

The following guest column appeared in the *Missoulian* on November 28, 2007

## **Trapping takes the Public out of Public Lands**

By Marty Essen

In his November 22 guest column, "Public land is open to trappers, not just people and their dogs," Richard H. Williams chose to use insults rather than facts.

Apparently people who object to trapping name their dogs "Poopsi" or "Bow Wow," and any dog that isn't a hunting dog has no business being in the woods. In fact, according to Mr. Williams, such non-hunting dogs can lead coyotes and other wild animals back to their owners, where the dog and owner will become the "main meal and dessert." Perhaps someday Mr. Williams will enlighten us on just where these super coyotes reside.

Seriously, trapping is a pastime that is past its time. Until Footloose Montana started spreading the word, I blissfully took my dogs (big, strapping, hunting breeds) onto public lands without a worry. Now that's changed. I'm much more reluctant to take my dogs hiking, as I'm fearful they could be maimed or killed in a trap.

As trappers see it, the solution to the problem is keeping all dogs leashed 100% of the time. For many of us, however, that solution is unacceptable. There's a special joy in watching a dog delight in the freedom of the great outdoors. If our dogs behave, and are in areas where they can legally be off-leash, why should all of us have to give up that pleasure for a mere 3,000 trappers?

Essentially trappers take twice. They take animals (sometimes endangered species) with their traps and also take the public out of public lands. Montanans shouldn't have to worry that a wonderful day in the woods could instantly become tragic, as they desperately try to free a loved-one from a deadly trap.

And by the way, little “Poopsi and Bow Wow” aren’t the only ones endangered in the woods. At a recent Footloose trap release workshop, an angry hunter stood up and told the audience about a trap his dog got caught in. Yes, even burly hunting dogs can become victims.

Finally, Mr. Williams’ claim that Footloose board member, Kathleen Stachowski, hasn’t read the trapping regulations is without merit. The Montana Trapping Regulations can be accessed directly from [www.FootlooseMontana.org](http://www.FootlooseMontana.org), and I’ve heard Ms. Stachowski accurately recite the regulations at a trap release workshop.

The rules state that traps “should,” not must, be checked at least once every 48 hours. The only penalty mentioned in the unattended trap section of the regulations is for failing to remove traps at the end of the season (some animals may be trapped year-round) or for waiting so long between trap checks that the animal is wasted.

I thank Footloose Montana for educating people about the hidden dangers of trapping and hope that someday our great state will follow Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Washington and ban barbaric leghold traps for good.

**Marty Essen is the author of the multiple-award-winning book *Cool Creatures, Hot Planet: Exploring the Seven Continents*. He writes from Victor.**