

EXHIBIT 18  
DATE 2-17-05  
HB 603

Regarding HB603  
Feb. 15, 2005

Dear Committee Member,

I am writing in qualified support of HB603. I am acquainted with the tale of destruction told recently in the *Missoulian* about the Victor couple whose lost dog was shot by a duplicitous and ill-informed trapper. Unfortunately, though recent, it is not even the last in a string of such tales in the Bitterroot Valley. I am pleased to see the legislature address this growing problem as a rapidly expanding, recreationalist population front-ends a practice most Montanans wouldn't encounter except in history books. Trappers lay all responsibility at the feet of owners who are supposed to control their dogs, meanwhile taking no responsibility for their meat-baited traps luring dogs that would otherwise not be drawn away.

Having been on the receiving end of much ignorance about animal-rights principles, last Saturday I attended the class put on by the Montana Trappers Association on the Missoula FWP grounds for the purpose of becoming educated about trappers and their concerns. I will readily admit that most of those trappers didn't exhibit the callous indifference to domestic pets of the trapper who shot the Victor dog; however, I was struck by their article of faith that the animals they trap are actually "comfortable". This is their euphemism to describe how an animal might feel up for up to four days caught in a leg hold trap while lying exposed to other predators and scavengers, unable to defend itself, eat, or drink, with a foot held tight enough to break bone. The trappers talked about how domestic pets can be so crazed by the pain that they bite at their own masters, giving the lie to the "comfort" theory of leg hold traps, despite one trapper's statement that the leg hold trap was "the same as a leash or tether on a dog".

A coyote trap was passed around the room, eventually reaching my spot in the back row of the class. I unobtrusively set it on the floor, spread the supposedly kinder-and-gentler laminated, offset jaws, then let them *gently* close on three of my fingers—I couldn't will myself to experience the bone-cracking **snap**--to the audible gasps from the instructors who were seated behind me and one's incredulous remark that I should *not* do that!

A video--the public face of trapping the MTA screens for schoolkids--was playing, with an upbeat female voice narrating the story of cute canids trapped in leg hold traps and released to run away unharmed. The video created a vision of these critters patiently awaiting the human presence while relating none of the tales of "wring-off" told in class. "Wring-off" is the unintended consequence in which an animal's bones are shattered by the trap, after which the animal pivots around the remaining flesh and can literally twist its foot off. One young trapper was perplexed at how some of his muskrat catches would just sit there until he approached, but then become frantic and rip off a limb in order to escape. The kid just shook his head and said, "Then all you got left is a foot!"

This is comfort? The video also failed to include the extermination of the animal and the blood and guts involved, not to mention disposal of the carcass. It failed to mention

catching non-target animals or--apparently this is a problem during hunting season--hunters incongruously blasting away at the trapper's catch, ruining the pelt anyway. I heard "Hunters and trappers don't mix." (I would love to hear the back-story on that.)

I was able to stand the pressure from the jaws for approximately 5 seconds. I then removed the trap jaws by releasing them as I'd fixed them after realizing that I could not withdraw my hand without pulling my skin off. I noted the period of time it took for the double purple lines to fade: after two hours later they'd almost disappeared. It staggers the imagination to conceive that an animal caught in such a trap is experiencing anything remotely close to comfort, and I would challenge any trapper or committee member to wear a coyote trap for four minutes, let alone four days, to prove the point otherwise.

Conibear traps, a type of trap that grips an animal's head or body until it suffocates, were a topic of debate, but not only because one was responsible for the death of a dog a couple years ago in the Bitterroot, whose owner tried valiantly for an hour to free it from the complicated trap which requires special tools and more than passing familiarity to spring. In one of the session's many ironies, one of the instructors allowed as how he would like to see conibears made illegal as land sets, with his conversion having come apparently after having gotten his own hand accidentally caught in one. He said he would likely not be around to tell about it had his wife not been present to free him.

I heard a great deal about ethics in the class, mostly in regard to making sure one didn't leave a dead animal too long in a stream for fear of incurring 'slippage' of the pelt hair, nor long enough for raptors to get at the pelt, and that one must always ask the landowner's permission and count one's snares. One heard repeatedly not to use snares near livestock...then several stories were told about the gangrenous destruction of snared livestock. One man told how he would no longer trap near an access which the public habitually used across private ground due to the fact his traps had caught so many dogs, and because their owners wouldn't return his traps, which cost him money. One man observed that a 24-hour check on traps was ridiculous "with gas at \$2 a gallon and [his] traps 80 miles away and coyote pelts worth only \$34".

I learned of large dogs remaining caught in traps whose breakaway limit should have been easily exceeded by the animal. I heard that "a 100# S-hook releases 9 out of 10 deer" which means that 'only' 10% of snared deer would likely lose their leg. The kid mentioned catching hundreds of fish in his underwater conibear traps. I heard about appropriate harvest numbers, but after a mention of how beaver were trapped out in the 1880's when prices were high, then returned, only to be trapped out again a hundred years later for the same reason. I heard that beaver prices and skins are good again.

I learned that one shouldn't set traps where the public might actually see a trapped animal. Call me cynical, but the talk of ethics seemed to be more concerned with flying under the radar of public detection of the cost of the blood sport of trapping, and with maximizing what seem to be the rather meager profits by most trappers. In my weighted but informed opinion, any welfare concerns for animals, target or non-target, were secondary to their bottom line.

This bottom line is going to be important in this debate. I was shocked when I read the FWP Trapping Regulations and saw the paltry amounts that trappers pay for a license to profit from a *public* resource, especially in light of the damage they can do. I was appalled that merely declaring oneself hunting for predators will get a trapper off almost any hook. I am at a loss to see why even a class such as the one I attended voluntarily, taught *by* trappers *for* trappers with no dissenting facts or opinions presented, is beyond the scope of state government to require antecedent to issuing that floppy license. I am angry that an unethical trapper can murder and dissimulate with impunity while law enforcement claims no jurisdiction and the judiciary yawns.

I was raised in some of the wilder parts of this state, in a log cabin with no electricity. I grew up on an Arab mare chasing cows with my dad on the East Side. I passed 49 years in this remnant of the Wild West watching roads widen and ranches narrow. We are no longer islands in a sea of plenty, but necessarily live in proximity and must attend to the conflicts that arise. Here is a chance to deal--albeit partially--with that conflict before someone steps 30 feet off-trail to relieve herself, reaches for some snow to clean up with, and winds up tethered to a conibear trap.

A 24-hour trap check wouldn't be too much to ask a trapper to accomplish, if ethics are truly a variable in balancing trapper and non-trapper rights. In consonance with the trapper's interest in asking the landowner's permission, it also certainly shouldn't be too much to ask that prospective trappers attend a class for a refresher on the proper way to comport oneself at the interface with civilization. We are landowners, too, of the public lands as well as our properties, and so require that minimum standards be met to protect our pets, our persons, and the fauna we seek to harvest with our eyes.

Please, pass this bill, with the single change that a 24-hour trap check be required instead of 48 hours, in order to mitigate animal suffering.

Sincerely,

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