

My name is Michael Koeppen. I have lived in the Missoula area for 39 years and currently reside in Florence, just south of Missoula in the Bitterroot Valley.

I am speaking in support of HB 603. Over the years, I have had many encounters with leg hold traps, snares, and a conibear trap. I have always been an avid hiker and have always had dogs for my hiking companions. I usually hike in Montana's wilderness areas. When I'm hiking, my dogs are close to me and not off running.

The traps I have encountered were set in the trail or a few paces off to the side. In Montana, leg hold traps and snares can legally be set in the trail tread, and the conibear, which is designed to kill quickly, must be set 30 feet off a trail. 30 feet is not much when hiking with a dog. Obviously, an educated and intelligent trapper would not place traps on commonly used trails, and yet that has been my experience. I believe that mandatory education and licensing for all trappers, in conjunction with larger setbacks for all types of traps, will improve this situation.

I had a dog caught in a conibear trap set next to one of the most commonly used trails in the Bitterroot Mountains west of my home. This type of trap is especially difficult to remove in time to save a pet's life. I was fortunate to be able to save my dog through luck. I was able to compress the two springs, but had no third hand to pull the dog out. A small hook designed to hold the spring while the trap was being set, caught accidentally, allowing me to pull "Jack" free. For the rest of Jack's life, my wife and I called him "Trapper Jack", but the experience still haunts me to this day.

Once, on a backpack trip, another dog and I walked into five leg hold traps set on a trail blasted out of a cliff. First the dog

put her foot in one, and when I crouched down to look at the trap, I inadvertently placed my hand into another trap covered with duff, and trapped myself.

I've found snares set right across USFS trails, clearly a hazard to dogs on the trail, and yet legally placed there.

I talked to a warden about these incidents, and his reply was that putting traps on trails or close to them, were the actions of poorly educated, irresponsible trappers that didn't know what they were doing, but yet were legal.

I believe that HB 603 will help reduce the increasing conflicts between trappers and other users of the outdoors, and I urge you to pass it.

Thank you.

**Michael Koeppen
300 Bullrun Road
Florence, MT 59833
273-2383**