

Time to End the Use of M-44 Cyanide Bombs

by ERIK MOLVAR MAY 1, 2019 <https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/05/01/time-to-end-the-use-of-m-44-cyanide-bombs/>

Earth Day was last Monday, and I would like to suggest a [gift](#) of immense value that USDA Wildlife Services could give to all the residents of Idaho: A permanent end to the use of M-44 ‘cyanide bombs’ statewide.

These devices are planted like land mines to poison coyotes and other wildlife, and employ spring-loaded charges of sodium cyanide that can also deliver a [toxic](#) dose to family pets, non-target wildlife, and even kids and adults.

An M-44 planted by Wildlife Services poisoned 14-year-old Canyon Mansfield and killed his family dog, Kasey, on the outskirts of Pocatello in March of 2017.

An [incident](#) with an M-44 near Vernal, Utah poisoned local rockhound Dennis Slaugh in 2002, forcing him into permanent [disability](#) and ultimately leading to his death last year.

In response to the Pocatello incident, Western Watersheds Project and our allies petitioned Wildlife Services, the federal agency that deploys the deadly devices

at the behest of the livestock industry, to impose a permanent moratorium on M-44 use statewide.

The agency committed to an interim moratorium of indeterminate length, committing to inform WWP some 30 days in advance of resumption of deployment of these deadly devices. Wildlife Services has been good to its word so far, to the best of our knowledge.

But an interim moratorium isn't good enough. In the summer of 2017, Wildlife Services sponsored a series of meetings around Idaho trying to convince the public that new protocols would make M-44s safe to use again. These assurances were not well-received by the public, to say the least.

Simply put, there is no way to plant land mines armed with deadly poison on lands of any ownership — public or private — and walk away, and at the same time guarantee the public that there is no risk of more unintended deaths.

At this very moment, the State of Oregon legislature is poised to legislate a permanent ban on these devices in that state. It passed the Oregon Senate on a 25 to 3 vote, across party lines, and passed the House on a overwhelming vote of 53 to 6.

It now heads to Governor Brown's desk, and if is signed into law, Oregon will [join](#) California and Washington as states that have successfully blocked M-44 use by USDA Wildlife Services (or anyone else). It's legislation that Idaho could pass as well, if the state has the fortitude.

The livestock industry's approach to the M-44 problem so far has been to lobby for its continued use behind the scenes, while scolding the public in the press for using the moniker 'cyanide bombs' to describe M-44s. On one hand, 'land mines' or 'chemical weapons' might be more technically precise.

On the other hand, the term "cyanide bomb" was coined by Theresa Mansfield, the mother of the 14-year-old who was nearly killed (and whose family dog WAS killed) by an M-44.

So the sheep ranchers can take up their hair-splitting with the mother of the victim if they feel so inclined; for myself, I think the mother of a victim gets to call it whatever she wants.

Even more to the point, instead of moralizing over terminology, perhaps the livestock industry to engage in some deep and thoughtful reflection about the morality of pushing continued use of M-44s despite the clear and present danger that they pose to the public and an ever-growing mountain of scientific evidence demonstrating that killing predators does nothing to reduce livestock losses.

Coyotes have spread in distribution and grown in population in the face of Wildlife Services' systematic and decades-long campaign to kill them. Non-lethal methods are now well-developed, and they work (unlike killing off the native predators).

This whole anachronistic and farcical campaign to kill off native wildlife supposedly to assist in livestock production is pointless at best and counterproductive at worst, with all kinds of ecological consequences, none of them good.

It's time for the livestock industry and their proxies in government to stop squandering millions in taxpayer dollars to wage a pointless and destructive war against nature.

Eliminating M-44s is unfinished business from long ago. President Nixon outlawed these devices, as well that the dangerous poison called Compound 1080, back in 1972.

But lobbying pressure from the livestock industry ultimately forced a reversal, and the Mansfield family, Dennis Slaugh, and many others have become collateral damage from this reversal.

There really is no case to be made that M-44s are necessary, or even particularly useful, and we hope that Idaho political leaders will respond to the tragic and terrifying events of the Pocatello M-44 incident by taking a leadership role in banning them for good.

There is already a bill in the U.S. Congress to make all use of M-44s illegal nationwide, but it shouldn't take an Act of Congress to impose some common-sense safeguards so the public can get out and enjoy nature on Earth Day without the fear of losing a pet or having a family member killed. Let Wildlife Services atone for its mistakes by making an end to M-44 use throughout Idaho, for all time.