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August 6, 2011

County Executive Parisi and the Board of Commissioners
City County Building
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Madison, WI 53703

Dear County Executive Parisi and the Board of Commissioners,

I am writing on behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and its over 225,000 Wisconsin members and constituents to strongly urge you to reject the proposal to allow trapping on Dane County state park lands.

It is vital, from the outset, to distinguish the difference between trapping and population control. Most trapping in this country is for recreational purposes and in no way reduces wild animal numbers, disease, or incidence of conflicts.

In fact, the reason that state agencies can set such liberal bag limits is because of the high reproductive potential of game species – i.e. even when a high proportion of the wild animal population is removed, their numbers bounce back due to the physiological phenomenon called compensatory reproduction – the ability to breed at an earlier age, have larger litters, and higher neonatal survival.

Opening up the Dane County park lands for the public trapping of mink, raccoons, beavers coyotes and other species may be something the Commission approves to satisfy the trapping minority but in no way can this proposal be construed as population or disease control.

Please consider the following points as you review this trapping proposal:

- **Leghold traps and body-crushing traps are non-selective:** Each year leghold and body-crushing traps in Wisconsin are used to legally kill thousands of wild animals a year, while the number of “non-target” animals—domestic dogs and cats, rabbits, songbirds, raptors -- goes un-reported. The high rate of “non-target” captures ranges from 0 - 67% according to studies (AVMA, April 2008) which is not surprising, since the trap will spring on anything of sufficient weight that sets foot in it. Non-target animals caught in traps can be theoretically released but usually have little chance of survival due to injury severity.

- **These traps cause suffering:** Both of these types of traps will cause significant physical damage to wild animals ranging from bone fractures, tooth damage and twisted ligaments to hemorrhage. Animals in traps are subject to severe physiological stress through prolonged exertion and are at risk from predation by other animals to death caused by extremes of climate. A scientific paper which reviewed mammal trapping studies stated “across the literature, the majority of studies show a significant percentage of trapped individuals suffering major injuries” (Iossa and Soulsbury, 2007). Submersion traps, which create death by drowning, are considered inhumane due to the panic induced and the long period til unconsciousness (Ludders et al, 1999) – for example, 9 minutes for beaver, 4 minutes for muskrat (Gilbert et al 1982).

Body-crushing traps are designed to snap shut on an animal’s spinal column at the base of the skull. However, under field conditions, it is impossible to control the size, species, position and direction of the animal entering the trap. The result is that even target animals frequently are not killed, but endure prolonged suffering as the clamping force of the trap crushes their abdomen, head, or other body parts.

- **Padded leghold trap can be as harmful as steel-jawed:** Leghold traps work by slamming shut on an animal’s leg or foot with enough force to hold the animal in place. The “padded” traps do the same but contain a very thin -- 1/11th inch thick -- strip of hard rubber lining the metal gripping edges. The result may be fewer *visible* lacerations– yet padded traps now contain higher spring force which means *the animal is held more tightly and can actually suffer more pain*. In addition, being restrained is very distressing to wild animals – their instinct is to break free. They pull and twist to get out of the trap, which can lead to extensive injuries, even to the point of chewing or twisting their own foot off (called “wring-offs” in the industry) Trappers are only required to check traps every 24 hours, so the animal can struggle over a prolonged period, and be subject to weather extremes, pain and predation – i.e. literally being eaten alive since they can’t get away.
- **Little has changed in 170 years:** Since its creation in the 1820’s, leghold traps have gone through marketing “face change,” such as being referred to as “foothold traps” to avoid the stigma associated with leghold traps. However, these devices are not akin to Cinderella’s slipper, as their new name implies, but are much the same primitive device that they were a nearly century ago. The same applies to body-crushing traps which may also be referred to as “smooth wire traps.”
- **The public strongly opposes the continued use of leghold traps.** Reputable national surveys indicate that more than 75% of Americans oppose the use of steel-jawed leghold traps (Kellert and Berry, 1979 and 1980). This claim is buttressed by the fact that 8 states , including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Washington, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, and New Jersey have banned or severely restricted the use of leghold and body-crushing traps.
- **Trapping is often confused with “population control”.** Because of the high *compensatory reproduction* ability exhibited by most fur-bearers, trapping creates a yo-yo effect on wildlife populations. Most game animal populations can withstand high *sustainable yield* reduction levels – which means that their numbers bounce back by the


next breeding season due to increased litter size, breeding at an earlier age, increased juvenile survival, etc – all phenomenon that is biologically adapted to maximize population growth. The bottom line is that most trapping is done for recreation, and agencies like the DNR manage furbearer numbers to allow for sustainable harvest. Population control is not achievable by this archaic tool due to this “bounce back” effect as documented in agency “bibles” such as *Wild Furbearer Management and Conservation in North America* (M. Novak et al) – for example, to achieve noticeable declines, one would have to remove over 40% of a beaver population or 50% of a raccoon population, and 70% of a muskrat population because of their ability to compensate for population losses. This kind of drastic reduction is extremely difficult to accomplish -- and then maintain at such low numbers.

- **Trapping is not an effective way to control beaver flooding:** The necessity of trapping beaver to control flooding is an argument used to validate trapping; however the continual immigration of 2 year old beavers –forced out of their natal lodge at that age -- results in vacated niches being quickly colonized by other beavers. In other words, trapping is a quick fix at best because removing beavers simply opens up habitat for other beavers to move into. Water flow control devices provide a long-term and cost-effective answer. This solution consists of properly designed ADS pipes which are inserted through beaver dams in a way to keep the water flowing while foiling the beaver’s instinct to plug up the dam. These devices provide a real solution because they solve the problem at its source.
- **These traps are not necessary or for nuisance wildlife control:** The best way to resolve nuisance problems is to eliminate what is attracting the animal, which is usually intentional feeding by humans, overflowing garbage cans, dumpsters without lids, or pet food placed outside. The solution is to implement better garbage disposal and collection practices in the parks along with effective educational signage which teaches people how to avoid creating problematic wildlife behaviors --- which usually stem from our own. Coyote problems can likewise be resolved with effective educational messaging along with hazing training, as was accomplished by the Denver Parks Department (CO) and other communities that resolved coyote issues using these simple but effective techniques.
- **Trapping doesn’t control rabies.** The reason that health authorities such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization don’t recommend trapping to control rabies (nor does the Connecticut State Health Dept) is because it doesn’t work. Clinically rabid animals don’t go into traps, and trapping would remove the naturally immune individuals that provide a buffer of safety for people – this is why the USDA-WS Rabies program and other successful programs to control rabies focus on *vaccinating* rabies vector species through the use of oral baits.

Once again, The HSUS strongly urges the Dane County Board of Commissioners to reject the current proposal to allow recreational trapping in Dane County parks. Such an action will be detrimental to the majority of park users --- and is wholly unjustifiable as a population, disease, or nuisance wildlife control measure.

Thank you for considering the views of the Humane Society of the United States and our Wisconsin constituents who strongly oppose trapping on public park lands for the reasons outlined in this letter.

Sincerely,



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