

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 12, 2024

Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Randy Moore
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250-003

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chief Moore,

We write to respectfully ask the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to safeguard the public, pets, and wildlife by banning M-44 sodium cyanide devices on all U.S. Forest Service lands.

Banning M-44 devices on Forest Service lands would bring USDA policies in alignment with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which banned M-44s in 2023,¹ and states like Idaho, Washington, California, Oregon, Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming, where they are either partially or entirely banned. Such a move would also align with public sentiment that a ban is vital to public safety and with documented statements by government trappers who have used M-44s for predator control and seen the indiscriminate and cruel nature of these devices firsthand. According to a former district supervisor, most trappers no longer want to use M-44 devices, and some even refuse to do so.²

M-44s, often referred to as “cyanide bombs” due to how they eject a cloud of cyanide powder into the air when triggered, are used by trappers for USDA Wildlife Services (WS), a program within the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). To date, many people have been poisoned by M-44s, with one even contributing to a Utah man’s death.³ Members of the public became increasingly aware of and horrified by M-44s due to a prominent poisoning case on public lands in Pocatello, Idaho. In 2017, Canyon Mansfield, a 14-year-old boy was poisoned and his dog killed during a routine walk near their home. His father, Dr. Mark Mansfield, believes his son was only spared death due to wind direction, which blew most of the cyanide powder toward their dog. In July 2022, Dr. Mansfield testified at a Congressional subcommittee hearing, detailing Canyon’s continued painful symptoms, including headaches, nausea, vomiting, numbness, insomnia, and chronic migraines.⁴

In addition to safety and health concerns, M-44 devices are also ultimately ineffective for predator control and pose a significant threat to non-target animals. In 2012, M-44-related deaths accounted for 11 percent of the non-target animals killed by WS. Between 2018-2022, more than 1,100 animals were unintentionally killed by M-44s, including gray foxes, red foxes, raccoons,

¹ *US agency ends use of ‘cyanide bomb’ to kill coyotes and other predators, citing safety concerns*, Associated Press (Nov. 28, 2023) - <https://apnews.com/article/coyotes-predators-cyanide-bomb-ban-federal-agency-6eae88fc23549b26d1b0751f0cc0f42c>

² Letter to Predator Defense from Carter Niemeyer, retired district supervisor, USDA Wildlife Services, Montana, urging ban of M-44s on public lands (Jan. 6, 2024) - https://www.predatordefense.org/docs/m44_letter_Niemeyer_01-06-2024.pdf

³ Death certificate of Dennis Slauch listing “Cyanide Poisoning/Exposure from M-44 Device” as a condition under cause of death - https://www.predatordefense.org/docs/m44_death_certificate_Dennis_Slauch.pdf

⁴ Dr. Mark Mansfield’s written testimony to House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans & Wildlife (July 21, 2022) - <https://www.congress.gov/117/meeting/house/115038/witnesses/HHRG-117-II13-Wstate-MansfieldM-20220721-U1.pdf>

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Virginia opossums, black bears, skunks, ravens, and dogs.⁵ Further, the yearly totals reported by WS do not reflect the total number of domestic dogs killed by M-44s.⁶

As noted in the Department of the Interior's July 21, 2022, testimony to a Congressional subcommittee, effective and far less dangerous wildlife management methods exist and can be used in place of M-44 devices.⁷ America's Forest Service lands should be safe places for people to recreate without worrying about losing their dog, their child, or being poisoned themselves. We urge the USDA to take swift action to ban M-44s on all Forest Service lands and remove any devices currently in use.

Thank you for your leadership in managing public lands and ensuring they are safe and accessible for all.

Sincerely,




Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



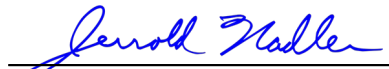
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

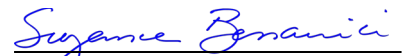
⁵ USDA Wildlife Services, Program Data Report G – *Animals Dispersed/Killed or Euthanized/Removed or Destroyed/Freed* - https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage/SA_Reports/SA_PDRs


⁶ USDA Wildlife Services Yearly Summary Statistics of Domestic Dog Killings by M-44s, Predator Defense (Sept. 13, 2018) - https://www.predatordefense.org/docs/m44_WS_dog_killings_yearly_statistics.pdf


⁷ U.S. Dept. of the Interior's Statement for the Record submitted to House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans & Wildlife (July 21, 2022) <https://www.doi.gov/oc/pending-legislation-37>


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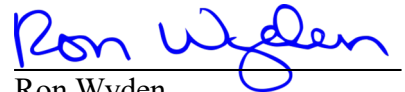

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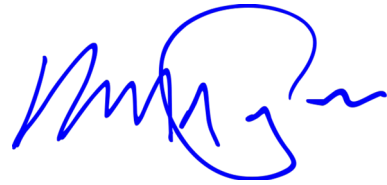

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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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