

M-44 cyanide bombs killed 164 Wyoming coyotes in 2017

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture in an annual report released last month lists 164 coyotes killed in Wyoming with M-44 “cyanide bombs” in 2017.

Including the number killed by the baited, poison devices, the federal program dispatched 4,503 coyotes in the state, the report shows. The killings were part of department efforts to protect a wide variety of resources, including farm and ranch livestock, from wildlife damage.

The 2017 M-44 coyote death number was 72 fewer than were killed by the devices in 2016 — 236 coyotes — according to records. Some residents have criticized the devices that spray a lethal dose of poison into the mouths of animals that take the bait. Critics say M-44s are indiscriminate and could kill non-targeted species, including pets.

An M-44 placed on private property killed two dogs near Casper last year, for example, [prompting an outcry](#). The federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services, the arm of the Department of Agriculture that operates the killing program, listed two unintentional wildlife deaths by M-44s last year, both red foxes.

M-44s killed another 36 red foxes as intended, the report says.

Use of M-44s is under review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services for their potential effect on endangered species, said Collette Adkins, senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group that sued over M-44 use. The center, along with other groups, challenged the federal government’s use of sodium cyanide, the active ingredient in M-44s, and another poison, compound 1080. The groups settled that action earlier this year in an agreement that sets a 2021 deadline for the review, she said.

Some agriculture interests in Wyoming have rejected using M-44s in areas where endangered species roam in numbers.

Once Fish and Wildlife has concluded its review, the federal Environmental Protection Agency, which regulates use of M-44s, will decide how and whether the state and Wildlife

Services, the arm of the department that carries out the wildlife damage program, can continue using them.

20,604 animals killed, most of which were starlings

All told, the federal program killed 20,604 animals in Wyoming in 2017, records show. More than half — 11,976 — were animals classified as invasive species.

Nationwide, the wildlife damage program “dispersed,” or chased off, far more animals than it killed, according to the report. Fully 93.52 percent of animals affected were “dispersed” compared to 6.37 percent killed, euthanized, removed or destroyed, the annual report says. In Wyoming only 353 animals were dispersed in 2017, the report states.

The European Starling was the most targeted species in Wyoming in 2017 and most of those killed were done in with the poison DRC-1339. (George Hodan/Public Domain Pictures)

Among the species killed in Wyoming, European starlings, an invasive species of bird, topped the list.

The federal program killed 11,523 European starlings in Wyoming with the poison [DRC-1339](#). It also used that poison to kill 968 ravens, 159 black-billed magpies and 224 American crows.

Ravens can be a threat to greater sage grouse, an imperiled species. The proliferation of ravens that take advantage of human settlement to nest, roost and feed unnaturally can lead to large populations that raid grouse nests.

Coyotes were the second-most-targeted species in Wyoming. Of the 4,503 killed last year, most — 3,221 — met their fate when shot from a fixed-wing aircraft. Another 1,142 were gunned down from helicopters and the rest killed by shooting from the ground, snaring, trapping or calling.

In a separate [2009 review](#), the federal government found the aerial program beneficial. “[P]rogram economists evaluated [Wildlife Services’] aerial operations in Wyoming to remove coyotes and protect livestock and wildlife ... [and] found that the benefits outweighed the costs by a ratio of 21 to 1,” the review said.

The 2017 annual report of animals killed lists 52 wolves. Twenty-one were shot from fixed-wing aircraft, 14 from helicopters and 15 from the ground. Trappers killed two caught in leg-hold devices. No wolves were killed unintentionally in 2017, the report states.

Yet a third federal review illustrates the impact wildlife have on one aspect of agriculture — sheep raising. Coyotes have the biggest impact on shepherds’ flocks, accounting for 70

percent of all losses to predators inflicting \$2.28 million in damages. That figure comes from [a review of last year's numbers](#) compiled by the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service Wyoming Office.

"Losses due to predators amounted to 2.9 percent of the 2017 sheep and lamb supply and 52 percent of all sheep and lamb deaths," the report stated. The losses by coyotes amounted to \$2.9 million, according to a February news release.

Predators killed 17,800 sheep and lambs, an increase of 1,300 from 2016, according to the review. "Predators caused an estimated \$3.26 million in losses in 2017, up 11 percent from the previous year," it stated.