

Amanda Kingsley

Port Townsend, WA. 98368

January 9th 2007

Congressman Peter DeFazio
151 W. 7th, Suite 400
Eugene, OR. 97401

Dear Congressman DeFazio:

This is a hard letter for me to write as it drags out memories of an event from which I am still trying to recover. But for those very reasons, drag I will -- in hopes that you will work in Congress for a ban on the M-44 poison traps used by the USDA APHIS Wildlife Services Program (WS). I hope if we can get M-44s and other irresponsibly used poisons out of the hands of WS it may save other people from suffering similar or worse nightmares.

In the fall of 1994 my fiancé and I were living on a farm north of Eugene that has been passed down to me through four generations of my family. We moved down to begin restoration on the property's 125 year-old farmhouse. We had many wonderful experiences while living in the Willamette Valley but it's hard to not let it all be overshadowed by one event. While walking our dog across the middle of my property she came upon an M-44 coyote trap set in the grass by Federal agents. She died horribly of cyanide poisoning with us kneeling beside her in the mud. In the process of trying to help her I was also exposed to cyanide and according to poison specialists am lucky to be alive.

When we moved down from Seattle we were trying hard not to be dumb city people and were grateful for advice from our Oregon friends and relatives about the dos and don'ts of life in the Valley. Everyone warned us that loose-running dogs would likely be shot by livestock farmers so the first thing we did upon arriving was to fence the yard for our two dogs, Jake and Ruby. Even on our own property we were always with the dogs and usually had them on leashes. The one thing no one thought to mention was the poison traps set out by Wildlife Services.

October 28th the rain gave way to a beautiful fall afternoon so we leashed the dogs and took them on a long walk across the property to play in Pierce Creek. Coming home we crossed the creek that runs across the middle of my land, less than 1/4 mile from the house. I stopped to pick wild mint and Michael started on across the last field towards the house. The dogs were wandering in the ditch near me; when I saw Ruby rolling on her back in the grass I laughed thinking she was playing. She got up then and started following Michael but suddenly dropped over on her side and was kicking at the mud. My heart went to my throat; I knew something was extremely wrong.

I threw down everything I was carrying and screamed for Michael. We both ran to Ruby. Her

eyes were rolled back; she was in violent convulsions and was having trouble breathing. There was a strong, chemical smell -- sharp and metallic. We immediately suspected poison and I bent near her mouth and inhaled deeply to try and identify the smell or to be able to describe it to a vet or medic. It didn't occur to me right then that it might be poison gas and that I shouldn't breathe it. Ruby was gasping and crying with her head arched back, eyes wild, fighting for air. Her strong legs thrashed and with every choking breath she let out a screaming moan. Ruby, who had always seemed impervious to any kind of pain, was suffering terribly. She was foaming at the mouth and her tongue was hanging limp in the dirt. I reached in her mouth to make sure her windpipe was clear and she bit my hand hard in her panic and convulsions. Michael began to run the 1/4 mile back to the house to get the van and call a vet. I knelt in the mud shaking and trying to get our big girl to keep breathing. More than anything I felt devastatingly helpless. As minutes ticked by she struggled less and less and breathed less and less, but when I would call her name sharply she would always gasp in one more breath. Just as Michael got back with the van -- it must have been fifteen minutes -- Ruby stopped breathing. We briefly tried to do CPR on her (through a plastic tube pushed down her throat) but it was clearly over.

According to Wildlife Services, death by M-44 cyanide is supposed to take about 45 seconds. It took ten or fifteen agonizing minutes for our dog.

We sat there in the mud sobbing, in absolute disbelief; it was hard to reconcile that such a sweet landscape could be hiding something so terrible, something that could strike down our mighty friend so quickly. Michael searched the grass where she had first rolled over and found the detonated trap as well as the tiny sign warning that it was sodium cyanide. Both sign and trap were completely buried in tall grass. We then washed our hands in the creek and that's when Michael saw that I had been bitten. Fresh blood was running from a puncture wound on my right hand. With all my attention on Ruby, I hadn't even thought about it. It suddenly occurred to both of us that we didn't know how cyanide worked and that I probably had it in my system by then. We ran to the van and raced for the farmhouse to call 911.

During the seemingly endless ride across the field my heart began to race and I started to feel light headed and nauseous. I was getting tunnel vision and was struggling not to pass out. I usually do all right in a crisis but at that point panic set in. Here we were, 25 miles from a hospital, having just watched a very tough animal that weighed the same as I do die horribly and fast. For the first time in my life I thought I was going to die.

The 911 Operator told Michael that basically if I was still alive at that point then I'd probably be all right. They said to clean the wound and stay close to a phone. At that point I assumed that my reaction, which was beginning to subside, must have just been panic.

First thing Monday morning I tried to reach the Linn County Wildlife Services trapper. He called me back later in the day to say that he was very sorry and that he had removed all poison from my property early that morning after getting the call from our farmer. He told me of several other incidents that year where similar "accidents" had killed other dogs in the area. That did not make me feel better. He also said not to worry, that the traps "are never harmful to people".

In the months following Ruby's death I had various symptoms that were worse in the first few weeks and slowly improved. I had an unusual metallic taste in my mouth and my heart never seemed to beat at a normal rate. I had never had insomnia until then, but my heart was pounding so hard at night I couldn't get to sleep. For the first few nights I was afraid that if I did fall asleep I'd have a heart attack. My arms started tingling and going numb, which I don't remember ever happening before. They'd fall asleep from the shoulders down any time I sat still for more than a few minutes. Months later when I finally called the Washington State Poison Center hotline I was told: "what you're describing are the classic symptoms of low-level cyanide exposure." They said the numb arms were an example of the temporary neuralgic problems that cyanide can bring on. They also said they were surprised that I was alive to talk about it.

When I asked Wildlife Services how the traps could be on my land without my permission they said that they had the consent of the Farmer that leases part of my farmland and that it should have been his responsibility to notify me. They explained that for them to try to obtain the consent of property owners would be "too difficult". (The "difficulty," I was told, was that many owners live out of the area and it would be too much hassle to track them down). It blew my mind that could poison my land without even *notifying* me. At the very least one would think that with a residence so near the trap site it would be mandatory to notify the homeowner so that whoever was living there would be warned of the danger to their pets and families. It's preposterous to claim that M-44s pose no danger to children. I was a kid who liked the salt licks my grandparents put out for their cows and I would certainly have closely investigated any mysterious post poking out of the grass.

In my dealings with Wildlife Services following our loss I was stunned at their lack of accountability. If this sort of "accident" happens once or many times one would think there would be some sort of review process to help prevent it from happening again -- especially in cases like ours where the traps were in violation of several Wildlife Services regulations. (They installed the trap beside a stream, there were no warning signs at the nearest property entrance, no effort made to notify the family living in the house nearby, and the warning signs on the trap were completely obscured by thick brush and grass.) It took many months and a lot of noise on my part before I ever received a letter of regret about the incident from Wildlife Services (although no admission of any error on their part). In spite of the fact that we were walking our dog, the only record WS made of the event was that a "loose running dog" was poisoned. In sheep country, *loose running dogs* are considered predators so I'm sure that categorization is one more way for WS to make her death seem justifiable for their year-end tally.

Within a week or two of Ruby's death I located Brooks Fahy and Predator Defense in Eugene. I don't know what I would have done without them as a source of support and straight information as I have struggled over the years to make *something* good come out of this terrible business.

During that first year I mounted the best protest I could, writing to Wildlife Services and every politician I could think of. Thanks (no thanks) to the incredible lobbying power of WS and the ranching industry my letters and protests fell on deaf ears. It was extremely disillusioning. My dealings with WS proved them to be an arrogant and extremely short-sighted agency experimenting with dangerous chemicals at the risk of many. For decades WS has operated with almost complete impunity, which means they don't have to be smart or careful in what

they do, and they aren't. In response to complaints the WS simply denied each and every violation and it came down to my word against theirs.

I continue to feel bitter about a Federal government that would support such an agency and sad that Oregon, my ancestral homeland, may never again feel like the haven it always was for me growing up. I don't have a good solution for the centuries old coyote/sheep issue, but neither does Wildlife Services. From everything I've read, their efforts don't significantly reduce wildlife predation and I fail to see the sense in perpetuating a program that not only doesn't solve the problem but creates a whole set of new ones by littering an otherwise peaceful environment with land mines that wait indiscriminately for whoever happens along.

Sloppy *and* lethal: a losing combination.

I'm not contesting a farmer's right to protect his or her own livelihood, but why should the government and taxpayers be doing it for them, and with such a broad-sweeping, unaccountable and clearly dangerous approach? The Wildlife Services program is reminiscent of the bad old days of wild animal genocide in the 19th century American west -- with bounties on wolves and shooting buffalo from trains; it's just astounding to me to realize that this is still going on, and in my own back yard.

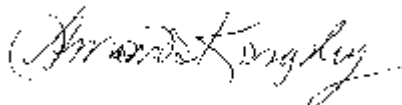
I like to think I'm pretty tough and resilient, so it's hard for me to admit this sort of thing, but the whole event left me dealing with many months of anxiety attacks and what turned out to be Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I've been troubled by bouts of depression ever since, and it's been 12 years.

Predator Defense has my undying gratitude for all the support they have given me when there was none other to be found. They seem to be the only group in the region that's watch-dogging Wildlife Services or insisting on accountability for their continuing "accidents" and violations. I continue to be impressed by the guts and tenacity of Predator Defense in taking on a nasty Goliath of an agency.

From my own experience I know what a battle it will be to get these poisons out of the grip of Wildlife Services. I greatly hope you will support the efforts of Predator Defense and introduce the legislation to ban any further use of M-44s on public and private lands.

I appreciate your record in fighting the use of other poisons in the past and I thank you ever so much for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amanda Wood Kingsley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Amanda Wood Kingsley

cc: Brooks Fahy, Predator Defense