



U.S. wildlife worker's online photos of animal abuse stir outrage

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Photos of animal abuse and suffering posted on a federal wildlife specialist's Facebook and other Web pages are stirring anger among wildlife advocates.

The pictures show two dogs savagely attacking a coyote in a leg-hold trap and the employee posing with the tattered carcass of a coyote. They also show other trapped animals – dead and alive.

"You can't look at this and associate it with wildlife management. This is cruelty and torture. This is wanton killing," said Brooks Fahy, executive director of Predator Defense, an Oregon environmental group.

The employee, Jamie Olson, works as a trapper in Wyoming for an agency called Wildlife Services, which is already under fire from scientists and environmentalists for its extensive killing of predators to protect livestock and mule deer. Those practices were the subject of a Bee investigative series earlier this year. The Facebook photos began to circulate Tuesday on the Web after being spotted by an environmentalist. Other graphic photos were also found on Olson's Twitter account and two other websites.

Agency officials are investigating.

"Wildlife Services does not condone animal cruelty and holds all employees responsible for representing agency standards," said spokeswoman Carol Bannerman in an email. "Our review of the situation began yesterday (Tuesday) and is ongoing."

Reached Wednesday, Olson said he hadn't had a chance to examine the photos. "I don't know if they are doctored. I don't know if they are of me. I don't know anything about it," he said.

"I heard that someone had gotten into my Facebook account," Olson said. "That's all I know. I did contact my attorney, and we'll have to take a look at it to see what it is they think they've got."

Wildlife advocates are outraged. "There should be no question that the intentional infliction of additional suffering on any trapped animal by a Wildlife Services employee is entirely unacceptable and warrants immediate termination," wrote Cathy Liss, president of the Animal Welfare Institute in Washington, D.C., and Camilla Fox, executive director of Project Coyote in California in a letter Thursday to the state director of Wildlife Services in Wyoming.

A 2011 Wildlife Services "directive" says employees "will exhibit a high level of respect and professionalism when taking an animal's life, regardless of method." The directive also cites a passage from the American Veterinary Medical Association about euthanasia that states:

"Conditions found in the field, although more challenging ... do not in any way reduce or minimize the ethical obligation of the responsible individual to reduce pain and distress to the greatest extent possible during the taking of an animal's life."

The Olson photos are not easy viewing. One shows the trapper's brownish-black Airedale approaching a coyote in a leg-hold trap, unable to defend itself. The coyote is snarling and trying to pull away. A caption says: "My Airedale Bear with a sheep killing female."

The Facebook photos, which were viewable publicly on Tuesday, appeared in an album labeled "work." By Wednesday, the page had been removed from the Web. Olson's Twitter account had been disabled, too. Gary Strader, a former Wildlife Services trapper in Nevada, was not surprised to learn about the controversial photos. "That is very common," Strader wrote in an email. "It always was and always will be controversial. It has never been addressed by the higher-ups. They know it happens on a regular basis." Another photo on Twitter showed a partly disemboweled coyote on a log. The caption reads: "Eagles got to this adult female before I did."

The photograph "clearly demonstrates Olson's failure to check his traps in a timely manner and his disregard for the animal's pain and suffering," Liss and Fox wrote in their letter to Wildlife Services.

In 2011, Olson's salary was \$34,445. His official title is "Biological Science Technician." On his Facebook page, he identifies himself as a "Wildlife Specialist" with "USDA Wildlife Services." And he wrote: "I hunt a lot."

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