

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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INTERIOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY OUTLINES STEPS TO CURB BALD EAGLE POISONINGS

In recent testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Nathaniel P. Reed, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, outlined immediate steps being taken to curb deaths of bald and golden eagles from illegal poisonings.

The Department of the Interior, he said, has asked the Environmental Protection Agency to ban the interstate shipment of thallium sulfate for animal control purposes. The chemical has been identified as the cause of 22 recent deaths of bald and golden eagles in Wyoming.

In addition, Assistant Secretary Reed said, "the end result of the use of the poison in Wyoming may constitute a violation of the Bald Eagle Act, and, if this proves to be the case, we will indeed prosecute any offenders who are apprehended." The act carries penalties of up to \$500. or imprisonment for 6 months, or both.

The EPA is also being asked, he said, to review all other poisons which can be used in animal control programs to assure adequate controls over their usage.

"If one thing can be learned from this unfortunate experience," Assistant Secretary Reed said, "it is that animal damage control work, when left to private individuals, will more likely than not result in indiscriminate and even wholesale killings of not only target species but also of non-target species."

In conjunction with the Council on Environmental Quality, the Department of the Interior is initiating a broad overview of the problem of dealing with wildlife depredation, he said.

The Department, he said, is encouraging the actions of Governor Stanley K. Hathaway of Wyoming to cancel the use of thallium sulfate in Wyoming. Other States, Reed said, will be encouraged to take appropriate action on local control of toxic chemicals.

Thallium is a highly toxic chemical, particularly to man. It is a cumulative and broad spectrum poison which, unlike some poisons, cannot be used only to affect a particular species.

Because of its dangerous properties, the Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has not used it in animal control work in the continental United States for 15 years. Final termination of all Bureau uses and storage at field stations was ordered in 1967.

No animal control work by the Bureau is undertaken unless it is clearly justified, and when undertaken, control activities are limited to the species causing damage, and where possible, only to the individual animals, Assistant Secretary Reed said.

Animal control programs are not undertaken by the Bureau, he said, unless requested by a land managing agency on whose land the work will be done, or by a State or local government. Stockmen's associations and private landowners whose property or live stock is being damaged can also request such control programs.

On May 1, two high school boys from Casper, Wyoming, hiking in Jackson Canyon, 12 miles from Casper, found two dead bald eagles. A few hundred yards further, they found three more dead bald eagles. They reported the deaths, and a subsequent search revealed eight additional eagles. In total, 22 poisoned eagles were found.

The eagles were tested at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife and were monitored by the Audubon Society and the Animal Health Division of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The discovery of thallium in the eagles was also substantiated by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission.

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