

Idaho rules on trapping aren't enough for safety

Lindsey Treffry/Moscow-Pullman Daily News editorial board

Idaho's Fish and Game commissioners sided with trappers last week when they rejected restricting the use of conibear traps, despite the snares killing two dogs in northern Idaho last winter.

A commissioner from Challis, Idaho, said he wonders why the state would change trapping rules based on an isolated incident or two. But are the incidents so isolated?

Former federal trapper Dick Randall said his records show for each target animal he trapped, about two unwanted individuals were caught. Because of their injuries, he added, the non-targeted animals had to be killed. While these animals may not be family pets, they still are unnecessary deaths.

The Fur Takers of America Inc. claim one of the best ways to control and prevent disease outbreaks is through controlled trapping of animals. Plus, it says trapping helps with overpopulation. But how do trappers know which animals they are targeting? Just as Randall found, a trap could take the life of a healthy, mature, endangered animal while leaving a young, disease-ridden one in the forest.

Officials fear restricting trappers would constrict the economy. Fur costs are on the rise; so too are the number of traps. However, surveys show most trappers trap for sport and a little extra income. A 1997 Associated Professionals Inc. survey of state wildlife agencies showed income from trapping was either extremely low or non-existent.

Commissioners apparently feel safety is served with Idaho's few regulations, like requiring traps to be 5 feet from the center of a trail to keep them "far" from pets and their owners. That's a frightening idea, though, for those who stroll their canines on 5-foot or longer leashes, or who bring their well-behaved pets leash-free into the forest.

It seems more logical and economical to encourage the use of faux fur for rug, furniture and clothing needs. It's more durable, can be made weather resistant, costs less and sometimes feels and looks better. But if that's too extreme for consumers - or trappers who enjoy killing for the fun of it - let's at least put regulations on the traps and require signs be posted to warn all who enjoy the outdoors of the dangers lurking just a few feet away.