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**Footloose Montana Proposes
“Montana Trap-Free Public Lands Initiative”**

Helena, Mont. – Public lands in Montana will become trap-free, if an initiative filed today with the Secretary of State qualifies for the November 2010 general election and is approved by a majority of voters.

The “Montana Trap-Free Public Lands Initiative” would prohibit trapping on public lands in Montana, except for scientific, public health and safety activities. Under the initiative, proposed by the Florence-based group, Footloose Montana, trapping on private lands, which comprise 65 percent of the state, will not be affected.

Dr. Tim Provow, a Footloose Montana board member, hunter, and member of the National Rifle Association, said that most trapping on public lands conflicts with hunting ethics. “The first rule of hunting is to ‘Be Sure of Your Target!’,” Provow said. “Trapping violates this rule by its indiscriminate killing of many species, including endangered, threatened and sensitive species, such as Canada lynx and American bald eagle,” he said.

Species targeted by trapping, such as marten and otter, are severely depleted, according to the text of the initiative, while wolverine and fisher are at risk of extinction in Montana. Trapping is a leading cause of the steep declines in these species, the initiative states.

“Trapping does not honor the hunters’ ethical code of ‘Fair Chase,’ or the time-honored principles of quick and efficient kill,” Provow continued. “Tens of thousands of untended, unmonitored traps on public lands lure wild and domestic animals with bait. For every wild furbearer killed, many more non-targeted wild and domestic animals are killed and discarded, in violation of hunting and outdoors ethics,” Provow said.

Connie Poten, secretary of Footloose Montana and co-owner of a western Montana Vineyard and Winery, said: “Montana's public land should be safe for all citizens and their pets. Under current law, trappers are able to set an unlimited number of traps, warning signs are not required, and trappers are not required to check their traps in any specific period of time.

“Thousands of camouflaged traps directly endanger adults, children, and pets,” Poten said. “Montanans should not have to compromise peace of mind, welfare of children, and pet safety when using public land.”

Public lands trapping contributes little to Montana’s economy, Poten said. “In Fiscal Year 2008, trapping brought in a total of \$94,000 in revenue to the State of Montana. In comparison, over the same fiscal year, hunting generated direct revenue to the state of \$45 million and fishing generated direct revenue to the state of \$20 million.

“Federal studies show that wildlife watching brought \$376 million into Montana in 2006,” Poten continued. “If trapping were limited to private land this financial contribution would likely increase as rare species become more abundant and visible on our public lands.”

Poten said trappers are currently allowed to trap certain species (such as fox, coyote, and badger) year-round without any regulations at all. Only four species (otter, bobcat, fisher and wolverine), out of the 14 species pursued (beaver, otter, muskrat, mink, marten, fisher, wolverine, weasel, bobcat, fox, coyote, skunk, raccoon and badger) have any quotas. These quotas are determined in the absence of detailed scientific data concerning species populations and how affected species are distributed across Montana, said Poten.

Anja Heister, the group’s executive director, said Footloose Montana is organizing local chapters across the state to help gather signatures for the initiative. She said the initiative needs at least 24,400 signatures of registered voters from at least 34 legislative districts, to qualify for the November 2010 general election ballot.