

# Renewed call for probe of federal Wildlife Services

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

Two U.S. congressmen are once again calling for a probe of a little-known federal agency called Wildlife Services, citing photos of animal abuse posted on the Internet by an agency employee.

"We are gravely concerned that (the) photographs ... do not represent an isolated occurrence, but may reflect a deep-rooted problem within the Wildlife Services program," wrote Reps. John Campbell, an Irvine Republican, and Peter DeFazio, an Oregon Democrat, in a Nov. 30 letter requesting a U.S. Office of Inspector General investigation.

The photos show two dogs attacking a coyote in a leg-hold trap and Wyoming-based agency trapper Jamie Olson posing with the tattered carcass of a coyote. They also show other trapped animals, dead and alive.

The photos, which began to circulate on the Web in late October, have sparked an agency review which "is still under way, underscoring that USDA takes this matter seriously," said Wildlife Services spokeswoman Carol Bannerman.

She added: "Wildlife Services has taken this opportunity to reaffirm to employees their obligations to uphold professional standards as well as their responsibilities to the American public."

Animal advocates are wary.

"What they address in the letter is absolutely accurate," said Brooks Fahy, executive director of Predator Defense, an Oregon nonprofit group. "This is not an isolated incident by any

stretch of the imagination.”

The photos have stirred outrage online, where more than 43,000 people have signed a petition calling for Olson’s termination at [www.change.org](http://www.change.org).

“They hope it will all just go away if they ignore it long enough,” said Camilla Fox, executive director of Project Coyote, a Bay Area group that drafted the petition with the Animal Welfare Institute. “But we are not going away and we will do all that we can to ensure that this kind of brutality against wildlife is fully exposed.”

For eight decades, Wildlife Services has specialized in trapping, shooting and poisoning predators for farmers and ranchers. More recently it has expanded into killing and controlling geese, pigeons and other species in urban areas.

“It would be good to review the whole program,” said Carter Niemeyer, a retired Wildlife Services district supervisor who contends the agency’s predator control practices are excessive and expensive.

“We live in a new society today. Forty, 50, 60 years ago, there were more livestock on the range,” Niemeyer said. “It would be a good time to examine the extent to which aggressive predator control is needed any longer.”

Federal trappers use dogs to attract coyotes or locate dens. But Niemeyer said some also train their dogs by letting them attack coyotes in traps, a practice he considers unnecessary and cruel.

The letter from Campbell and DeFazio comes almost six months after they requested a congressional oversight hearing in the wake of a Bee series earlier this year that found the agency targets wildlife in ways that are indiscriminate, at odds with science and inhumane. No hearing was held.

Several nonprofit groups have called for action, too, including the Humane Society of the United States, which in May urged U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack to conduct a "top-to-bottom review." Vilsack declined.

"This is the latest in a mounting portfolio of evidence that there are a lot of problems at Wildlife Services," said Campbell, referring to the trapper's photos.

"Several other requests we have had seem to have fallen on deaf ears," he said. "We're hoping these new revelations will cause someone to take notice."