

**Testimony in Support of S.B. 994  
An Act Concerning Leghold Traps  
March 9, 2009**

Dear Members of the Environment Committee:

My name is Skip Hilliker from East Hampton, CT. I am a licensed Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator (NWCO) and long-time trapper. I submit this testimony in **SUPPORT of Senate Bill 994, An Act Concerning Leghold Traps.**

I have been trapping wildlife in Connecticut for the past 50 years, since I was 12 years old. Over the years I have trapped tens of thousands of animals and every furbearing species in the state, ranging from beavers and muskrats, to raccoons, foxes and coyotes. Over the years I have trapped animals both for their pelts and for nuisance complaints. In the early 80's I was a volunteer nuisance trapper for the DEP and on average was capturing over 1,000 animals a year. In fact, in one year alone, I managed to trap and mark 500 raccoons for the DEP.

Even though I used leghold and body-crushing traps for decades, I slowly realized that these traps were grossly inhumane and that I could actually catch animals more efficiently with live traps. In 1985 I switched to using live catch or box traps for trapping wildlife and have been using them ever since.

A lot of trappers claim that recent modifications to leghold traps, such as the padded or swivel versions, have made them more humane, but this just isn't true. All of these traps do the same thing -- they grab an animal by the leg, hold them in place for hours, and cause unnecessary pain and suffering. The "pad" on the padded leghold trap is made of a thin, hardened piece of plastic, not a soft cushion, while the swivel variety often becomes quickly clogged with grass or debris and no longer swivels as intended. These traps are NOT as different from one another as some would like you to believe and all can result in injuries to the trapped animal, such as broken teeth, skin abrasions and bruising, and gnawed limbs.

**From first-hand experience I can attest to the fact that leghold and body-crushing traps are both cruel and unnecessary.** We, as trappers, simply do not need them, given the alternatives available to us today.

Beavers are a case in point. Many trappers will use body-crushing traps to "solve beavers complaints." The body-crushing traps used to kill beavers, also known as conibear traps, do not result in a humane death because beavers don't enter them perfectly -- so beavers who aren't killed outright are then held under water, with the entrapped part of their body crushed, until

they drown. Since beavers can stay submerged under water for up to 18 minutes, there's no doubt they suffer.

From experience, I know that it is virtually impossible for a trapper to guarantee an instant death with these traps. As a result, what I do now, and have been doing for the past 20 years, is install water flow control devices throughout the state to resolve beaver-caused flooding problems. In those cases where there's no tolerance for beavers and they need to be removed, Hancock suitcase-type traps work extremely well, and are humane.

I should note too that given the low pelt prices throughout the country, that trapping wild animals for fur is a dying endeavor and not very profitable. For example, a single muskrat pelt is only worth about \$5.00 in today's market.. Worse yet, the number of these animals in CT has been declining for years, and DEP still allows trappers to use body-crushing traps to kill more of this species than any other furbearing mammal in the state.

**SB 994 is exactly what CT needs and has needed for a long time. There are a lot of misconceptions out there about trapping and I can tell you from my 50 years of experience that leghold and body-crushing traps have no place in CT.**

**I urge the committee to support SB 994.**

Thank you for your time.

Skip Hilliker  
23 Young Street  
East Hampton, CT 06424  
860-267-0061 (ph)