

November 6, 2012

Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Request for Investigation Concerning Abuse to Wildlife by Federal Agents; and
Establish Code of Conduct Prohibiting Cruelty by USDA Employees

Dear Mr. Vilsack:

We, the thirty-two (32) undersigned groups and persons, request that you issue a directive that unequivocally states intolerance for, and punishment of, acts of cruelty perpetrated by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) employees on our nation's wildlife. We also ask that you take immediate action to investigate two matters that received national attention this year.

In 2012, two USDA employees posted photographs on the Internet documenting what appears to be their own abuse of wildlife. In both instances, the wildlife had been caught in steel-jawed, leghold traps. View the photos at <http://goo.gl/JNNfb>.

In the latest incident, Wyoming-based Wildlife Services' employee Jamie P. Olson allegedly uploaded a series of photographs that shows his dogs attacking several trapped coyotes. In one instance, it appears that the coyote died from his dogs' attack. The *Sacramento Bee* (<http://goo.gl/AIWEH>) reported on the photographs on November 2, 2012. Mr. Olson now claims that his dog-on-coyote incidents occurred before his employment with Wildlife Services (<http://goo.gl/btkcq>).

Earlier this year, Forest Service employee Josh Bransford posed in front of a live, trapped, bleeding, and distressed wolf in Idaho. He posted photographs on Trapperman.com. Reuters reported on the incident (<http://goo.gl/wugL7>) and the article was published internationally.

Such brutal and cruel behavior by USDA agents, whether on or off duty, must not be tolerated by the agency as the public opposes and vehemently dislikes animal cruelty. People are especially galled that in the case of Wildlife Services, they may be forced to support such acts with their tax dollars.

These two incidents may be indicative of a larger problem at USDA agencies (we have since discovered other such photos, likely taken by Wildlife Services' agents, that are posted on the Internet). We ask that you immediately investigate these and any other occurrences known or unknown to your Department, and take decisive action to prohibit future occurrences. We have also called upon Congress to investigate these matters.

We ask you to begin your investigation with Messrs. Olson and Bransford. If you find that they have acted with callous cruelty toward our nation's wildlife, we ask you to consider their immediate censure and dismissal.

We also request that USDA adopt a code of conduct and ethics and oversee training for personnel that interact with our nation's wildlife. The administrative animal cruelty code should clearly describe repercussions for agents that harass, harm, or otherwise mistreat wildlife – whether on the job or on personal time. The duties of Wildlife Services officers engaged in killing wildlife could perpetuate a callous disrespect for animals. It is vitally important that USDA personnel act, at all times, with respect and under a clearly defined and enforceable legal and administrative code to prevent further abuse of wildlife.

Federal agencies manage the public's resources in trust. That trust is violated when federal agents abuse and torture our wildlife. We urge you to take measures to ensure that USDA personnel do not engage in such acts again. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have comments or questions.

Sincerely yours,

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cc: President Barack Obama