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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** June 20, 2013

## **Leaked Documents Reveal Cover-up of Animal Abuse Investigation in USDA's Wildlife Services Agency**

- *Wildlife officials withheld "final" investigative report from public and Congress*
- *Report contradicted by subsequent communications between officials*

**EUGENE, OR** - In response to damning information revealed in leaked documents written by USDA officials, the wildlife advocacy nonprofit organization, Predator Defense, is once again appealing to Congress to increase pressure on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee to hold hearings on Wildlife Services, the USDA's lethal predator control program.

The leaked documents reference a November 2012 internal investigation of animal abuse allegedly committed by a Wildlife Services employee. The documents were Tweeted by Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Tom Knudson, following up on his [June 15 Sacramento Bee story](#) on the Wildlife Services documents, which is part of an ongoing series of investigative articles exposing the agency's secretive culture and inhumane, irresponsible, ecologically harmful practices. [View Knudson's full Sacramento Bee series](#)

Wildlife Services began their animal abuse investigation in response to the storm of controversy and outrage generated by graphic images posted on the internet by one of their agents in Wyoming named Jamie Olson. The photos showed Olson's dogs viciously attacking a coyote held in a leghold trap, Olson posing with a dead coyote, and other hideous images of dead and dying trapped animals. [View sampling of graphic photos](#)

The leaked information includes:

- [A November 8, 2012 email from William Clay](#), Deputy Administrator for Wildlife Services, a career employee, to other agency officials. In it he states: "I created a rule the other day to send all emails with 'Jamie Olson' in the subject line directly to my junk folder."
- [The December 2012 Report of Investigation](#) by the USDA's Administrative Investigations and Compliance Branch (AICB) regarding the Jamie Olson case. While the public and Congress have been waiting for eight months for a report, USDA officials have withheld it and now claim the investigation is still underway.
- [A December 6, 2012 memo from the Chief of the AICB](#) indicating that, as of the issuance of the Report of Investigation, they consider the case closed.
- [A December 13, 2013 email from USDA's Legislative and Public Affairs](#) stating that, on advice from Freedom of Information Act specialists, the Report of Investigation cannot be released to Congress.

The intentional withholding of the Report of Investigation refers to a [November 30, 2012 letter](#) sent by Congressmen Peter Defazio (D-OR) and John Campbell (R-CA) to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture as a result of the Jamie Olson case. The Congressmen requested a thorough audit of Wildlife Services and its "culture" by the USDA Office of Inspector General,

citing the lethal predator control program as being under heavy criticism for unnecessarily killing wild animals, lacking transparency and accountability, and allowing and encouraging inhumane methods. Congressman Campbell Tweeted earlier this week that Wildlife Services had told him and DeFazio the report did not exist. [View Campbell's Tweet](#)

"The Report of Investigation, along with the internal emails between USDA officials, go beyond the culture of disrespect and lack of accountability referenced by Representatives DeFazio and Campbell," said Brooks Fahy, Executive Director of Predator Defense. "The documents warrant immediate and full Congressional oversight hearings. They demonstrate an unbelievable abuse of power involving the intentional withholding of documentation requested by members of Congress."

The leaked documents also contain conflicting information regarding Deputy Administrator Clay's request that the investigation specifically address allegations of Olson's dogs attacking trapped animals and his failure to check traps appropriately.

- On pages 3 and 4 of the [Report of Investigation](#) Olson states his dogs do not attack coyotes. However, [Olson's photographs](#) showed his dog attacking two different trapped coyotes. Clay also states in his [February 5, 2013 email](#) that "Olson's dogs had electronic collars on them, but Pepper still bit the coyote."
- Page 4 of the report indicates supervisors had no problems re Olson's trap-checking record. Yet Clay, in his [December 20, 2012 email](#) refers to M-44 traps that had not been checked for up to 69 days, as well as three other occasions in two years where Olson's traps were not checked as required.

In spite of the visual documentation of brutal animal abuse, the violation of internal directives, and the admission of lingering questions about the agent's adherence to trap check requirements and other directives, Wildlife Services exonerated Olson of any wrongdoing. This is evidenced by their internal emails regarding their interpretation of the Report of Investigation. And Olson still retains his government position.

The June 15, 2013 *Sacramento Bee* article reported that Clay had asked investigators to re-examine the case. But it is not known if they did or what they found. Wildlife Services spokeswoman Carol Bannerman said this month that the investigation is ongoing. On June 17, 2013 Predator Defense asked Bannerman to clarify whether the AICB has indeed reopened the case file, to supply any documents and reports available in reference to an ongoing investigation, and to say when a final report is expected. No response had been received at the time of this release.

"Whether the December 2012 investigative report was final or not, the leaked documents regarding this case are the equivalent of an environmental Watergate," said Fahy. "They should result in a thorough Congressional questioning of operating procedures from the top administrators down to field agents. Wildlife Services' abuse of power and animals has to stop. The time is now."

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#### **RELATED RESOURCES:**

- [Read Sacramento Bee investigative series on Wildlife Services](#)
- [Read letter from Congressmen urging oversight hearings](#)
- [WARNING! Sample of graphic photos posted by Jamie Olson showing dogs attacking live coyote in trap](#)

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*Founded in 1990, Predator Defense is a national nonprofit working to protect native predators and create alternatives for people to coexist with wildlife. Our efforts take us into the field, onto America's public lands, to Congress, and into courtrooms. Visit us online at [www.predatordefense.org](http://www.predatordefense.org).*