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## Dane County Park Commission and County Board Supervisors

I am a veterinarian and Emeritus Professor of Veterinary Medicine at the University of California. As someone who has had experience with leghold and other body-holding/crushing traps, I am writing to comment on your county's plan to allow trapping of various species of wildlife. Although I will focus on so-called steel jaw leghold traps as a prime example, all methods designed to capture and restrain an animal by a limb have the same shortcomings with respect to animal welfare.

The majority of veterinarians polled believe that leghold traps should not be used because they are cruel devices. The American Animal Hospital Association, which represents a significant number of veterinarians, is on record as opposing these traps (5) and the American Veterinary Medical Association has stated these traps are inhumane (6).

Many veterinarians, including myself, have had to attend to various types of animals, both domestic and wild, who have been caught in these traps. We have seen first hand the degree of damage to limbs and other parts of the body caused by these traps. Although some animals have sustained minimal damage, for most, the damage was substantial and inflicted severe pain. There is no way of "properly setting" one of these traps to avoid this type of injury (19).

The damage, and therefore the pain, inflicted by these traps is compounded by the struggles of the trapped animal. These struggles are violent enough to cause laceration of skin and other soft tissues, fracture of bone, dislocation of joints, and severance of limbs, depending on the force of the struggles and the type of animal. Even if the trap has "offset" jaws, the gap between the closed jaws always is less than the diameter of the bone of the trapped limb and severe injury still can occur (12,19). Moreover, tooth breakage and associated pain is common from animals chewing on the traps.

So-called padded traps will reduce injury in some cases, but they are not as effective in reducing injury as the industry would have the public believe. Several studies have been done comparing the effects of "padded" versus un-padded traps on various animals. These have shown that both could and did cause the same degree of damage to a limb, including laceration of skin and fracture of bones (1,7,8,15,16,20).

Some trappers try to demonstrate how "painless" steel jaw leghold traps are by letting one snap closed upon their finger or hand. This is meaningless because the trap used for this type of demonstration, usually for small mammals such as raccoons, is inappropriately small to provide a true comparison. A trap of a size used for wolves or similarly sized creatures would be more appropriate anatomically. It is unlikely that anyone would be foolish enough to risk severing tendons or permanently crippling themselves by letting a trap of that size snap closed on their finger or hand.

Trappers state that the trapped limb becomes numb. Whereas the part of the limb distal (further away) to the point of contact with the trap jaws could become numb (after an indeterminable period), the tissue caught in the jaws would not be numb nor would joints that are dislocated. There would still be extreme pain with every movement of the animal.

Other elements compound the suffering of the trapped animal: adverse weather, exposure to predators, and the terror a wild animal experiences simply from being restrained. Females with nursing young may experience additional fear or anxiety because of strong maternal instincts. Several hours to many days may pass before the trapper arrives. Prior to this the animal may have died from dehydration, starvation or freezing. If not, death at the trapper's hands may not be quick. For example, it may be brought about slowly, by suffocation through the trapper standing on the animal's neck or chest.

Trappers claim that some animals are "asleep" in the traps, suggesting that this proves how innocuous the traps are. There are at least two explanations for this phenomenon, assuming it is true. One is that the animal may succumb to sleep after a period of futile attempts to escape. This is not, however, evidence that the traps do not cause pain. Injured people manage to sleep despite being in pain. The other possibility is that the trapped animal succumbs to a well known phenomenon: learned helplessness (14). In this situation, the animal being subjected to noxious stimuli from which there is no escape "learns" that struggling will not help and eventually gives up despite intense pain.

It might be that potential trappers will be required to attend and pass a "training" course. It should be obvious, however, that no amount of training will reduce the agony and suffering of a trapped animal. In replying to the sentiment that these courses are beneficial, one licensed trapper in Connecticut wrote: "[the person] is either describing his hallucinations, or he is...pulling the wool over the reader's eyes." (13) Incidentally, this same trapper explained how such courses taught trappers how to manipulate habitats in order to increase numbers of target species, defusing the argument that trapping is done for population control.

There also is the issue of "non-target" animals who are trapped. Because steel jaw leghold traps are not selective, any animal tripping the pan may be trapped. So-called non-target animals are caught frequently, and number in the millions every year. During a five year study conducted by the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, the ratio of unwanted animals to target animals caught was greater than 2:1 (2). Other studies have shown higher ratios of unwanted to wanted animals. When a nursing animal is trapped, this compounds the number of animals killed.

Many trappers contend that the steel jaw leghold trap allows them the opportunity to release unwanted animals (if they are still alive when found). This is misleading, however, because many of those animals are too debilitated from the damage caused by the trap to compete in the wild, and die later as a result of their injuries even if these injuries seem slight upon initial inspection (10,12,19). For example, essentially all raptors (birds of prey) who are victims of these traps are killed or kept in captivity because the damage to their source of livelihood, their legs, often results in amputation (8). In contrast to the steel jaw leghold trap, alternatives such as box traps allow an unintended victim to be released relatively unharmed.

One of the most important reasons for trapping, according to proponents, is the prevention of wildlife overpopulation. There is no evidence, however, that trapping is an effective and efficient means of controlling wildlife populations. As an example of the lack of credibility of the "management" argument, two years after the steel jaw leghold trap was banned in Florida, the Everglades Regional Manager stated: "We have not found it necessary to implement any control measures for wildlife populations that we did not have before the ban on trapping [in Florida]." (4) Trappers do not trap for conservation reasons; they trap based on the price of pelts (17).

Prevention of the spread of various diseases to human beings by reducing the natural reservoirs is often touted as an important benefit of trapping. Although trapping of animals may reduce natural reservoirs, there is no evidence that this must be done with steel jaw leghold traps, even if the premise

was true. Even in the case of rabies, there is no proof that trapping has any effect on the natural reservoir in a particular area (11,18). The Council on Environmental Quality has found: "The contention that rabies increases dramatically when steel leghold traps are banned seems entirely without merit." (4) The National Research Council recommended: "Persistent trapping or poisoning campaigns as a means to rabies control should be abolished. There is no evidence that these...programs reduce either wildlife reservoirs or rabies incidence." (3)

In testimony to the inherent cruelty of steel jaw leghold traps, over 64 countries have already banned their use, and several of our states have either banned or significantly restricted their use. Other than for the financial return associated with furs, there is little evidence that these traps are beneficial or necessary in this country. Even some furriers realize the cruelty of these devices as illustrated by the following statement referring to the efforts of others to outlaw furs in general: "...we hand them...the most damaging evidence in our continued use of the leghold trap." (9)

If there are questions about my statements, please feel free to contact me.

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