

The Conservation Column

By the RVAS Conservation Committee

This month, the Trump Administration's war on federal environmental and science programs came into sharp focus with the release of their 2018 budget proposal. The final budget, of course, is produced by Congress, and so it will be up to all engaged citizens to contact our elected representatives and make sure they know that we oppose these terribly destructive cuts. Here is the statement by David Yarnold, President of the National Audubon Society on the Trump budget proposals:

Statement by the National Audubon Society on the Trump Administration's Proposed 2018 Budget:

WASHINGTON—"The budget proposal released today would be a death sentence for America's long, bipartisan legacy of protecting our cherished natural places and the birds and other wildlife that depend on them," said David Yarnold, Audubon's president and CEO.

The White House budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2018 would mean crippling reductions to America's most important conservation initiatives, many of which support Audubon's efforts to protect birds and the places they need.

"Millions of birders, hunters and outdoor lovers from all political backgrounds stand to lose forever their opportunity to pass on our shared natural heritage to their kids and grandkids if such a severe proposal is implemented," Yarnold continued.

"Whether it's cranes migrating through Nebraska, shorebirds nesting along our coasts or any of the 314 North American species threatened by a changing climate, birds all across the United States benefit from federal investment through conservation programs and now find themselves on the chopping block. From special places like the Everglades to the Colorado River, and the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, these programs protect birds and the places they need now and in the future.

"The slash and burn approach proposed by the President would be nothing short

of lethal for bird habitat—whether it’s a local park or an iconic landscape—and communities that depend on these places.”

The Trump Administration’s proposed cuts for the Departments of the Interior (12%), Agriculture (21%), Energy (6%), the Environmental Protection Agency (31%), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (16%) would affect all Americans and endanger birds all across the United States, especially those already facing threats from disappearing habitats and climate change.

“Conservation investments at the federal level have already struggled in recent years to meet the demand from local communities,” said Sarah Greenberger, Audubon’s VP of conservation. “But the President’s proposal would push birds and ecosystems all across America over the edge.”

“We look to our leaders in Congress to reject this White House budget and counter with a plan to restore funding for conservation to a level that secures a natural legacy our children and grandchildren can be proud of.”

Below are some examples of federal departments and agencies in President Trump’s crosshairs. Highlighted are conservation programs that partner with Audubon and the birds at risk if those programs are eliminated:

Department of Agriculture: Important programs include: Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Conservation Reserve Program, US Forest Service.

Department of Energy: Important programs include: Solar Energy Program (SunShot Initiative), Wind Energy Program.

Department of the Interior: Important programs include: the Land and Water Conservation Fund, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Neotropical Migratory Bird Protection Act, State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, WaterSMART.

Environmental Protection Agency: Important programs include: Geographic Programs, National Estuary Program.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: Important programs include: Coastal Zone Management Grants, Regional Coastal Resilience Grants, National

Estuarine Research Reserve System.

Hundreds of bird species benefit from federal support and could easily disappear forever if collaborative conservation efforts like those listed above are made impossible by draconian budget cuts. For more than 100 years, Audubon has worked with local, state and federal officials from both parties. With nearly one million members from across the entire political spectrum spread out in red states, blue states and purple states, Audubon will continue fighting to protect birds and the places they need.

We also need to remain engaged on the local level. One issue of concern is Jackson County's contract with the USDA's Wildlife Services agency for wildlife control.

USDA's Wildlife Services on the Wrong Side of Conservation

By Lin Bernhardt

The recent unintended killing of a grey wolf in eastern Oregon highlights the indiscriminate methods used by the highly secretive arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, known as Wildlife Services, for resolving human conflicts with wildlife. It also highlights Wildlife Services' emphasis on lethal control of predators, which does not advance an ethic of living in harmony with nature. It's proven that predators, from hawks and eagles to coyotes and wolves, are essential to the healthy functioning of natural ecosystems.

While this wolf was killed with an M-44 cyanide capsule, a device perhaps not used in Jackson County, other deadly control methods used by Wildlife Services are equally indiscriminate.

Wildlife Services killed more than 3.2 million wild animals across the U.S. during fiscal year 2015, according to new data released by the agency. The total number of animals represents a half-million-animal increase over the 2.7 million animals the agency killed in 2014. These animals are shot, crushed in steel traps, strangled by snares and poisoned, often suffering painful and prolonged deaths, most as a "preventative" measure to avoid conflicts with agricultural and other interests. Their targets include bears, cougars, foxes, coyotes, muskrats, bobcats, raccoons, otters, herons, flickers, cormorants, beavers and others.

Since 2000, over 50,000 were unintended targets including family pets and endangered species. According to agency insiders, the number of unintended animals killed goes vastly underreported, citing a common mantra “shoot, shovel and shut up.”

Not surprisingly, Wildlife Services has been under withering attack for many years by members of Congress, editorial boards, conservation and animal welfare organizations and wildlife ecologists, who call it a rogue program with no basis in science that has no place in modern society.

Wildlife Services claims to use lethal control as a last resort but the numbers don't agree. Even with an internal program researching non-lethal methods, the numbers have stayed relatively constant over the years, and even increased since 2014. According to a High Country News investigation, new control methods are not reaching the seemingly entrenched agency trappers ([http:// www.hcn.org/issues/48.1/wildlife-services-forever-war-on-predators](http://www.hcn.org/issues/48.1/wildlife-services-forever-war-on-predators)). While Wildlife Services claims to work with land owners on conflict prevention, the fact is, prior to trapping or shooting there is no requirement for property owners to follow any of the basic animal husbandry practices that are proven to reduce conflicts with animals, including removing attractants or installing appropriate fencing.

Wildlife Services operates in most counties in Oregon. Jackson County each year signs a contract with Wildlife Services to deal with nuisance animals, at taxpayer's expense (\$64,436.62 for FY 2016/17).

Jackson County has the opportunity to shift wildlife conflict resolution to a more humane and eco- logically sound manner by altering their contract. Recent workshops held locally have helped edu- cate the public on prevention and non-lethal methods to deal with the reintroduction of wolves. This effort should extend to all predators and nuisance wildlife.

Some counties, such as Marin Co., California, have ended their funding of Wildlife Services, and instead used those funds to provide assistance to property owners on prevention. These non-lethal methods have shown to work better, cost less, reduce the risk to the public and pets, and benefit all county residents, including those who enjoy “watchable” wildlife.

Wildlife belongs to all citizens. Please let the Jackson County Commissioners

know you'd like them to recognize the important role predators play in our ecosystems and encourage changes to their contract with Wildlife Services. Transitioning their activities from killing to prevention and providing technical assistance on good animal husbandry and non-lethal control methods will benefit all of us.

To contact the county commissioners, go to www.jacksoncounty.org. To get an inside look at Wildlife Services by former staff, go to predatordefense.org to view the documentary EXPOSED: the USDA's secret war on wildlife, and go to the Center for Biological Diversity for more information at www.biologicaldiversity.org (home page/Wildlife Services in search bar).

[Editor's note: Lin Bernhardt recently joined the RVAS Conservation Committee.]