

Wildlife Services says it's working to avoid future wolf harm

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

The state director for USDA Wildlife Services in Oregon said the agency has removed M-44 cyanide poison traps from "areas of immediate concern" following the unintended poisoning of a wolf in Wallowa County in February.

Director Dave Williams said Wildlife Services has reviewed what happened and shared that information with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, which manages wolves in the state. The two agencies are in ongoing discussions about how to prevent another wolf death, Williams said.

"We don't feel good about that," he said.

Williams said Wildlife Services has removed M-44s from areas identified by ODFW as places wolves are present. ODFW officials confirmed that took place.

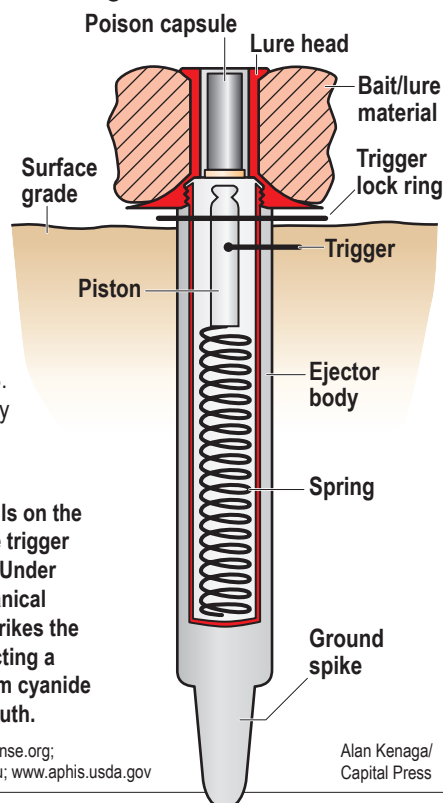
"We appreciate that Wildlife Services has voluntarily removed M-44s," ODFW Wildlife Division Administrator Doug Cottam said in a prepared statement.

M-44 Cyanide Traps

M-44-style traps, also known as Canid pest ejectors, or CPEs, were first developed in the U.S. in the 1930s as a way to autonomously control pest species.

When the animal pulls on the baited lure head, the trigger releases the piston. Under pressure of a mechanical spring, the piston strikes the poison capsule, ejecting a lethal dose of sodium cyanide into the animal's mouth.

Sources: www.predatordefense.org; www.smithandgeorg.com.au; www.aphis.usda.gov



Alan Kenaga/
Capital Press

"We also recognize we want to increase our communication between our agencies," he said. "We want to develop a more effective system to ensure that Wildlife Services' staff working in areas with wolves know what

ODFW knows about wolf activity."

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 bait-

ed 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 describes M-44s as an "effective and environmentally sound wildlife damage management tool," but the wildlife activist group Predator Defense calls them notoriously dangerous.

The devices are designed to kill canids such as coyotes and foxes. The cyanide powder reacts with saliva in an animal's mouth, forming a poisonous gas that kills the animal within one to five minutes. Brooks Fahy, executive director of Predator Defense, said M-44s indiscriminately kill dogs attracted by the scent and are a hazard to children or others who might come across them in rural areas.

The Wallowa County incident is complicated by Oregon's management and protection of gray wolves over the past decade as they entered the state from Idaho, formed packs, quickly grew in population and spread geo-

graphically.

Previously, Wildlife Services did not use M-44s in what the state designated as Areas of Known Wolf Activity. After wolves were taken off the state endangered species list in 2015, it was ODFW's understanding that Wildlife Services would continue to avoid using M-44s in such areas.

"We discussed our concerns specifically regarding M-44s," ODFW spokesman Rick Hargrave said last week. "We didn't want those devices in those areas."

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

Williams, the Wildlife Services state director, said he wants to focus on preventing another wolf death rather than "who messed up here."

He said the Wallowa County case was the first time the agency has killed a wolf in Oregon. Overall, the agency has recorded "lethal take" of "non-targeted" animals — ones it didn't intend to kill — in 1.3 percent of cases, he said. He said the agency twice unintentionally caught Oregon wolves in foothold traps,

which nonetheless allowed ODFW to put tracking collars on them before releasing them unharmed.

"Some of our tools are more forgiving than others," Williams said.

He said Wildlife Services puts on workshops to help ranchers protect livestock with non-lethal methods. In one case two summers ago, agency personnel spent 260 hours over four weeks helping protect a sheep flock from Umatilla Pack wolves, he said. The work allowed ODFW to avoid having to kill wolves due to depredations, he said.

Meanwhile, the Oregon Cattlemen's Association views the Wallowa County incident as a matter of agency to agency interaction and is "staying on the sidelines" in the investigation, said Todd Nash, a Wallowa County rancher who is the group's wolf policy chairman. Livestock producers, of course, have a keen interest in the state's wolf management policies and outcomes.

"It's never a good time politically to have a dead wolf," Nash said.

Glyphosate-resistant tumbleweed poses problem for farmers

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

An advocate of direct seeding and no-till farming hopes Northeastern Oregon wheat growers don't give up the practice in wake of news that patches of Russian thistle, or tumbleweed, have developed resistance to glyphosate, the herbicide commonly used to control weeds in wheat fields.

Judit Barroso, a weed scientist at Oregon State University, recently published her research that confirmed what some growers have been worried about since they first reported trouble controlling Russian thistle with glyphosate in 2015. Barroso collected thistle samples from 10 locations in Morrow, Sherman and Umatilla counties; three from Morrow County turned out to be glyphosate resistant.

Barroso said those populations probably were treated much more frequently than others sampled, and had developed tolerance to the herbicide. Glyphosate is the active ingredient in Monsanto's widely used Roundup weed killer. Farmers who grow on a summer fallow rotation typically spray their fields after harvest and while the field lies fallow. The practice kills weeds without tillage, which can cause erosion.

Russian thistle competes with wheat plants for water and nutrients, and can reduce yield. When it dries, breaks off the stem and tumbles with the wind, it can spread seeds across wide areas, meaning glyphosate-resistance could spread as well.

Barroso advises growers to



Courtesy of Lynn Ketchum/Oregon State University

Judit Barroso, weed specialist at OSU's Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center at Pendleton, removes Russian thistles (tumbleweeds) from a research plot. Barroso is researching ways to control the weed in wheat fields. Some Russian thistle populations in the northeastern part of the state have developed resistance to glyphosate, a commonly used herbicide.

delay the onset of glyphosate resistance by rotating the use of different herbicides or using other weed control methods.

Blake Rowe, CEO of the Oregon Wheat Commission, said dryland growers in Oregon and Washington are closely following Barroso's work and are trying to figure out the next step in research. Possibilities may include revised chemical strategies or timing,

or planting cover crops that would compete with Russian thistle and perhaps weaken it. A return to cultivation is possible, he said.

"We're looking at this one pretty hard," Rowe said.

The Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association, based in Colton, Wash., has been monitoring the findings as well. The organization is a nonprofit that helps growers transition to no-till farming

and direct seeding practices, in which seeds and fertilizer are planted into the stubble of the previous crop with minimal disturbance of the soil.

Executive Director Kay Meyer said a couple strategies have emerged to cope with glyphosate resistant Russian thistle. There's no "silver bullet," she said, but some farmers may be able to break the weed cycle by rotating in other cash crops rather than

follow the grain-fallow-grain pattern year after year. Austrian peas may be an option for some, she said.

Cover crops may break disease cycles and build up soil, but some producers are worried they would take too much moisture from land that otherwise would lie fallow, she said.

Technology may hold an answer as well, Meyer said. New spot spray systems such

as WeedIt and WeedSeeker can optically identify and spray only growing weeds, not bare ground. Such systems can reduce chemical use by 80 percent, Meyer said, and the savings might allow growers to use more expensive chemicals other than glyphosate.

The technology is expensive, but in some cases farmers might jointly purchase and share the system, she said.



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