

SUPPORT STATEMENT -- FOR SB 994 BANNING LEGHOLD TRAPS

March 6, 2009

Honorable Representatives,

Our names are Brian Hill (BH) and Laurie Hiestand (LH) of Scotland, CT. Our dog was caught in a leghold trap in November last year. It cost us about \$2500 and much trauma to recover from the ordeal. Our story is as follows:

BH is a sixty-four year old retired Systems Analyst and LH is fifty-two and works as a Senior Project Manager in East Hartford. We own a three and a half year old, sixty-five pound, neutered male Australian shepherd (Freddy). On Sunday morning, November 9, 2008 we were walking in the Natchaug State Forest with our dog as we had done on many occasions in the previous two years. We walked north on a dirt road (some call it the Old Kenyon Road), which runs along the eastern edge of the Hampton Reservoir. It has stone culverts at intervals to allow streams and run-off water to flow under the road and down to the reservoir and swamps surrounding it.

After walking about a mile and a half we approached what is possibly the largest culvert, with a five-foot high stone arch under the road and a rocky, knee-deep, six-foot wide stream flowing through it. As he often did, our dog went down the embankment to get a drink. He enjoys playing in water and he splashed up the stream and into the culvert. After a few moments we heard frantic barking and yelping and knew he was in trouble.

BH went down the embankment and saw Freddy struggling to free a paw that seemed to be caught under a rock. Freddy was clearly in pain and thrashing about, slipping and falling and going under water as he tried to free himself. BH waded into the culvert and tried to release his paw by feeling under the water. Freddy clamped down hard onto BH's arm with his teeth to try to stop him from moving his paw and causing pain. It was then that BH felt the trap and tried to raise it to see how to remove it. This caused the dog pain and he began to bite at BH. LH came into the water to try to restrain the dog while BH attempted to free him. We did not know how to release a leghold trap and were unable to release it by forcing the bars apart.

We backed off to calm Freddy but he was hysterical with pain and fear, and while going underwater to bite at the trap, fell repeatedly and began to inhale water. BH believed that the situation was critical and that the dog would soon drown. He found that the trap was attached to a wire, and that the wire was wrapped around a large rock that could be moved. So he picked up the rock by the wire in his left hand and with the dog and trap in his right hand carried everything out of the culvert and put them on the stream bank. LH helped to carry and restrain Freddy. By this point both of us had sustained bleeding puncture wounds and gashes.

Once on the bank the dog became quiet and went into shock, shivering continuously. We thought that he might have a broken foot and believed we should do two things: We needed to find someone who knew how to release a leghold trap, and we had to sedate or restrain the dog to be able to get the trap off his foot. That meant contacting the DEP wardens for the Natchaug Forest and finding a vet to provide medical care. However, there was no cell phone communication at the culvert.

So while LH stayed with the dog BH began to walk the mile and a half back to the edge of the forest where we had parked the car. After awhile a truck came along the road and BH flagged the driver (C) down. C graciously offered his help and drove BH back to his car. C is a very kind man who wishes to remain anonymous. BH got into our car and they both drove back to the culvert. Although C was a hunter and woodsman he did not know how to open a leghold trap either. C had a large and heavy screwdriver with which we tried to pry the trap open, but to no avail. BH's tools were also useless. C offered Band-Aids and antiseptic cream to LH for her injuries, which she applied, and C then volunteered to stay with LH and Freddy while BH went to the Natchaug Forest HQ some miles away.

However, the wardens were on patrol in the forest and were not at their HQ. Later after talking to them BH learned that one had in fact been nearby and heard BH but by the time the ranger got back BH was driving down the road. Since there were horse campers in the park the ranger thought one might have been injured in a fall and so went to the horse campsite. He found nothing amiss and continued on patrol of the forest roads looking for a possible accident.

While driving out of the forest BH ran across two other hunters but neither of them knew how to open a leghold trap. Finally BH got to a place where there was cell reception and called the vet (Dr. Groves) at Eastbrook Animal Hospital. Despite it being a Sunday she promptly came out to the forest with an assistant. BH met them in Hampton and led them back to the culvert.

Meanwhile, because Freddy was lying still LH was able to study the trap. She tried several different methods of opening it unsuccessfully, suffering some bites, then discovered that by pressing two semi-circular tabs on either side of the trap simultaneously, it would open. Immediately upon being freed Freddy changed back into his normal self, but was shivering uncontrollably so LH moved him into the sun and covered him with her coat. At this point C left to find BH to tell him the dog was freed, but could not locate him.

Soon after C left, the patrolling warden came by the culvert in his truck and stopped. LH was down the embankment and due to the angle did not recognize the truck as an official DEP vehicle. The warden asked LH if everything was alright. She said that she no longer needed any help, thinking that since the dog was out of the trap and assistance was on the way there was nothing for the person to do. So the warden continued on patrol, still looking for a problem he believed he had not yet found.

When BH and the vet came to the culvert, the vet and her assistant gave Freddy a morphine shot and tended to his injuries. We then drove to the animal hospital, where Freddy received an IV and was X-rayed. He was found to have lacerations and soft-tissue damage but no broken bones. After he was settled in for observation and treatment we went to the emergency room. LH had 5 puncture wounds and BH had 10 and 4 lacerations that were bandaged (one required stitches). The medical bills for us and the dog came to over twenty-five hundred dollars.

The next day BH talked with the DEP wardens at the Natchaug State Forest and they were very sympathetic and angry at what had happened to us in their territory. BH went with one of the wardens to the culvert where they found that the leghold trap was still there. The trap was legal, as was its placement, it was in season, there was the required ID tag, and the trapper was licensed. The wardens verified that the trapper showed up to check his traps within the required 24-hour period. Consequently we saw no point in filing a complaint or deposition with the DEP even though urged to do so by the wardens, since we felt that nothing could be done because the trapper had followed the law and was within his legal rights, and the DEP wardens had acted in an exemplary manner.

This then is a detailed account for the record of what happened to us on a fall morning, walking with the dog in the Natchaug Forest. We have not been back there since that time because we feel it is too dangerous for the dog. We urge the enactment of this bill to make it safer for walkers, riders, skiers, bicyclists, hunters, all of whom recreate in Connecticut State Forests with their dogs.

If anyone were to come to the conclusion that this incident is a trivial matter, of interest only to a few dog owners, we urge that everywhere you see the word "dog" in this account you substitute in its place the word "child." When you do this you cannot help but realize the risk of an even more serious incident with all its attendant consequences if the legislature fails to enact this Bill and ban leghold traps in the state.

Sincerely yours.

Laurie Hiestand