

The nation's largest animal protection organization, the Humane Society of the United States, is calling for reform of the federal government's wildlife damage control program.

Citing recent stories in The Bee, the society's president, Wayne Pacelle, has asked U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to investigate Wildlife Services, the agency in charge of the killing, and ban its use of poison for predator control.

"Even given our longstanding concerns about Wildlife Services, we are dismayed at the extent and depth of problems reported in the Sacramento Bee," Pacelle wrote on May 7 to Vilsack. "For these reasons, the HSUS urges USDA to take a hard look at the ... program and make critically needed and long-overdue reforms."

The Bee found that Wildlife Service's traps, snares and poison have killed more than 50,000 non-target species since 2000, from family pets to federally protected bald and golden eagles. Also, several employees have been killed or injured in aerial gunning crashes, and a growing body of science has found the heavy killing of predators invites unintended ecological consequences, including the proliferation of rodents.

"The Bee's highly detailed series shed light on an agency that most people don't know a lot about," said Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., who co-sponsored a bill with **Rep. John Campbell**, R-Newport Beach, in March to ban the agency's use of sodium cyanide along with a less commonly used poison, Compound 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate.)

The three-part series, which began April 29, was widely disseminated on the Internet and has touched off a drumbeat of concern, comment and calls for change.

"Is the writing on the wall for Wildlife Services?" wrote North Carolina resident DeLene Beeland in a blog, Wild Muse. "... In my opinion, we've advanced far beyond the mentality of the time period in which Wildlife Services was first formed. Why hang onto an anachronism?"

Blogs posts at Discover Magazine, Defenders of Wildlife and other sites also addressed the issue. An online petition – [www.thepetitionsite.com/378/318/356/us-wildlife-services-stop-waging-war-on-our-wildlife](http://www.thepetitionsite.com/378/318/356/us-wildlife-services-stop-waging-war-on-our-wildlife) – urges federal officials to "Stop Waging War on OUR Wildlife!" It seeks 10,000 signatures. On Friday evening, it had 5,688.

Pacelle, the Humane Society president, said that Wildlife Services is "over-reaching in a dramatic and destructive way and slaughtering animals, even before they do any damage."

In his letter to Vilsack, he called for an immediate ban on sodium cyanide M-44 capsules and Compound 1080. Vilsack did not respond to a request for comment, nor did Wildlife Services officials. But earlier this year, William Clay, the agency's deputy administrator, defended the agency's damage control work, including traps, snares and poison.

"Wildlife is a publicly owned resource and state and federal wildlife agencies have a responsibility to maintain stable, healthy populations. But when those populations get to the point where they cause damage, those same government (agencies) also have a responsibility to manage that damage," Clay said.

But Pacelle, whose organization has 11 million members, said the agency's management often leads to the accidental killing of non-offending animals and lacks accountability.

"It is particularly troubling that employees report a culture of hiding non-target animals killed," he wrote in his letter to Vilsack, "especially considering the agency requirements for reporting those kills."