

## **Some seek ban on 3 types of trapping**

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To view the state's current trapping rules, click [here](#).

LAS CRUCES - Las Crucen Michael Trujillo was hiking with his doberman, Niña, one afternoon about seven years ago in the desert west of Picacho Hills, when he was interrupted by a sharp noise from his dog.

"All of the sudden, I hear a yelp, and she's far enough away from me I can't tell what's going on," he said. "I see something attached to her leg, and I thought it was a rattlesnake."

Once he ran closer, Trujillo said he discovered the real culprit: The line he'd seen was a cable from a coyote trap. The snare was clamped on Niña's foot, and the dog was lying on the ground.

"She was in a whole lot of pain," said Trujillo, 60, a retired homebuilder. "She wasn't biting me, but she was threatening to."

Trujillo said eventually he was able to calm his dog and wrangle the leg-hold trap - a metal device that clamps the foot or leg - off its foot after about 10 minutes. He said there were no broken bones or torn flesh, but "her foot swelled up real big and she was pretty hurt."

Trujillo said the experience is prompting him to lend his backing to a movement to ban certain types of wildlife trapping in New Mexico.

Spurred on by ongoing reports of pets getting caught in traps and a belief the devices are inhumane, critics are pushing for a statewide ban on three types of snares on public lands: steel leg-hold, body-gripping and strangulation traps. The restrictions would apply to trappers seeking pelts for market and recreation, supporters of the ban said. But traps on private land and those used to protect livestock wouldn't be affected.

Trappers have long defended the use of traps for catching fur-bearing game. They noted that leg-hold traps - the devices most often involved with unintentional pet trapping - most often don't seriously injure animals. Plus, the devices allow for animals to be released alive.

At least one trapping supporter said a some regulation changes might help reduce conflicts between trappers and the rest of the public.

### **Pets and traps**

New Mexico trapping regulations were last revised in 2006. The rules were opened last December for possible revisions by the state game commission, and game department officials are gathering public comments.

Critics of current rules complain that there's no requirement to notify the public or post warning signs about trap locations and that regulations are too-lax about where the devices can be placed, creating ripe conditions for dogs to get caught in them.

Existing regulations don't require the disclosure of trap locations or any warning notices in the vicinity, but they do specify that traps be at least 25 yards from public trails or roadways. Also, all traps must be marked with an identification number issued by the state to individual trappers or with the person's full name and address, according to the regulations.

State rules also spell out that traps should be checked every 24 hours.

Leg-hold traps are camouflaged on the ground and baited with an odor attractant. When animals wander into them, the jaws snap shut, clamping the leg. Trappers, when they find an animal, place a hood over its head, knock it unconscious and then stand on its chest to stop the heart and lungs. Sometimes animals are shot.

The National Trappers Association, on its website, counters criticism of leg-hold traps, saying they do allow hunters to live-release animals they don't want to kill.

"Although not aesthetically pleasing, blunt force trauma (bludgeoning) and shooting are recognized as humane euthanasia techniques by the American Veterinary Medical Association," the group writes. "Trapper education provides information on humane techniques to put an animal down."

Most often traps don't permanently injure an animal, but less frequently, animals injure themselves while trying to escape, said M.H. "Dutch" Salmon of Silver City, a former state game commissioner.

"There are instances where the animal will suffer a broken leg or chew their fur off, and you end up with a gruesome result," he said. "That, of course, makes it more emotional."

While not a trapper himself, Salmon said he's accompanied trappers in several states. He said he's also experienced about six instances over the years in which his own hunting dogs got caught in someone else's leg-hold traps, so "I have some sympathy for the point of view of banning the traps."

"I was always able to get the dog out of the trap myself because I knew how to work the trap," said Salmon, who was dismissed after Gov. Susana Martinez took office this year. The dogs "never had a permanent or serious injury, but I realize it does happen."

Salmon said he wouldn't back an outright ban, though there are some changes that could be made, such as possibly increasing the distance from trails that traps can be set and more strictly enforcing the 24-hour rule.

Bobcat, fox and coyote pelts are among the most sought-after by fur trappers in the state, with bobcats fetching prices of several hundreds of dollars apiece.

Some trapping supporters point out the problems would be reduced if pet owners kept dogs on leashes and stuck to trails.

Trap critics, however, said there's a loophole because none of the rules - including distance requirements from trails - applies to coyotes, considered an unregulated species by the state.

Winston-area resident Mary Katherine Ray, a volunteer with the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club who backs trap banning, said the group has been receiving complaints from around the state of dogs getting caught in the leg-hold traps.

"They say universally the sound their dog makes when the trap springs is screaming," she said. "The dog will be biting at the trap, biting at them when they try to get it open."

### **No bag limits**

Fur seekers - whether trappers, bow hunters or rifle hunters - pay a \$20 license to hunt during the winter months. There aren't any per-person bag limits - another criticism of those opposed to traps.

The trap debate isn't a new one, Salmon noted. He said it most boils down to: "There's a certain number of people who like to hunt furbearers, and the question is, are we going to let them do it?"

State game commissioners may take up the issue this summer, said Commissioner Dick Salopek of Las Cruces.

The concern about dogs getting caught in traps on public lands is "legitimate," Salopek said. Still, though he hasn't yet looked over the existing rules in-depth, he said he doesn't like the idea to ban traps outright.

"I'm in favor of trapping," he said.

Salopek said he'd likely back a change requiring trappers take an education course.

Trujillo, even though his own dog wasn't injured, said he's also concerned about traps causing wildlife to suffer.

"If my dog would have been a coyote, who knows?" he said. "The coyote could of laid there and chewed its leg off or died of starvation or thirst - any number of things."

Body-gripping traps consist of a spring-loaded, metal frame. When an animal attempts to pass through, they're triggered and snap shut around the neck or chest. It's meant to break the upper spine and kill instantaneously.

Strangulation traps catch an animal around the neck with a loop that progressively tightens as the animal attempts to escape.

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