Oregon Ag Fest is dedicated to educating the public about the importance of agriculture, and we see this award as a way to encourage and support student groups that have programs and activities aimed to accomplish the same thing."

Oregon Ag Fest attracts over 19,000 people who experience the world of Oregon agriculture in a fun-filled, festive environment. For more information go to www.oragfest.com.

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