

Remove M-44s from Oregon

It has been a bad month for Wildlife Services. The federal agency accidentally killed a wolf here in Wallowa County with an M-44, a cyanide-based trap that shoots poison into the mouth of a canine. The traps are intended for coyotes. Just a week later, a family dog was killed by an M-44 in Idaho, and a young boy who was nearby was injured when the trap went off.

EDITORIAL
East Oregonian

The incidents were matching black eyes for an agency that likes to stay out of the headlines as it kills hundreds of thousands of nuisance animals across the country each year. That list includes pigeons and starlings, coyotes and badgers and bears. When wildlife becomes a problem, Wildlife Services likes to be the solution.

And in plenty of cases they do important, difficult work that saves the lives of many animals by culling those causing a problem. In other instances they are killing non-native and invasive species en masse, doing the difficult work that many of us are incapable of doing.

Still, there are problems. And a black eye can cause people to notice those problems. A pair leads to some serious questions.

M-44s are one such problem for a state that has an increasing wolf population. Maybe you don't like wolves and hope they are poisoned. But you cannot argue the fact that taxpayers have spent a lot of money — and our government has spent a lot of time — working on their recovery. Each accidental death, especially those caused by the government, increases the money taxpayers will pay to fend off lawsuits, and the more active government will have to be in wolf recovery. The more active the management, the higher the cost.

And, as a side note, it's a good time to talk about how wolves help control coyote populations.

But it isn't just about money. Placing something in our woods that indiscriminately kills canines — be they wolves or coyotes or family dogs — is not smart. For the safety of our family pets, and our family members out traipsing around the hills, removing all M-44s makes sense.

Oregon has put so much money and so much effort into improving and conserving the environment in our state, for the benefit of elk and salmon and forests and water and humans and wolves. Any fatal actions must be taken with extreme caution.

Paying government trappers to kill predators may seem like a 19th Century concern, but it's happening to this day in rural Oregon. There is still some need for it, but it should be updated to include 21st Century technology and ethical and social mores.



Understanding the Electoral College can be tricky

Shortly after the election, I sat down with the intention of writing a column about the Electoral College. But after jotting down a few ideas, I soon realized that I wanted to cover far more ground than my word limit would do justice. So after allowing some of my thoughts to percolate for a few months, I have decided to tackle the subject in several columns. In this one, I will try to provide some basic information about what the Electoral College is and how it was established.

In case you are wondering what expertise I might have on this subject beyond whatever the average voter probably knows, the answer is — more than you might have guessed. Back in December 2008, I had the distinct honor of serving as one of Oregon's seven presidential electors. So I had a first-hand opportunity to see how this somewhat mysterious institution works. I would not be surprised if I am the only person currently living in Wallowa County who has had this privilege as a citizen. I'll tell you more about my experience as a presidential elector in my next column on this subject.

It is worth noting that the phrase "Electoral College" is found nowhere in the U.S. Constitution. When most people think of a college, they probably associate it with a university, but on a smaller scale. Unfortunately, this primary connotation of college only muddies the water in this case. You have to delve much further down the list of meanings in Webster's Dictionary before you arrive at more relevant definitions of college, such as "an organized body of persons engaged in a common pursuit or having common interests or duties; a group of persons considered by law to be a unit; a body of electors."



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
John McColgan

If we focus on the word "electors" rather than the more commonly used phrase, "Electoral College," we can learn more about the origin of this institution by reading Article II of the U.S. Constitution, which deals with the executive branch of our nation's government. Paragraph 2 of Section 1 declares: "Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress."

Paragraph 3 begins by stating "The Electors shall meet in their respective States, and vote by Ballot for two persons, of whom one at least shall not be an Inhabitant of the same State with themselves. And they shall make a list of all the Persons voted for, and of the Number of Votes for each; which list they shall sign and certify, and transmit sealed to the Seat of Government of the United States, directed to the President of the Senate. The President of the Senate shall, in the Presence of the Senate and the House of Representatives, open all the Certificates, and the Votes shall then be counted. The Person having the Greatest Number of Votes shall be the President."

Article II, Section 1, Paragraph 3 contains more language explaining what shall be done in the event that there is no majority of electors voting for one presidential candidate, and a careful reading of that paragraph also

reveals that our current method of choosing a vice president has evolved since the Constitution was originally adopted. Essentially, this paragraph stipulates that in the event that no candidate for president wins a majority of the electoral vote, the House of Representatives shall choose the president from a list of five nominees. And if no candidate for vice president has won a majority of the electors, the runner-up in the House vote for president shall become the vice president. The 12th Amendment modifies this process slightly, particularly in the event that no candidate for president or vice president wins an outright majority of electoral votes.

If you are wondering where the Constitution mandates that the Electoral College shall operate on a winner-take-all system on a state-by-state basis, the short answer is: Nowhere. That system evolved over the first 50 years or so of our nation's history along with the evolution of political parties. And if you are wondering how we came to have 538 electors, that number is determined by tallying the number of Representatives in the House (currently at 435 according to an Act of Congress passed in 1913), plus 2 Senators from each of our 50 states (currently totaling 100), plus 3 additional electors to account for the otherwise severely underrepresented citizens of the District of Columbia, in accordance with Paragraph 2 of the 23rd Amendment, passed in 1961.

In case you are not yet sufficiently confused, try holding your breath for my next column, and that will surely make you dizzy.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.

Limit government by cutting Wildlife Services

On Feb. 26, USDA Wildlife Services poisoned a wolf in Wallowa County ("We don't feel good about that," said Wildlife Services).

On March 11, two dogs were killed by the same device, an M-44 cyanide bomb, along a hiking trail in Wyoming (Wildlife Services denies blame.)

On March 16 a dog was killed by an M-44 near a residential area in Pocatello, Idaho, and a boy sprayed with cyanide powder. ("Wildlife Services understands the close bonds between people and their pets and sincerely regrets such losses.") A second device was yards from the first, both on BLM land, despite a 2016 agreement by federal agencies to ban M-44s on federal land in Idaho. Wildlife Services kills millions of

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animals yearly at the behest of public and private interests. The methods are usually indiscriminate, like M-44s, traps and snares. Any animal is a potential victim. Wildlife Services is OK with this, it has been the modus operandi since 1895.

Wildlife Services is a sloppy operator. It sets traps where they endanger the public, it forgets to post warnings, or puts them where they're not seen, or if they're in the right place it leaves them up long after the traps are gone (like on Wallowa County's East Moraine) so that folks are afraid to walk a trail. A Wildlife Services

agent filmed his dogs attacking trapped coyotes, another was convicted of intentionally trapping a neighbor's dog. If pressed, the agency will "investigate" incidents, sometimes apologize (a recent development), but resumes its nasty habits.

What's galling to us who dislike this agency, this behavior, this brutal contempt for animals and citizens, is that we pay the bill.

Our federal, state and local taxes fund this agency. If you pay property tax in Northeast Oregon, you are paying your county to pay Wildlife Services to set M-44s.

If people want smaller government, let's start with USDA Wildlife Services.
Wally Sykes
Joseph

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