

WILDLIFE: Enviro press FWS to revoke permit for poisoning Idaho ravens *(Monday, May 12, 2014)*

Scott Streater, E&E reporter

An environmental group is demanding the Fish and Wildlife Service revoke a permit authorizing the use of a pesticide to kill as many as 4,000 ravens in southern Idaho, arguing that doing so violates federal law.

A senior attorney with Boise, Idaho-based Advocates for the West Inc. in a [letter](#) sent today to FWS Director Dan Ashe takes aim at the federal plan to cull raven populations in Idaho. The goal of the raven control plan is to determine whether doing so helps protect greater sage grouse in the Gem State.

Ravens are known predators of the sage grouse, though their impact on grouse populations is not clear. FWS officials say the raven-killing plan being developed by the Agriculture Department's Wildlife Service predator-control program is designed to help answer that question.

FWS has until late next year to decide whether to propose listing the greater sage grouse as threatened or endangered across the bird's 11-state Western range.

The ravens, which are protected by federal law, would be killed with poisoned chicken eggs laced with the pesticide DRC-1339. The raven-control plan, which will be carried out in a partnership between the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and USDA's Wildlife Services, also calls for shooting the birds and destroying nests.

But it's the use of the pesticide that has garnered the attention of Todd Tucci, senior attorney with Advocates for the West in Washington, D.C.

Tucci wrote in the eight-page letter to Ashe and other FWS officials that Wildlife Services isn't following the specific precautions and monitoring mandates required by U.S. EPA as part of the use of the pesticide DRC-1339.

For one, he wrote, EPA mandates that before the pesticide can be applied, "sites that are to be treated must be observed for evidence of nontarget activity and must be prebaited" to guard against other animals being exposed. Also, he wrote, the carcasses of dead birds must be collected and disposed of "by burning or burial," again to guard against other species being poisoned.

Wildlife Services and Idaho Fish and Game are doing neither, Tucci wrote.

"Wildlife Services' expansive use of DRC-1339 ... and its refusal to collect and dispose of the dead, poisoned raven carcasses creates a potential public health emergency, and violates the express terms of the [EPA's] pesticide label," he wrote.

Tucci in the letter asks FWS to "investigate Wildlife Services' unlawful use of this highly-toxic avicide in contravention of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act," and to "immediately revoke" the permit authorizing the plan granted to Idaho, "as it was invalidly issued."

He also asks that FWS "commence enforcement actions if Wildlife Services begins its scheduled use of DRC-1339."

While FWS has issued a permit authorizing the use of the pesticide, Wildlife Services has not finalized a required environmental assessment (EA) of the plan, and officials with the agency have said they may not begin the culling plan until next year.

Regardless, Tucci said in an interview that Wildlife Services needs to slow down and do its due diligence and back off the use of the pesticide, which would be applied by spreading poisoned chicken eggs in specific targeted areas with raven populations.

"I want to ensure that the agency that is proposing to place 14,000 poisonous eggs on the ground does not do it," Tucci said. "If they do it, they will be sued."

Miel Corbett, an FWS spokeswoman in Portland, Ore., said in an emailed statement that the agency has received Tucci's letter and is "having conversations with Idaho Fish and Game and Wildlife Services about the concerns raised" in it.

Carol Bannerman, a Wildlife Services spokeswoman, did not provide a comment on Tucci's letter in time for publication. But she pointed to USDA's technical specifications for DRC-1339 that notes the pesticide is designed for specific targets and is "only slightly to moderately toxic to many nonsensitive birds, most predatory birds, and most mammals."

Bannerman has also said in the past that the pesticide is designed to be expelled by the ravens before they die, so if a raptor or other animal ate a dead raven it would not ingest the poison. But the so-called tech note also states, "To reduce any potential hazard, poisoned birds should be retrieved, then burned or buried, whenever possible."

Tucci's letter to Ashe follows letters sent last month to Ashe and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack from a coalition of conservation groups, including the American Bird Conservancy, National Audubon Society and Advocates for the West, asking Ashe and Vilsack to abandon the Idaho plan ([E&ENews PM](#), May 5).

In the [letter](#) to Vilsack, the coalition wrote that the proposal "ignores the central threats to Greater sage-grouse habitat and populations throughout Idaho," which it lists as wildfire, weeds, habitat fragmentation due to human development and livestock grazing.

The coalition also wrote that the proposal "fails to fully examine the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of using the avicide DRC-1339 across the southern Idaho landscape."

In the coalition's [letter](#) to Ashe, they asked him to "strongly consider revoking" the permit allowing "the use of lethal measures" as part of a two-year study evaluating the effectiveness of raven control on greater sage grouse populations in the state.

Instead, the coalition wants Fish and Wildlife to focus on conservation efforts like those outlined last year in a number of proposed resource management plan amendments aimed at implementing management strategies to preserve and restore the grouse.

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