



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

Bill: HB 579 to repeal prohibitions on snare traps
Committee: House Environment and Transportation
Position: Oppose
Date: February 10, 2021

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. On behalf of our Maryland members and supporters, the Humane Society of the United States opposes House Bill 579, which repeals a prohibition against possessing a snare trap in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties, and repeals a prohibition against using, selling, possessing, setting, placing, or maintaining a snare trap in Cecil County.

A snare trap, also referred to as a cable restraint, is a loop of wire, stranded wire, or wire rope that is designed to ensnare an animal by the neck or leg. These devices should remain prohibited in the above Maryland counties for the following reasons:

Snare traps are inhumane and cause immense suffering

Snares cut into an animal's skin and can become deeply embedded, causing lacerations and tissue damage, and result in pain, injury, and even death. Animals captured in snares are known to frantically chew on the cable and on their own limbs in an attempt to free themselves, breaking teeth, bloodying gums, and causing self-injury. They can also die by strangulation as they struggle against the tightening wire, often causing grotesque swelling and hemorrhaging of the head.¹ Snared animals may be hanged to death if they jump over a fence or branch in an attempt to escape, or can sustain joint dislocation, severed tendons, and other internal injuries as they fight against the snare. They may also struggle to near-asphyxiation, then briefly recover, then struggle again, repeating this horrific cycle for many hours until they die or the trapper returns to bludgeon or shoot them to death. And target and non-target animals alike caught in snares that are not monitored may die from exposure, dehydration, or starvation.²

Canadian trappers and wildlife agencies conducted a highly-controlled snaring study that required that the traps be checked twice daily, with a small sample size of 17 coyotes. The study found, "The most common injuries sustained included subcutaneous edema and hemorrhage around the head and neck and minor cutaneous lacerations. One of the Coyotes that showed indicators of poor welfare had one digit amputated, major laceration on the footpad, fractured bone fragments in the foot likely caused by self-mutilation in addition to a missing incisor tooth that may have been lost while the animal was biting the restraint. A second Coyote exhibited a hemorrhage of the mucosal lining of the stomach."³ These types of injuries were documented under the best of circumstances and using the strictest of protocols, when the snare traps were checked two times a day. However, Maryland requires that traps be checked

¹ Papouchis, C.M. (2004). A critical review of trap research. In Fox, C.H. and Papouchis, C.M. (eds) *Cull of the Wild. A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States*. Animal Protection Institute. Sacramento, California pp 41-55. Bang Publishing: Brainerd, Minnesota, USA.

² Proulx, G., Rodtka, D., Barrett, M. W., Cattet, M., Dekker, D., Moffatt, E., & Powell, R. A. (2015). Humaneness and selectivity of killing neck snares used to capture canids in Canada: A review. *Canadian Wildlife Biology & Management*, 4(1), 55-65.

³ Garvey, M.E. and Patterson, B.R.: "Evaluation of Cable Restraints to Live-capture Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) in Southern Ontario, Canada." *Canadian Wildlife Biology & Management*, 2014: Volume 3, Number 1 <http://cwbm.name/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/3-Vol-3-Issue-1-Garvey-and-Patterson.pdf>

only once a day, so even more animal suffering and injuries could result if snares were made legal in those counties.

Even if snares capture animals alive, there are no laws or regulations to ensure that those captured animals are killed humanely. Various forms of killing may be used, including clubbing, drowning, or strangulation, ignoring recommendations of the American Veterinary Medical Association. The trauma and injury scales used to develop best management practices for trappers do not provide guidelines on how animals, once caught, should be killed.⁴

Animals who are released or escape from a snaring cable restraint may later die from their injuries or suffer from their reduced ability to forage for food. For example, a 2019 study found that “...wolves captured with cable restraints suffered more injury to their mouth, but these would not hinder movement, although they could influence predation and feeding.”⁵ In 2018, a federally protected gray wolf with a snare wrapped around his muzzle was euthanized by authorities near Duluth, Minnesota. An eyewitness observed that the wire snare “...was wrapped tight around its nose, and embedded into the nose. It clearly could not open its mouth at all. It was very thin.” A local wildlife rehabilitation center added, “He might have been able to lick up some snow and sniff roadkill, but he had not been able to eat. He had been starving, and was a skeleton of fur and bones.”⁶

Snares are indiscriminate and capture “non-target” animals, including pets and protected species

It is unclear how many non-target animals suffer or die in traps in the U.S., because trappers are not always required to report these captures. However, in field studies, snares have caught non-target wildlife, including deer, and domestic dogs.⁷ Snares are silent killers; a dog who is hiking or hunting with his owner could become ensnared and quickly be choked to the point that he cannot vocalize. When dogs are captured in traps that clamp to other parts of their body, their owners can hear them bark, yelp or cry in pain and are able to rescue them. But tragically, dogs captured in snares may just hunker down and pass out before slowly and quietly suffocating.

Snares also trap protected species, like golden eagles and bald eagles.⁸ Former USDA Wildlife Services trapper Gary Strader states, “The problem is, eagles eat until they can eat no more. Then they have to get in the air, but it takes a long runway for them to get off the ground. They start running down the trail you set your snares on (and) end up getting caught and killed.”⁹

Many factors determine if a snare restrains an animal or causes major injuries and even death, including whether the snare functions properly and if the “right” animal will be ensnared by the “right” part of his or her body. For example, a snare may be set for a coyote and intended to restrain the animal by the neck or limb. But if a smaller animal such as a fox or a raccoon enters the snare, that smaller animal may be caught by the spine or abdomen as they pass further through the loop before it fully closes, causing

⁴ Rochlitz, I. (2010). The impact of snares on animal welfare. In OneKind Report on Snaring. Cambridge University Animal Welfare Information Service: Cambridge, UK.

https://onekind.org/uploads/publications/onekind_report_on_snaring_chapter_1.pdf

⁵ Gese, E. M., Terletzky, P. A., Erb, J. D., Fuller, K. C., Grabarkewitz, J. P., Hart, J. P., Humpal, C., Sampson, B. A. and Young, J. K. (2019), Injury scores and spatial responses of wolves following capture: Cable restraints versus foothold traps. *Wildl. Soc. Bull.*, 43: 42-52. doi:10.1002/wsb.954

Jones, D.M. and Rodriguez, S.H. (2003): “Restricting the use of animal traps in the United States: An overview of laws and strategy.” https://www.animallaw.info/sites/default/files/lralvol9_p136.pdf

⁶ John Myers: “Wolf, entangled in snare, shot in Duluth.” *The Duluth News Tribune*, February 12, 2018.

www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/science-and-nature/4402542-wolf-entangled-snare-shot-duluth

⁷ Papouchis, *supra* note 1.

⁸ Kidston, Martin: “3 golden eagles caught in snare traps in Montana; 2 die.” *Missoulian*, January 29, 2013 at

https://missoulian.com/news/state-and-regional/golden-eagles-caught-in-snare-traps-in-montana-die/article_09d14c2e-69ad-11e2-a5a2-001a4bcf887a.html.

Rodrigues, Jenny: “B.C. photographer captures rescue of bald eagle trapped in snare.” Global News, February 2, 2017 at <https://globalnews.ca/news/3223397/b-c-photographer-captures-rescue-of-bald-eagle-trapped-in-snare/>.

⁹ Knudson, Tom: “Neck snare is a ‘non-forgiving and nonselective’ killer, former trapper says.” The Sacramento Bee, April 30, 2012 at <https://www.sacbee.com/news/investigations/wildlife-investigation/article2574607.html>.

prolonged, severe suffering, deep lacerations, internal organ damage, and even death. In one study performed on red foxes, an average of 35% of captures were around the body rather than the neck.¹⁰

Additionally, a cable loop that has fallen will not catch the target animal, but may catch a nontarget animal.¹¹ A device that is set 10 inches off the ground to catch a coyote, but dropped a few inches due to the weather (wind, snow, etc.), will now ensnare non-targeted animals like foxes or bobcats—and likely by the abdomen or another non-target part of the body.

Snares and other traps do not control the spread of disease

Scientific, veterinary, and public health entities, including the Centers for Disease Control, the National Academy of Sciences, and the World Health Organization, have found no evidence that trapping reduces incidences of rabies or other diseases. The National Academy of Sciences subcommittee on rabies concluded: “Persistent trapping or poisoning campaigns, as a means to control rabies, should be abolished. There is no evidence that these costly and politically attractive programs reduce either wildlife reservoirs or rabies incidence. The money can be better spent on research, vaccination, and compensation to stockmen for losses, and education and warning systems.”¹²

Research has found that trapping may actually *exacerbate* the spread of disease.¹³ By removing mature, immune animals, trappers reduce competition for habitat and make room for newcomers who may not be immune or may even be carriers of disease. And animals infected with rabies do not eat in the latter stages of the disease and thus do not respond to baited traps—so those traps will more often capture healthy animals rather than infected animals.

There is a high probability of mass saturation of snare traps on landscapes

Cheap, lightweight, easy to make, and set in large numbers, snares are inconspicuous “land mines” that may be abandoned on the landscape and can imperil any animal crossing their path, including deer. The Missouri Department of Conservation acknowledges the potential for trappers to set the devices and fail to retrieve them, stating, “Some trappers do not accurately record all set locations, or they feel that the cable restraints are so inexpensive that they do not need to retrieve every one of them. Restraints may remain active for a long time after the trapper quits checking them. Animals can be captured in them days or weeks after the trapper has left, and all trappers reputations are damaged by these actions.”¹⁴

“Best Management Practices” established for trappers are inadequate and seldom followed

To assuage concerns about the inhumane and nonselective nature of snares and other devices, trapping proponents, including state wildlife management agencies, often refer to the Best Management Practices (BMPs) developed by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA).¹⁵ Analysts have found, however, that the trauma and injury scales used to develop the BMPs allow for an unacceptable level of harm to wildlife and do not effectively consider unintended victims of traps.¹⁶

Moreover, BMPs are relatively unknown among the trapping community and are rarely followed by trappers. A 2015 report by the AFWA found that only 42 percent of trappers had heard of the BMPs. Of those 42 percent, only 66 percent currently use and plan to continue using the BMPs when they trap.

¹⁰ Muñoz-Igualada J, Shivik JA, Domínguez FG, González LM, Moreno AA, Olalla MF & García CA (2010) Traditional and new cable restraint systems to capture fox in central Spain. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 74: 181-187

¹¹ North Dakota Game and Fish: Using Cable Devices in North Dakota Responsible Use.

¹² “Control of Rabies,” National Research Council, Subcommittee on Rabies, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C., 1973.

¹³ Choisy M. and P. Rohani. 2006. Harvesting can increase severity of wildlife disease epidemics. *Proc Biol Sci.* 2006 Aug 22; 273(1597): 2025–2034. Published online 2006 May 23. doi: [10.1098/rspb.2006.3554](https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2006.3554); “Controlling Wildlife Rabies through Population Reduction: An Ineffective Method,” *The Rabies Monitor*, Vol. 4, No.1, Spring 1996.

¹⁴ Missouri Trappers Association and the Missouri Department of Conservation: “Missouri Cable Restraint Training Manual.” Revised March 2007 at https://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/sites/default/files/downloads/4157_6377.pdf.

¹⁵ The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (2006). Best Management Practices for Trapping in the United States: Introduction. https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/3515/1862/6191/Introduction_BMPs.pdf

¹⁶ Rochlitz, *supra* note 4.

That means that only 28 percent of all trappers are following the only, and insufficient, guidelines that the trapping industry has established to address animal welfare concerns.¹⁷ This does not inspire much confidence that snares, if allowed, would be used appropriately.

Protect Maryland's wildlife and pets: Please reject HB 579

Maryland should not repeal its prohibition on the use of snares in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, Montgomery, Prince George's, and Cecil Counties. Doing so will lead to targeted and non-targeted animals, including pets, eagles, deer, and other species, suffering and dying in these inhumane and indiscriminate devices. We therefore ask that you reject HB 579. Thank you.

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¹⁷ The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. (2015). Trap use, furbearers trapped, and trapper characteristics in the United States in 2015. Available at http://www.fishwildlife.org/files/AFWA_Trap_Use_Report_2015_ed_2016_02_29.pdf.