

Groups, US reach settlement on predator-killing poisons

March 2 2018, by Keith Ridler

U.S. officials have agreed to complete a study on how two predator-killing poisons could be affecting federally protected species as part of the settlement of a lawsuit filed by environmental and animal-welfare groups.

The 10-page agreement filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Montana requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to complete consultations with the Environmental Protection Agency by the end of 2021 on the two poisons used by federal workers on rural Western lands to protect livestock.

The Center for Biological Diversity and the other groups in the lawsuit filed last year in Montana say Fish and Wildlife is violating the Endangered Species Act by not analyzing with the EPA how sodium cyanide and Compound 1080 could harm federally protected species including grizzly bears and Canada lynx.

The groups say the federal agencies in 2011 started but never finished the analysis.

One kind of device is called an M-44, referred to by those who would like it banned as a "cyanide bomb." It's embedded into in the ground and looks like a lawn sprinkler but sprays cyanide when triggered by animals attracted by bait smeared on the devices.

A 14-year-old Idaho boy was injured in 2017 when he encountered one

with his dog on federally-owned land near his house on the outskirts of the small city of Pocatello. His Labrador retriever dog died.

The Center for Biological Diversity, WildEarth Guardians, The Humane Society of the United States and The Fund for Animals in the lawsuit seek to have the poisons banned.

"Deadly, indiscriminate cyanide bombs and compound 1080 have littered our public lands for far too long," Bethany Cotton of WildEarth Guardians said in a statement. "We are hopeful the Service will revoke or significantly restrict use of these poisons given recent and past tragedies."

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are named in the lawsuit. The U.S. Department of Justice, which defends the government in lawsuits, did not immediately respond Friday to an inquiry from The Associated Press.

M-44s are planted to kill coyotes and other livestock predators. They killed about 12,500 coyotes in 2016, mostly in Western U.S. states.

Other environmental groups in different court action involving the devices say that over the last 20 years they've killed about 40 dogs and injured a handful of people.

The other poison targeted in the lawsuit is a pesticide called Compound 1080 that's placed in collars worn by livestock and ingested by attacking predators.

The lawsuit says the collars can harm non-targeted predators as well as carrion feeders, including birds. The groups also say the collars can be lost or punctured by vegetation, leaving behind poison that can kill non-targeted wildlife.

"The federal government needs to ban these deadly pesticides, but until then we're hopeful the analysis spurred by our lawsuit will lead to common-sense measures to prevent unintended deaths," Collette Adkins with the Center for Biological Diversity said in a statement.

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