



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

Bill: HB 579 to repeal prohibitions on snare traps  
Committee: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs  
Position: Oppose  
Date: March 31, 2021

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. On behalf of our members and supporters in Cecil County and across Maryland, the Humane Society of the United States opposes House Bill 579, which repeals a prohibition against using, selling, possessing, setting, placing, or maintaining a snare trap in Cecil County.

Cecil County is home to amazing public lands such as Fair Hill and Susquehanna State Park, which are enjoyed by all Marylanders. Cecil County residents and visitors from across Maryland and outside our state should not have to worry about snare traps that can kill dogs and injure children who inadvertently cross out of the park onto surrounding private lands.

### **Snare traps are inhumane and cause immense suffering**

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. 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, referred to by trappers as "jelly head."<sup>1</sup>



A puppy's neck wound from a snare trap, shown after one week of healing.

Photo courtesy of Footloose Montana

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup>



A dog with a snare wrapped around the waist, shared by Texas-based Bastrop Animal Rescue, Inc. Photo courtesy of Wyoming Untrapped

### Snares are “silent killers” that also capture 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 them. However, in field studies, snares have caught non-target wildlife, including deer, and domestic dogs.<sup>6</sup> In 2013 a 12-year-old New Jersey dog was strangled to death by a snare set a few feet off of a walking path, and in recent years dogs have suffered a similar fate in Idaho, Wyoming, New Mexico, Iowa, Florida, and other states. In 2020 a hunting dog captured in a snare in southern Indiana had to be euthanized because of gruesome and debilitating injuries.<sup>7</sup>

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.

<sup>3</sup> 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](https://onekind.org/uploads/publications/onekind_report_on_snaring_chapter_1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> 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](https://www.animallaw.info/sites/default/files/lralvol9_p136.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> 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](http://www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/science-and-nature/4402542-wolf-entangled-snare-shot-duluth)

<sup>6</sup> Papouchis, *supra* note 1.

<sup>7</sup> Maher, Savannah: “Snaring Death Of Family Dog Raises Questions About Trapping On Public Lands.” Wyoming Public Media, Feb. 3, 2020; “Pet dog strangled in bobcat snare during family outing in SV.” *Buckrail*, Jan. 17, 2018; Ridenour, Shelley: “Owners of dog killed in trap recommend caution.” *Challis Messenger*, Mar. 11, 2020; “Proposed snare trap-ban legislation named for dog who died.” *Ruidoso News*, Jan. 9, 2019; Hardaway, Liz: “Traps set for coyotes snare dogs instead; two die.” *Venice Gondolier*, Aug. 22, 2018; Davis, Phil: “Hunting snare kills Woolwich family dog at Locke Avenue Park.” *South Jersey Times*, Feb. 7, 2013; Strandberg, Sarah: “Traps can kill pets; Calmar woman’s beloved dog Skylar dies in her arms.” *Driftless Journal*, Dec. 4, 2012. Whaley, Grace: “Dog passes away after injured by possible snare trap.” *TriState Homepage*, Feb 18, 2020.

Snares also trap protected species, like golden eagles and bald eagles.<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup>



A dog suffered this wound from a snare wrapped around his abdomen.

Photo courtesy of Trap Free Montana

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 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.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, a cable loop that has fallen will not catch the target animal but may catch a nontarget animal.<sup>11</sup> 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.”<sup>12</sup>

Research has found that trapping may actually *exacerbate* the spread of disease.<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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](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/>.

<sup>9</sup> 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>.

<sup>10</sup> 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

<sup>11</sup> North Dakota Game and Fish: Using Cable Devices in North Dakota Responsible Use.

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

<sup>13</sup> 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.

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

Cheap, lightweight, and 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.”<sup>14</sup>

## “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).<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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. 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.<sup>17</sup> This does not inspire much confidence that snares, if allowed, would be used appropriately.

## Tools already exist to prevent conflicts with coyotes

The use of snares is not an effective strategy to protect people, pets, or livestock from conflicts with coyotes. We recommend that landowners and ranchers consult with experts about using non-lethal property and livestock protection methods including fencing, guard animals, birthing sheds, and noise and light devices that deter carnivores. If those methods are ineffective, though, Cecil County livestock owners can lethally remove problem coyotes from their property at any time, and can engage the services of licensed wildlife damage control operators when necessary. But randomly setting cruel and indiscriminate snare traps in the area will not mitigate conflicts or reduce coyote numbers, and will serve only to endanger Cecil County’s pets and non-target wildlife who come across them.

## Protect Cecil County’s wildlife and pets: Please reject HB 579

Maryland should look at what states such as New Mexico are doing and be discussing legislation aimed at limiting the use of snare traps in the state, not expanding their use to additional counties. Legalizing the use of snare traps in Cecil County will impact public resources and public lands that are held in trust to all Marylanders, and 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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<sup>14</sup> 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](https://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/sites/default/files/downloads/4157_6377.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> 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](https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/3515/1862/6191/Introduction_BMPs.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Rochlitz, *supra* note 4.

<sup>17</sup> 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](http://www.fishwildlife.org/files/AFWA_Trap_Use_Report_2015_ed_2016_02_29.pdf).