

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## USE OF WETTING AGENTS TO CONTROL WINTER BLACKBIRD ROOSTS PROPOSED IN EIS

The use of the chemical PA-14 to control large winter roosts of blackbirds and starlings that pose hazards to agriculture and to human health and safety is proposed in a draft environmental statement issued recently by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Concentrations of the birds have caused several aircraft crashes that involved loss of human life. Winter roosts of up to 5 million birds can produce droppings 3 feet thick that make people nauseous and heighten the likelihood of their contracting histoplasmosis--a serious infection of the trachea and bronchial tubes.

The Fish and Wildlife Service considers PA-14 the most effective method of controlling large roosts when other methods are not feasible. It is the only chemical registered for that purpose by the Environmental Protection Agency.

(The chemical has been used several times in recent years to control concentrations of blackbirds and starlings and to kill diseased birds. Preparation of the EIS was begun early in 1975 when it became apparent that large roosting concentrations of blackbirds could be a continuing problem requiring immediate control measures. Since that time Congress enacted emergency legislation covering a period of 60 days only which waived provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws and directed the Department of the Interior to authorize the use of PA-14 on roosts declared hazardous by the Governors of Tennessee or Kentucky. Five applications of the chemical were made which removed over 1 million birds before the law expired April 15.)

PA-14, an avian stressing agent, developed by a private company, is a relatively nontoxic, short-lived chemical that is sprayed in solution over roosts on cold nights. It breaks down the oil in bird feathers, removing the bird's natural waterproofing and insulation. After spraying, if temperatures are low enough and rainfall occurs, the bird's energy loss becomes so great that its body temperature falls to a lethal level.

Despite the fact that over 300 million blackbirds and starlings die from natural causes each year, large winter roosts continue to pose hazards to agriculture and human health and safety. The blackbird/starling

(over)

population in North America reaches a low point of about 250 million birds in late April to early May each year. By July, when the reproductive season ends, the population has more than doubled to 550 million birds. Between mid-July and the following April, over 300 million blackbirds/starlings die naturally, reducing the breeding population to the 250 million level of the previous breeding season.

Both species have benefited from land use changes caused by man and their populations have remained relatively stable. Habitat alteration has been the primary reason for the recent conflicts with man.

The Fish and Wildlife Service anticipates that between 5 and 20 million birds would be removed annually through the use of PA-14. That would provide temporary relief to impacted areas. A population model developed by the Service estimates that as many as 50 million birds could be removed annually without adversely affecting the national breeding population.

Only the Fish and Wildlife Service has authority to supply and approve the use of PA-14 through its animal damage control program. It would be used to alleviate roosting problems when other methods would not achieve a suitable level of control in relation to the long term well-being of humans, blackbirds, and the environment. Other control measures considered in the EIS include moving roosting concentrations through the use of repellants and habitat manipulation, changing agricultural practices, trapping birds and moving them to other sites, and poisoning.

The use of PA-14 would be under strict guidelines and would be supervised by trained Fish and Wildlife Service employees. The chemical would be used only after concerned local governments, organizations, or individuals substantiated specific damages or hazards caused by these birds.

Copies of the draft statement are available for inspection at the following Regional Offices of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

1500 Plaza Building, 1500 N.E Irving Street, Portland, Oregon  
500 Gold Avenue, S.W., Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Federal Building, Fort Snelling, Twin Cities, Minnesota  
17 Executive Park Drive, N.E., Atlanta, Georgia  
John M. McCormack P.O. and Courthouse, Boston, Massachusetts  
10597 West Sixth Avenue, Denver, Colorado  
1717 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Interested persons wishing to comment on the draft should submit their comments in writing to the Program Coordinator, Animal Damage Control, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240, by June 1, 1976.

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