

Testimony and experience running dogs during trapping season

I am writing this RC because I am unable to testify in person due to military obligations keeping me at Fort Wainwright.

This Proposal is in regards to all proposals advocating for restrictions to trapping and trap setbacks. I will preface this by saying that I have never trapped in the state of Alaska and do not plan to any time in the near future. I do run dogs all winter long on and off trail while hunting ptarmigan, grouse and snowshoe hare.

Conflicts between trappers and the public are most often times caused by pet owners not actually having control or paying attention to their animals. They also do not pay attention to tell-tale signs of a trap line in an area. Rather than accept responsibility, educate themselves and control their dogs, most pet owners would rather put restrictions on another user group in order to create a false sense of security. It is an emotional response. I would also like to ask, where is the data showing that trap setbacks work and what is the actual number of pets per year caught by trappers?

I have heard it said that even the most trained dogs cannot avoid a baited set. That is absolutely false. I own one of the most driven hunting breeds in the world and I train them to avoid traps. Trappers in the northwest states use trap line dogs and also teach them to stay out of sets. The reality is, people don't want to put in the work to train their dogs.

I can't tell you how many people I run into while hunting who are skiing, hiking or snowshoeing with their dogs. Most of the time, their dogs come rushing up to me and my dogs despite the weak commands of their owners. I can blow a whistle and my dogs instantly lay down flat wherever they are. That is control and most pet owners don't have it.

I have helped with classes meant to educate the public on how to avoid traps with their dogs and how to extract them if need be. I also help teach dog training classes.

If people really wanted to protect their pets, they should take responsibility, train their dogs and educate themselves on trapping. This would work far better than any trap setbacks.

I do not want the majority of pet owners to represent the few of us who actually have control of our dogs. I also don't want to have to comply with some future leash law because of incompetent people who refuse to train their dogs before running them in the winter.

Sincerely,

Mike Harris