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**IN SUPPORT OF SB 994**

Testimony by: Laura Simon  
Committee: Joint Committee on the Environment  
Date: March 9, 2009

**Members of the Environment Committee;**

My name is Laura Simon, and I am the Field Director for the Urban Wildlife Program for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the nation's largest animal protection organization with over 174,000 members and constituents in Connecticut. HSUS also runs a wildlife hotline in Connecticut which handles over 6200 public assistance yearly.

The HSUS strongly supports the passage of SB 994. Although the recent incident involving a Great-horned owl brought this issue into the public spotlight, what is unseen are the many animals of many different species who are trapped and suffer often agonizing deaths in our state every year.

This is but one reason that this bill is timely, relevant, and vital to pass into law this session. Other key reasons include:

- **Leghold traps and body-crushing traps are non-selective:** Each year leghold and body-crushing traps in Connecticut are used to legally kill 6,500 wild animals a year, while the number of “non-target” animals—domestic dogs and cats, rabbits, songbirds, raptors -- goes un-reported. The Great-horned owl attests to this lack of selectivity, as do incidents reported to our field office in Connecticut by animal control officers and members of the public -- involving animals ranging from cats to geese (see *Incidents Reported* attachment).

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 -- 1/11<sup>th</sup> 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) Connecticut 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.** The recent public outcry in Connecticut over the owl's fate indicates the high level of support for banning leghold and other cruel trapping practices in this state. 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 our neighboring states of Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, and Washington; Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, 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 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 DEP 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 because of their ability to compensate for population losses.
- **This law won't take away a farmer's tools:** All of the states which currently *have a trap ban* (excepting Rhode Island) have more agricultural acreage and farm value than Connecticut, as noted by Office of Legislative Research Report done in 2003 for the Connecticut General Assembly. Farmers will still have tools at their disposal. They will still be able to shoot problem animals or capture them in box traps. Other long-term problem mitigation measures to avert crop

and livestock damage include the use of netting, fencing, guard animals, shed lambing and other deterrents. In cases where damage can't be prevented using non-lethal means, we would not be opposed to the creation of special exemptions as long as non-lethal options have been tried in good faith—and done correctly – yet failed to resolve the problem.

- **There are other ways to resolve coyote problems:** Although coyotes can be difficult to catch, the leghold trap is not the only viable tool. Property owners still have the option of shooting coyotes, and although more difficult, box traps can be used as well when removal is deemed necessary. Certain steps such as pre-baiting enhance a trapper's success. However, the vast majority of coyote calls received by our wildlife hotline in Connecticut do not necessitate removal but rather, merely require public education. Many of these calls involve unfounded fears (merely seeing a coyote as cause for alarm) or result from human-created food sources attracting the coyote, such as pet-food or garbage left outside.
- **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. Here in Connecticut, the HSUS has a Beaver Remedies program devoted to solving beaver problems using water flow control devices which provides 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. Towns throughout CT have expressed high satisfaction levels with this solution (Simon, 2003).
- **These traps are not necessary or for nuisance wildlife control:** The vast majority nuisance wildlife animal removal is done in largely suburban/ urban areas using box traps for safety and humane reasons. For convenience, some operators use body-crushing traps to capture raccoons and squirrels, particularly along rooflines, yet this method is inhumane and unnecessary. There are far better, more humane methods. Box traps, eviction methods, and “one-way door” traps (i.e. hinged on one side to allow the animal to leave but not re-enter a den site) provide more than ample tools for nuisance wildlife control work.
- **Trapping can have a detrimental impact on certain vulnerable populations and ecological dynamics.** Muskrat are believed to be in serious decline in Connecticut due to the reduction in cattail habitat throughout the state. When a species is reduced to a certain low threshold, removal by trapping can negatively impact a population due to their vulnerable status. It is of concern to note that in 2007 trapping season, muskrat were the most highly trapped mammal in Connecticut – over 2700 were removed legally that year and 4200 the year before -- and it does not appear that the DEP has restricted their take. This is one example where trapping may well be adversely impacting a declining population – which otherwise could withstand heavy trapping. Some furbearing species prey on other furbearers (i.e. mink eat muskrat). So by trapping one species, trappers can actually *increase* other furbearer numbers.
- **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.

The HSUS strongly urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 994 given the extent of animal suffering caused by leghold and body-crushing traps, and the availability of viable non-lethal alternatives for catching wild animals and resolving conflicts.

Laura Simon  
Field Director, Urban Wildlife Program  
The Humane Society of the United States  
[lsimon@humanesociety.org](mailto:lsimon@humanesociety.org)

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## LEGHOLD TRAP INCIDENTS IN CONNECTICUT

These are among the emails The Humane Society of the United States received from Connecticut residents and animal control officers in the last few weeks (compiled by Laura Simon)

- *I am writing to you regarding an incident that occurred several years ago in Newtown, Ct. At that time, one of my cats came home dragging a leg hold trap that had crushed his paw. After being treated by the vet, his paw actually ended up falling off. My cat ultimately died two weeks later of septicemia as a direct result of the infection that had spread throughout his body from this horrendous incident.*  
- **Adria Henderson**  
Newtown CT
- *I discovered a Canada Goose stuck in a leg hold trap on 12-7-06 as the bird floated, or was dragged by the weight of the trap mechanism, downstream.. I was dispatched to the city park and found the bird floundering. The trap was on one of the bird's legs. I was not able to secure it using my net or other equipment so I phoned a bird rehabilitator, Jeannie Presslitz, who brought her rocket net gun and the bird was captured. Apparently the bird floated, or was dragged by the weight of the trap and anchor chain from another town which was upstream.*  
- **Michele Kellough,**  
Norwich Animal Control Officer, Lebanon Animal Control Officer
- *Awhile back we had an owl hanging from a tree upside down caught in a leghold trap and I don't believe it survived. It was 8-10 yrs ago. Last fall of 2008, in a residential neighborhood, a cat went missing and was found by its owner struggling next door in a leghold trap. Her vet bills were high.*  
- **Jan Lund**  
Berlin Animal Control Officer
- *I had a resident who went walking in Nachaug Forest with their Australian Shepard and their dog got caught in one of these traps, they had a very difficult time getting the dog released from the trap and it wasn't until the dog went into shock that they were able to get that accomplished. The trap was set along side a walking path, down in a culvert.*  
- **Nancy Bard**  
Scotland Animal Control Officer
- *About 2 years ago, I encountered a raccoon in a leg hold trap. The trap was set under the water surface, probably to catch beaver. I found the trapped raccoon on State property in Mansfield CT. I notified the DEP*  
-**Noranne Nielsen, Mansfield Animal Control Officer**
- *We received a raccoon (mid 90's) that a State Trooper brought up to the house with his front leg in a leghold trap. The raccoon was treated and eventually released but it suffered a lot.*  
- **Karen Marrotte, wildlife rehabilitator**
- *I responded to a situation involving a raccoon caught in a leghold trap – it was awful*  
- **Jean Roslonowski, Ansonia Animal Control Officer**