

FOOTLOOSE MONTANA

Promoting trap-free public lands for people, pets & wildlife

February 2009

www.footloosemontana.org

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SAD STATISTIC ON BOBCAT, OTTER, FISHER AND WOLVERINE TRAPPING

So far, 2,230 bobcats have been killed by recreational and commercial trappers in Montana. This is not the final count as the season still continues in some districts until March 1. A total of 95 otters can be killed officially by trappers and so far, at least 47 otters have lost their lives in traps. The otter trapping season is still wide open in the entire state (all districts) and will end on April 15. The season on the fisher is closed as trappers have reported to have officially killed 7 individuals and thus met the quota for this rare species. And ah, the wolverine... well, the quota allows trappers to kill a total of 5 individuals; until the end of the wolverine season on Feb. 15, one more wolverine can officially be killed in traps.

These are just the reported numbers of animals for which quota exist and the real extent of animals killed in traps is virtually unknown. Other species 'targeted' by trappers, include beaver, muskrat, mink, marten, coyotes, weasels, ermines, badgers, raccoons, foxes in addition to 'non-targets' such as threatened and endangered species.

MYTH: TRAPPING CONTROLS DISEASE IN WILDLIFE

The "Trapping Effect" on the perpetuation of diseases in wildlife

A recent letter to the editor by a trapper may have left some people wondering if the claim that the 'benefits' of trapping includes disease control has actual merits.

Contrary to trappers' anecdotal claims, there is significant evidence that attempts at population reduction, such as trapping, are ineffective in preventing the spread of diseases. In fact, such activities may *increase* the chance of disease propagation through an animal species. The healthiest and most mobile animals tend to get trapped, and they leave behind the more debilitated and sedentary animals to perpetuate the spread of diseases.

Trappers exploit the predictability of animals' behavior and activity patterns. Trappers set their deadly devices on well known travel pathways of the species they pursue. Thus, fur trappers kill active, mobile and healthy animals rather than those animals that deviate from the normal behavioral pattern—the weak and otherwise compromised animals. With respect to rabies, consider the following: animals suffering from rabies do not eat in the later stage of the disease and won't be tempted by baits and lures to get caught in a trap.

In addition, a historical case reported in the book *Cull of the Wild* shows how trappers have caused the spread of disease among furbearers. “The Centers for Disease Control and other authorities attributed a raccoon rabies epidemic on the East Coast to the translocation of more than 3,000 raccoons from Florida to West Virginia in 1977 by trappers and hunters to boost local populations. At that time, the particular strain of raccoon rabies was restricted to Florida, but some of the animals translocated to West Virginia were infected. The epizootic has spread across much of the northeast and to the Canadian border. Potential costs associated with prevention and control activities of the disease have been estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars” (pgs. 26-27).

Disease in wildlife is a selective, ecological process while traps and snares are inherently non-selective. In other words, traps are not only species-indiscriminate, meaning that any animal unfortunate enough to step into a baited trap, will be caught, but traps also do not select for diseased animals. The net result of furbearer trapping very well may be overall compromised wildlife populations that are becoming increasingly more susceptible to various diseases.

Even pro-trapping publications admit there is no scientific evidence to support the claim that recreational and commercial trapping is an efficient method to prevent or reduce the spread of disease among wildlife populations. The brochure on “Trapping and Furbearer Management” published by the Northeast Furbearer Resources Technical Committee, states that “The influence of trapping on the occurrence and spread of wildlife diseases has not been established definitely” and furthermore, “. . . the relationship of normal harvests to disease occurrence and intensity in wildlife populations is not yet well understood” (pg. 18).

http://www.pgc.state.pa.us/pgc/lib/pgc/trapping/trapping_management.pdf

Instead of relying on opinions from trappers, we should ask our state wildlife agency (FWP) the following question: Where is the scientific evidence to support the claim that furbearer trapping controls diseases in wildlife? We have requested scientific, peer-reviewed literature from the State’s furbearer coordinator (and avid trapper) Brian Giddings. We’ll keep you posted.

FOOTLOSE MONTANA SPONSORS 2nd DOG FIRST AID CLASS ON MARCH 14

We are sponsoring another Red Cross Dog First Aid and CPR Class on March 14. In this class, you will learn how to:

- * Recognize an emergency
- * When & where to call for help
- * Survey the emergency victim
- * Approach a sick or injured animal
- * Recognize what is normal for your pet
- * Detect dehydration
- * Emergency action steps that can be used in almost any situation
- * Apply first aid techniques

For more information, please contact Dani at 406.493.6220 or 404.229.2244 or mtpetfirstaid@earthlink.net

UPDATE ON INITIATIVE TO BAN TRAPPING ON PUBLIC LANDS

We are moving forward with finalizing the language of our initiative for a trap ban. Once our initiative is approved, we’ll head into the signature-gathering process. Because we’re publishing this newsletter on our website, which trappers have access to, we don’t want to reveal too many details. If you’re interested in learning more, or in helping us reach our goal please contact us at info@footloosemontana.org

MONTANA COMPANION ANIMAL NETWORK, INC. and FOOTLOOSE MONTANA JOIN FORCES TO INCREASE REWARD IN RECENT DOGS & FOX POISENING CASE

The Montana Companion Animal Network, Inc. (MTCAN) and Footloose Montana add to the reward generously put up by Dave Pauli from the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). Each organization added \$100.00 to the reward of \$2,500 to find the person(s) who recently killed the Tate family's two beloved dogs and a fox with a poisoned meat ball in the Bitterroot Valley (see Missoulian, *Couple's dogs killed by poison meat*, Feb. 6, 2009).

RECENT LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Missoulian, Feb. 9 2009

Claims in letter appear blatantly false

In response to his letter of January 28th, I must urge Mr. Wustner to check his source(s) of information carefully. I could find no statement attributed to the NWF that included Wustner's claims about misleading the public with emotionally based information. Further research also yielded no position statement from the CDC advocating furbearer trapping as a method of population or disease control. His claims are blatantly false. There is significant evidence that attempts at population reduction, such as trapping, are ineffective in preventing the spread of diseases. In fact, such activities may *increase* the chance of disease propagation through an animal species.

A detailed scientific discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this letter. Let me leave Wustner with a few questions instead. What is the actual human incidence of the diseases you mentioned within the state of Montana? (I'll give you a hint – it's extremely low). Since the organism responsible for bubonic plague (*Yersinia pestis*) is carried by rodents, and traps kill many of the animal species which control the rodent populations, how can trapping be useful in controlling this disease? If trapping is, as you claim, such an integral part of animal-borne disease control, why have we not seen widespread increases in these diseases within the states that have banned trapping? Why aren't Washington, Colorado, and Arizona overrun with rabies, bubonic plague, and tularemia? The above information is easily accessible on the Internet. I urge everyone to check for themselves.

Let's not lose sight of why trapping needs to end. It is a cruel and inhumane activity. Montana is populated with kind, caring people who have a healthy appreciation and respect for their wilderness areas and the animals which inhabit them. It's long past time we join other western states in ending the practice of trapping.

Timothy Provow, MD
Board Member Footloose Montana
Missoula

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Missoulian, Feb. 6, 2009

Guest Column: Trappers have had it their way for too long

By Anja Heister, Executive Director of Footloose Montana (to read this guest column, please visit www.footloosemontana.org)

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Missoulian, Jan. 30, 2009:

No way to find 'common ground'

Finding "common ground on trapping" (Missoulian editorial, Jan. 11) is like finding common ground on water boarding. All the reasons in defense of these practices do not recognize the fact that their inherent cruelty diminishes the integrity of our own struggling species.

Peg Klouda, Victor



Independent, Feb. 12, 2009

Coyote questions

In response to Mike Dey's recent letter regarding coyote trapping (see "Letters," Feb. 5, 2009), I would like to put forth several questions for the public to ponder.

There is an accumulation of scientific evidence to support the theory that many animal species, including coyotes, will vary their population size in accordance with their current numbers. If you kill more coyotes, average litter sizes will increase to compensate and vice versa. Dey, based on his individual anecdotal observations, says no. Who are you going to believe?

Dey then says that none of the trappers were aware of the recent coyote killing contest. This contest was organized by the Montana Furbearer Conservation Alliance. This is the Montana chapter of the Fur Takers of America. It is a national trapping organization. Dey is trying to claim that none of Montana's trappers were aware of a huge, politically contentious issue being sponsored by their own organization?

*Tim Provow
Missoula*



Independent, Feb. 5, 2009

The cream rises, what floats to the bottom?

My good friend told me not to attack the individual that presents or defends their actions but to address the actions and explain the fault you see in these actions. It is a task that I am finding extremely difficult considering the disgusting nature and unnecessary suffering that this hideous hobby of trapping causes.

Trapper Bothwell is trying to tell us that because of the great pleasure animals are having while they are caught in the comfortable but tight jaws of a foothold trap, they decide that they will lie down and take a nap prior to the trapper coming along and either stomping, beating or shooting them to death. Their sleeping wouldn't have anything to do with the struggle and onset of exhaustion would it? Oh! Can't forget that this waiting period to die could last from hours to days since trappers in Montana are not required to check their traps in any specific period of time. So I ask you Mr. Bothwell— what is it that I do not understand?

With little fanfare Mr. Bothwell's claim to fame is serving on the board of the trappers organization Montana Furbearer Conservation Alliance. This is the same group that has organized the all-you-can-kill Coyote huntathon, trapathon. Here comes the spin. Mr. Bothwell makes two statements that I find sadistically self-centered and serving: "We get to demonstrate our skills in a friendly manner," and "We are trying to help other game species". While killing all the coyotes you can and in any manner possible we will be friendly. Gosh! In his second statement, Mr. Bothwell forgets to mention that all the animals he is saving from the big, bad coyotes he will be targeting later for killing by himself or others like him. What a good sport! No sense letting nature run her course like she has been doing since the beginning of time, we have the Montana Furbearer Conservation Alliance to the rescue.

Now for the Cream! Footloose Montana sounds like an organization that not only promotes ethics in our relationship with nature but is not deceptive or manipulative. It seems to have the well-being of backcountry visitors and their pets on public lands in mind. I don't know Susie Waldron, a Footloose Montana member, but I believe she has several positive points, one of which is that these animals that are being targeted for killing have a right to be here. I ask Mr. Bothwell this. The animals that trappers kill, whether targeted or non-targeted: Are their lives any less valuable to them then yours is to you or your offspring?

*Sincerely,
Marc Cooke*



Independent, Jan. 29, 2009:

Cruel intentions

While hiking up Sweat House Creek in the Bitterroot my dog was lured into a leg hold trap baited with three pheasants and two rabbits. Contrary to Don Bothwell's beliefs (see "Trapping the heartstrings," Jan. 15, 2009), she did not simply nap but screamed louder than anything I have heard in my life. Her foot was broken and permanently disabled. It was horrifying for me and extremely stressful for my dog.

Trapping is just plain cruel. It's not hunting. It's not a sport. It's barbaric and should be banned. Bothwell and all those involved in the "Howler Hauler" clearly have no respect for animals and give real hunters a bad name. It's deplorable to kill for the sake of killing. It's unfortunate there are people like Bothwell in this world, who obviously knows nothing about the torture he inflicts on his prey.

*Meredith Patterson
Stevensville*



Independent, Jan. 22, 2009:

Not napping

Regarding the article "Trapping the heartstrings" (see January 15, 2009), I take issue with Don Bothwell's comments. Bothwell, a well-known Kalispell trapper and emerging spokesperson for Montana trappers, claimed many trapped animals, after struggling briefly, "just take a nap." Bothwell made this same claim at a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks meeting last year. But from what I've seen in the trapping world, more likely the "napping" animals were exhausted from struggling and in shock, giving the appearance of sleeping. Then Bothwell came along, woke them up, and clubbed them to death.

Personally, I've seen many traps while hiking. One, set on a cedar tree along the upper Lochsa, had trapped a marten. The unfortunate animal had shredded a large circle of bark extending as far as the trap chain would allow. Two years ago on the Salmon River trail in Idaho, a coyote chewed and tore all the brush within several feet of the trap. A few miles farther downriver, my wife and I found a trap where a river otter had inadvertently been caught. The otter had escaped, but left its chewed-off foot in the trap. Hardly a "nap," I'd say.

Bothwell can try to sugarcoat trapping, but in reality it's a violent, incredibly brutal practice. As far as Kerry Foresman's comment that he respects trappers and "it's a legal activity," legal has nothing to do with what's right or humane.

*Michael Koeppen
Florence*



Moral fiber

You can't make a silk purse out of a coyote's ear—although, where trapping's public perception is concerned, Don Bothwell has tried—but apparently you can win a cash purse with enough of them.

One note to the Independent: Use of the word "heartstrings" in your article's title tends to trivialize animal activism. The cruel reality of trapping doesn't require emotional manipulation. Activists are after justice for animals, not sympathy. This has more to do with moral fiber than heartstrings.

*Kathleen Stachowski
Lolo*



To read the guest column by Anja Heister titled **Trappers have had it their way for too long** in the Missoulian, visit www.footloosemontana.org



Editor,

Your biased article, “Trapping the heartstrings” (1/15/1009) included the subheading “Coyote hunting contest angers animal rights activists,” yet the reader was subjected to line after line of sugar-coating from trappers and learned comparatively little about how and why animal rights activists would be angry. Do you think your readers so naive as to believe that a trapped coyote casually says to herself, “Hey, I can’t go anywhere, what the heck” and takes a nap? Animal rights activists are angry because they know the truth about what animals in traps actually go through.

I have heard the cries of shock and pain when an animal first feels the steel jaws of a trap lock down onto his leg. Believe me, they struggle frantically--there’s nothing casual about it. And I’ve looked into the weary eyes of a helpless, fatigued and dehydrated victim who’s been caught in a trap for days and nights on end.

With no other hope of escape and feeling vulnerable to anything that comes along, trapped animals sometimes resort to amputating their own leg. Trappers callously try to downplay this grim act of despair, giving it the innocuous nick-name, “wring off.” But if they don’t bleed to death or die from infection, these animals spend the rest of their lives crippled and possibly unable to keep up with a demanding life in the wild. I’ve found the chewed-off leg of a lynx, and seen more than my share of three-legged coyotes.

Yes, compassionate animal advocates everywhere are angry. We’re angry that the twisted tradition of trapping still goes on. Angry that sentient animals still suffer horribly and senselessly in the name of sport or commerce. And we’re angry that newspapers like this one habitually side with those causing the suffering and keep their readers in the dark about the cruelties of trapping.

*Jim Robertson,
Bozeman*



For a compassionate and footloose 2009,
Your friends at Footloose Montana