



Carson Mansfield took this photo of his dog, Bella, as evidence after she was killed by a conibear trap on Feb. 14. (courtesy photo)
| Buy Journal Photos



Bella, a registered Beagle, was killed by a hunting trap at 20 months old. (courtesy photo)



Mansfield holds Bella in his lap in his car in early February. During a Valentine's Day hunting trip, Bella came upon a trap and was killed. (courtesy photo)

Additional Stories:

Dog caught by trap, dies

3/13/2009

By TIM UNRUH, Salina Journal

Carson Mansfield was in a choice place on Valentine's Day, hunting rabbits near Kanopolis Lake, when he heard his dog yelp.

"At first, I thought she was in a fight," Mansfield said.

Bella, his registered 20-month-old beagle, was caught in the rectangular steel jaws of a conibear trap.

Mansfield, a deputy Salina police chief, began a frantic struggle to free his four-footed friend.

"I had read how to get them off. I'm afraid all my efforts did was prolong the agony of her death," he said. "It was incredibly devastating."

Bella became weaker, and then fell unconscious. Within six minutes, she was gone.

The trap, which is designed to kill small animals that are harvested for their fur, was set in a plastic bucket to entice the curiosity of a raccoon, coyote or bobcat.

When an animal sticks its head in the bucket, the trap is tripped, he said. On Feb. 14, it was Bella, curious as she patrolled for rabbits, who was captured by the powerful jaws.

Mansfield blamed himself, at first.

"She trusted me to get her out of that trap. She kept waiting," he said.

Then came the anger over such a deadly trap being allowed on public land, where hunters often stalk game with dogs.

They're perfectly legal

Before he put Bella's body, with the trap still attached, over his shoulder for the two-hour hike back to his car, the cop in Mansfield kicked in. He snapped several "evidence" photos of Bella ensnared in the trap. It happened just south of Thompson Creek on public hunting land owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"I thought, 'Whoever's responsible for this has got to be breaking the law,' " Mansfield said.

But conibear traps are perfectly legal during trapping seasons, he said.

Mansfield wants that changed, especially in places where people hike and hunt on public land -- sometimes with dogs.

After calling the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to lodge a complaint, Mansfield was invited to talk about the incident. Thursday, he appeared before the governor-appointed Wildlife and Parks Commission, which was meeting in Topeka, with two requests.

"I would like to get kill traps off of public hunting land," Mansfield said. "Conversely, I would like for everyone who comes to Kansas to use those lands to know they risk the agonizing death of their dogs."

He has added a hacksaw to his hunting gear.

"I don't know if it will help. The veterinarian said that even if I would have gotten Bella out of the trap, she would likely have never been the same or died anyway, because of the damage the trap did to her body," Mansfield said.

The state has rules about what animals can be hunted and when, as well as how many and what gender, Mansfield said. "But a conibear just kills whatever gets in it. When you check your traps, you just pitch whatever you didn't want to kill. It doesn't make any sense to me at all."

The trapping season for most species runs from Nov. 12 to Feb. 15, which overlaps the pheasant and quail seasons. The beaver trapping season is still open, said Capt. Mel Madorin, in the wildlife and parks law enforcement division office at Hays. Madorin was not at the meeting.

If traps are set properly and legally, there is normally not a problem, Madorin said.

He said the trap set near Kanopolis did not violate any rules or regulations.

In Mansfield's case, especially with Bella's size, "it didn't work well," Madorin said. "I would hate to have my dog killed in any way. I understand his feelings."

But right now, Madorin said, conibear traps are accepted for trapping game.

Mansfield wonders why the traps are allowed in public hunting areas.

"Far more hunters and hikers use that area than trappers, and hunters use dogs," he said.

While there was some debate at the meeting, Mansfield said the Wildlife and Parks commissioners "seemed receptive" to his requests.

"I really didn't think there would be a chance, but now maybe there is," Mansfield said. "It's such a no-brainer. I don't understand why it's not getting done."

Mansfield bought a new puppy in late February. Her name is Lilly.

n Reporter Tim Unruh can be reached at 822-1419 or by e-mail at tunruh@salina.com.