

CONNECTICUT TRAPPERS ASSOCIATION

Public Hearing March 9, 2009
Environment Committee

Testimony submitted by Herb Sobanski Jr., Secretary/Treasurer
Connecticut Trappers Association

Raised Senate Bill No. 994, An Act Concerning Leghold Traps

My name is Herb Sobanski Jr. I live in Enfield, CT. I have been a trapper for over 30 years. I am representing the Connecticut Trappers Association, founded in 1967. The present membership exceeds 225. Our association is completely opposed to the raised Senate Bill No. 994 particularly the language in Section 1 "No person shall place, set or attend any body-crushing trap, leghold trap, snare, net or similar device capable of taking, killing or injuring any animal. For purposes of this section, "body-crushing trap" means a device designed to kill an animal with a blow or crushing force to the body and includes, but is not limited to, conibear-style traps and "leghold trap" means a device designed to close on the foot or leg of an animal with sufficient force to hold the animal until the person tending the trap returns. A leghold trap includes, but is not limited to, a steel jawed leghold style trap that is either padded or unpadded. For purposes of this section, cage and box traps, nets, suitcase-type beaver traps and common rat and mouse traps shall not be considered body-crushing traps, leghold traps or snares."

The following are sound reasons for defeating this bill in committee.

1. The Department of Environment Protection has very specific regulations concerning the size, type and use of the modern foothold and conibear traps and adheres to the Best Management Practices (BMP) established by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.
2. Regulated trapping using the current, effective tools today, the leghold and conibear traps, help in reducing the incidences of mange, rabies, and giardia.
3. The modern day foothold and conibear traps are necessary tools in assisting the DEP in managing furbearer populations. Beaver can't be successfully trapped in numbers without the combined use of foothold and conibear traps. DEP Beaver harvest statistics will show that close to 50% are harvested using foothold traps.

4. The coyotes throughout the state are becoming more and more of a problem species. The foothold is the only trap that can consistently take this animal. There simply is no other trap. In 1995 DEP recognized this fact and established a coyote land trapping season using foothold traps to counter the problem this species is causing.
5. Without the use of the leghold and conibear traps, beaver and coyote management would be severely effected. Coyotes cannot be successfully and consistently caught in cage traps.
6. Using "suitcase-type" live traps for beaver would be ineffective in managing the growing population of beaver in this state. "Suitcase-type" traps are large, cumbersome, and expensive. Their main purpose is in the use of capturing and containing beaver alive. Beaver relocation is not considered a viable option for alleviating beaver problems in Connecticut as recognized by the DEP.

One need only look to out neighbor to the north, Massachusetts, which banned the foothold and conibear traps in 1996, to see what problems that action has created.

In 1996 when Question 1 was passed, the beaver population was estimated to only be approximately 24 thousand animals, and the coyote population was of no real significance. Much to the voter's dismay, animal related incidents steadily grew, caused by booming populations of furbearers and nuisance animals, their populations no longer able to be efficiently managed. In 2001, the beaver population was estimated at over 70 thousand beavers in the state of Massachusetts (that is an increase of almost 200 percent), and the coyote population was estimated to be over 4 thousand! Incidents of tick-borne and mosquito-borne diseases were on a rise, as their habitat grew with the growing populations of furbearers. Disease spread rapidly throughout the populations, and in 2005, over 45 percent of raccoons tested positive for rabies. 37 percent of skunks tested positive. A poll carried out by MassWildlife determined that at least 70 percent of voters, who had voted for question 1, were now regretting that decision. In 2005, only 9 coyotes could be caught in box traps, in no way denting their growing numbers. A large majority of beaver showed signs of injury due to infighting as a result of decreasing habitat and increasing numbers.

Connecticut citizens and its wildlife do not want this problem!

In regards to the recent owl incident in Wallingford.

NO ONE wants to see birds or animals suffer and it is very, very unfortunate that this occurred.

Banning all leghold and conibear traps, making them illegal, will not eliminate illegal activity and will promote the misuse of a perfectly legitimate activity and tools by untrained amateurs taking the law into their own hands. No licensed trapper would ever consider doing this illegal act in Connecticut, let alone stake any foothold device in a way that a captured animal would easily escape... only someone who has total disregard for the law, animal welfare and is inept in the art of furbearer trapping would carry this out. While I can sympathize with the people who were emotionally energized by the recent owl incident in Wallingford, – it in no way represents what modern day regulated trapping is, its accepted researched tools and methods or the people who partake in this important activity.

What are BMPs?

They are a set of trapping recommendations developed by the Fur Resources Committee of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The purpose of the BMP process is to scientifically evaluate the traps and trapping systems used for capturing furbearers in the United States. Evaluations are based on animal welfare, efficiency, selectivity, practicality and safety. Results of this research are provided as information to state and federal wildlife agencies and trappers.

The most important phase of the program is the extensive scientific field testing of different types of foothold and conibear traps to determine which ones meet the 5 criteria; animal welfare, efficiency, selectivity, practicality and safety. This field testing, which is done in a scientific manner with actual studies performed on captured animals by wildlife veterinarians, at the University of Georgia and the University of Wyoming, resulted in a published list of traps by size and type that meet and exceed the five criteria mentioned above.

The BMP Program partially funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Department of Agriculture commenced in 1996. BMPs are being developed for most of the furbearers in the United States and Canada. To date BMPs, with the major component being the size and type of acceptable traps, have been developed for thirteen furbearers.

The Connecticut Environmental Committee is dedicated to conserving and preserving Connecticut's natural resources. Please listen to your own hired wildlife professionals who have dedicated their careers and in many cases their lives, to ensuring the health of Connecticut's wildlife. From them, you will receive nothing but honesty, facts, and no hidden agendas in their answers.

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- ❖ This bill is not fair to the legal trappers that work hard to keep our ecosystem stable and healthy.
- ❖ This bill is not fair to the residents of Connecticut who depend on trappers to protect their families, livestock, domestic animals, and property.
- ❖ This bill is not fair to our precious wildlife that will suffer from disease, infighting and the brutality of illegal and uneducated trapping.

The bottom-line is that Connecticut cannot afford the economic health and ecosystem impact that this bill will produce. Please do not make the same mistake as our neighbors in Massachusetts.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at 860-741-0728.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input on the issue.

Herb Sobanski Jr.