

Headwaters**News**

Reporting on the Rockies

Dog Poisonings As Terrorism

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After motoring 2,000 miles across the interior West, posting leaflets at popular backcountry trailheads along the way to warn pet owners to keep their dogs on leashes, Brooks Fahy has been giving a lot of thought to unthinkable subjects.

"We live in a new era of the unthinkable," the conservationist founder of Predator Defense Institute says. "The truth of the matter is that if we're talking and thinking about it ourselves, then the thought has already crossed the minds of the people responsible for putting this poison out there."

To date, dozens of poisoning incidents, involving dogs and wolves have been documented in Jackson Hole, Yellowstone, Wyoming counties south of Teton, and over in Idaho.

A lot of heartbreak has beset victimized pet owners; low-level outrage and fear has grown among the public; notable silence is emanating from the once-vocal wolf haters; and there is nothing to report, so far as investigative progress, from local, state and federal law-enforcement agencies reportedly involved in identifying possible suspects.

Fahy isn't convinced that enough is being done, not only in trying to nab the perpetrators but in sending the message that this kind of behavior is unacceptable and shouldn't be tolerated.

If left emboldened, Fahy wonders: What if the individual, or more likely, the persons responsible for poisonings in the northern Rockies decide to take their vigilantism one step further? What if the perpetrators decide to turn their apparent loathing for wolves and their probable anti-government behavior into a larger political statement that would really get the nation's attention?

What if, and Fahy raises the possibility with obvious repulsion, a few outlaws who see themselves as folk heroes, decide to pay a visit to Yellowstone's Lamar Valley, secretly disperse poison baits laced with Temik or Compound 1080, and then sit back and wait for the killing to unfold?

One of America's greatest wildlife conservation success stories, a story that took decades to write and now is touted around the world, could be erased at the very place where it all began in the 1990s.

The point of this disturbing exercise, Fahy says, is to illustrate what he believes is a double standard within the Bush administration and, more generally across the country, for what constitutes domestic terrorism and what does not.

In the civilized world, threats of ricin and anthrax are acted upon aggressively by the Department of Homeland Security and its related spooks in the intelligence community.

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Yet to Fahy and others it seems that legitimate concerns over a host of other ultra-lethal poisons — agents, it should be noted that are easily attainable and prolific — are approached with almost casual indifference.

Fahy is fighting to get 1080 permanently banned in the U.S. He doesn't see it as that big of a leap to think that the kind of people today putting Temik into hotdogs and leaving them in Jackson for dogs to eat might not turn their warped logic towards humans they don't like next in the future.

He believes that the poisoning incidents in Wyoming and Idaho are all part of the same bailiwick that could, and should, be described as domestic terrorism.

The truth is that parts of the rural West still cling to a cultural acceptance of killing wildlife using poison to eradicate animals that are not deemed acceptable to agriculture.

It's an attitude that has not kept pace with the modern world, and condemnation must begin with our political leaders.

Why aren't the governors of Wyoming, Idaho and Montana standing together on a soapbox decrying the outlaws who are indiscriminately putting out poison to kill wolves?

So far, government investigators, at least publicly, have demonstrated no direct connection between the Idaho resident who posted a playbook for how to deploy Temik to kill wolves on a website, and recent cases of dead or sickened canines.

But the action, in this post-9/11 age, should cause society to at least question that expression of free speech. This week, the Fish and Wildlife Service, a federal agency, did fire its own warning shot to poachers when it announced that a Lewiston, Idaho, man who pleaded guilty to killing a wolf in Idaho had his hunting privileges revoked nationwide, was ordered to serve a year of probation and had to pay \$21,252 in restitution to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

As for the poisoning cases, more \$20,000 has been offered as reward money for information leading to the conviction of those responsible, a demonstration that citizens are ahead of our politicians in refusing to condone such vigilantism.

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