

My senior yellow lab was caught in a foothold trap in October 2005. We were hiking in the Ninemile along an overgrown logging road. The road skirts a saddle ridge between the McCormick Creek and Kennedy Creek drainages, and is frequently used by horseback riders, hunters, and is a popular area for collecting firewood. The exact location would be Forest Service Road 4282, approximately one mile from its intersection with McCormick Creek Road.

My dog was about 10 yards ahead of me, snooping in the brush when I heard her howl. I was at her side in seconds. The trap was set about 3 feet off the road. This was my first encounter with traps, and I was absolutely shocked since I'd been hiking that area 3-4 times/week for the past 4 years. Despite being in a panic and not very mechanically inclined, I was able to release my dog. She was fine and other than a sore foot - had no serious injuries.

Because the trapper had tagged his trap with ID, my husband and I contacted him. This was our introduction to Montana's trapping regs...we'd never before realized how lax they are. The trapper is a local resident. He traps extensively in the Ninemile and prides himself in following the trapping regs faithfully. I believe he does, and he's won the good graces of the feds by contacting them in the past when wolves have been caught in his traps. He's active in the MT Trappers Assoc as well, and can/does travel to Helena to testify when the regs are being challenged. He lives to trap, and really doesn't care if his activities cause discord with his neighbors.

Over the years, I've heard a number of stories detailing episodes of local pets being caught in this trapper's traps. This includes dogs who were out jogging with owners, bird dogs, and dogs simply hiking with owners. This trapper uses both snares and foothold traps. The snares terrify me.

Because this trapper's traps are everywhere, I now carry a wire snip when I'm out with my 3 dogs. I've also attached bells to the dogs' collars so I know where they are at all times...since I realize I only have minutes if they encounter a snare. This trapper's trapping activities have effectively destroyed my sense of safety/enjoyment while hiking. Many times, I opt to simply stay on my own property rather than risk an encounter with traps.

This trapper traps for everything - coyotes, bobcat, fox, etc. He claims to have permission to trap on lots of private property, too. He does setup traps all along McCormick Creek Road, and Forest Service Road 4282. He rarely sets traps more than 30 feet from the road - that would entail physical effort to check/maintain his trapline.

Footloose Montana member, Nine-mile, December 13, 2008.