

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Wildlife Groups Seek to Protect Endangered Jaguar's Critical Habitat

Tucson, AZ - The Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) and WildEarth Guardians (Guardians) have notified the United States Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program of their intent to sue over the program's failure to ensure that its activities do not harm rare and endangered jaguars or their critical habitat in violation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Western Environmental Law Center (WELC) sent the required [60-day notice](#) on behalf of AWI and Guardians.

Historically, jaguars—the largest cat species in the Western Hemisphere—were found in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and possibly as far east as Louisiana. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, these big cats were extirpated from California and Texas, and nearly eradicated from Arizona and New Mexico. This resulted in an endangered species listing for the jaguar across a portion of their range in 1972 and across their entire range in 1997. Between 1996 and 2011, either five or six individual jaguars were documented in the United States.

After years of delay, in March 2014, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) designated critical habitat for jaguars in Hidalgo County, New Mexico, and the counties of Pima, Santa Cruz, and Cochise in Arizona. Despite the designation, Wildlife Services currently employs lethal wildlife management techniques in designated jaguar critical habitat. Wildlife Services is violating the ESA's requirement to consult with USFWS concerning potentially harmful activities in the jaguar's designated critical habitat.

“The presence of rare jaguars in the Southwest is part of what makes it such a unique and special part of our country,” said John Mellgren, staff attorney at WELC. “The critical habitat designation will help ensure that the jaguar does not go extinct. As such, it is important that we hold Wildlife Services accountable for actions that could harm jaguars.”

The fundamental purpose of the ESA is to conserve endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems upon which they depend for survival and recovery. The ESA requires federal agencies to ensure that their activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or adversely modify a listed species' critical habitat.

A not-widely-known (and ironically named) federal program, Wildlife Services is responsible for the deaths of millions of wild animals each year. Wildlife Services uses multiple lethal management techniques designed to target large predators in and near designated critical habitat for jaguars—including blind sets, baited and scented traps, draw stations, leg and foot snares, and

M-44 cyanide capsule ejectors. Many of these cruel techniques routinely injure and kill non-target species. Because Wildlife Services' activities will affect the jaguar's designated critical habitat, the ESA requires the federal program to consult with USFWS.

“Wildlife Services can no longer blindly pretend that jaguars do not have a place in the American Southwest,” said Tara Zuardo, wildlife attorney with AWI. “Employing indiscriminate, dangerous lethal control methods in occupied jaguar habitat is a severe threat to the species' recovery and must end now.”

Wildlife Services is also contracted to carry out other activities, such as the Pink Bollworm Eradication Program, which includes harmful pesticide application in Arizona and New Mexico in the vicinity of known occupied jaguar habitat. In the notice of intent to sue, AWI and Guardians request that Wildlife Services immediately cease activities that impair designated jaguar critical habitat.

“For far too long, Wildlife Services has hidden the impacts of its lethal activities on endangered species like the jaguar,” said Bethany Cotton, wildlife program director at WildEarth Guardians. “Wildlife Services must immediately cease its activities in jaguar habitat and comply with the Endangered Species Act.”

A copy of the 60-day Notice of Intent can be found here:

http://www.westernlaw.org/sites/default/files/NOI_Jaguar%20WS_ESA_FINAL_4_4_2014.pdf