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Conservationists Target Feds' Slaughter of Washington State Wildlife

October 22, 2019 [KARINA BROWN](#)

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(CN) – The federal government agency Wildlife Services needlessly slaughters bears, bobcats, wolves, coyotes and other animals in a “mass extermination program,” according to a [lawsuit](#) filed Tuesday by the Center for Biological Diversity. The environmental group wants a judge to stop Wildlife Services, a U.S. Department of Agriculture agency that specializes in killing animals on behalf of other government agencies and private landowners, from “engaging in mammal-killing activities” in Washington state until it updates its decade-old environmental assessment to incorporate new science showing that killing predator in an attempt to prevent them from preying on livestock often [backfires](#) and can even [increase predation](#) on livestock. Studies published since Wildlife Services completed its 2008 environmental assessment show that removing top predators [harms ecosystems](#) by increasing [carbon emissions](#), creates a trophic cascade that harms [riparian habitat](#) and encourages the proliferation of [Lyme disease](#), among other problems.

Federal agencies are legally required to update old environmental analyses when new becomes available, Center for Biological Diversity claims.

But in Washington state last year, employees of the federal agency Wildlife Services shot, trapped, gassed six black bears, 397 beavers, 376 coyotes, 429 marmots, 448 squirrels and thousands of other creatures, according to its [data](#).

The agency also reported having killed animals using methods such as electronic calling devices, strychnine oats and suitcase trips last year. The center says the agency hasn't analyzed those methods under the National Environmental Policy Act and continued to use gas cartridges after the Environmental Protection Agency updated its rules on the method.

And the agency killed 294 pocket gophers last year, even though four species of the creatures have been listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. But Tanya Espinosa, a spokeswoman for Wildlife Services, said the agency killed only Northern pocket gophers, which live on eastern side of the state, and are not the same species as

the four that are listed as threatened. Those four – Olympia, Roy prairie, Tenino and Yelm pocket gophers – live on the western side of Washington, Espinosa said.

Espinosa declined to comment on the other allegations in the lawsuit.

“It’s long past time to use the best available science to inform these management decisions,” said Sophia Ressler, attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity. “Not doing so is irresponsible, dangerous and ecologically destructive.”

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee last month asked his Fish & Wildlife Department to “significantly reduce the need for lethal removal” of gray wolves. The state agency kills wolves itself, not through contracts with Wildlife Services. But the state killed nine wolves this year, including an entire pack that repeatedly preyed on cattle, as part of a management plan that justifies wolf killings on the theory that they will change wolf behavior and reduce livestock conflict.

The state counts its wolf population each winter. There were 126 gray wolves in Washington in December 2018. The department is currently creating a “post-recovery conservation plan” for gray wolves, based on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s proposal to remove the animals from the Endangered Species list. The [comment period](#) for Washington state’s proposed plan closes Nov. 1.

In his Sept. 30 [letter](#), Inslee called for the department to increase nonlethal methods of conflict management, like having more humans riding along with livestock “and other proven or promising methods.” The governor also suggested revisiting ranching allotments on public lands “that are prime wolf habitat.”

“The status quo of annual lethal removal is simply unacceptable,” Inslee wrote.