

*Missoulian, February 6, 2009*

The Montana Trappers Association's president, Tom Barnes, states they "won't support any legislation that would require trappers to check their traps on a certain schedule" (see Man posts video after dog snared in 2 traps, *Missoulian*, Dec. 22, 2008). They have the support of officials of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), which firmly resists posting trap warning signs or daily trap checks.

FOOTLOOSE MONTANA now posts on its website trap incidents reported to us. In December, we received six reports of dogs injured or killed in traps near Missoula. In one incident, a black Labrador had to be killed as a result of severe injuries sustained from a leg hold trap, the fate of another dog who simultaneously spent four days in a trap is still uncertain. FOOTLOOSE MONTANA received 12 reports of dogs caught in traps (two were fatal) as soon as we organized in 2007. From these incomplete reports we know where danger areas are near Missoula.

FOOTLOOSE MONTANA has urged FWP to discontinue trapping where most conflicts occur—primarily in the Bitterroot and Ninemile drainages. Instead, FWP set three areas as "trap-free," Pattee Canyon, the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area (closed to dogs all winter) and Blue Mountain. But what if our dogs get injured or killed in traps when we ski, hike or hunt on other public lands? It is not a right trappers have; it's a privilege. But we taxpayers do have the right to enjoy our public lands safely. It's time we stand up for this right.

Trappers complain about having to make concessions. But if anyone is forced to make concessions it is the public. We are left to fear for the safety of our dogs on our public lands; we are left to witness a snare, leghold or conibear trap strangle or crush companion animals; we are left with high veterinarian bills to rehabilitate our dogs' injuries; we are left to struggle with the sudden, agonized death of a loved companion when our dogs get caught in baited traps. Incredibly, it is illegal to spring a trap to reduce the danger to one's self, child, or pet, but it is not illegal to catch non-target animals, including dogs and endangered species, in traps.

All this, just so that trapping—the maiming, torturing and killing of our wildlife for pleasure or profit—can continue indiscriminately. In any other instance, the perpetrator would be arrested for animal cruelty.

FWP supports the Montana Trappers Association's mantra of "education, not regulation." To this end, a bill (HB 63) has passed the House requiring mandatory safety education for new trappers. The only safety involved here is the trapper's. The trap isn't any safer; it's still a hidden, deadly weapon intended to catch and kill any animal that stumbles into it—possibly your dog, your horse or a swan, eagle, lynx or any other creature. This bill is a smokescreen, a public relations ploy that insults the public's intelligence while upholding the status quo.

The solution is not more education for trappers. The solution is to speak up and demand a ban of trapping on Montana's public lands. It's time to consign to history this cruel and barbaric hobby that holds our public lands hostage. Eight other states have banned trapping, including Washington, California, Arizona and Colorado. This isn't an extreme measure; it's a practical one to protect people and end indiscriminate carnage on our public lands.

Echoing the Trappers' Association's question of "how much is enough?" we say the danger and suffering is enough. Make Montana's public lands trap-free. Speak up now and support Footloose Montana to make your voice heard.

Anja Heister

Executive Director of Footloose Montana