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2-legged dog becomes symbol of trapping flap



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Andre the two-legged dog was rescued last winter when a woman noticed the animal trailing blood across a country road.

The large, friendly mutt lost most of the lower half of his left legs after getting caught in an animal trap or snare.

Now, the black and brown canine has become a symbol in Alaska for what pet owners and animal lovers say is a gruesome and growing problem: pets accidentally caught in traps and snares meant for wild animals.

The problem, animal owners and advocates say, is increasing as more people move into and use areas of Alaska that were once wild.

But the problem is not new. Tension between dog owners and trappers has been percolating in Alaska for decades, said Cliff Judkins, chairman of the Alaska Board of Game.

"I don't know what the long-term answer is to it really. The Board of Game is caught in the middle between two groups," he said. "This thing has been going on for a long, long time."

Karen McNaught, of Palmer, nursed Andre back to health, although she initially didn't think he would make it.

"No one had seen a dog with two legs cut off like that," she said. "The bone was sticking out on both of them. It was horrible."

Now, Andre bounces around her back yard like a Pogo-Stick. When tired, he leans against the house or the fence. The plan is to fit him with artificial legs.

Merle Jean Muller's dog, Bo Diddley, was luckier. The 52-year-old woman's 100-pound mixed breed stepped on a trap about 10 feet off a trail near the fast-growing area of Palmer in December.

Muller got Bo Diddley out of the trap. She then took the trap, left the trapper a nasty note and reported the incident to the Alaska Board of Fish and Game. She also organized a letter-writing campaign.

"If it was up to me trapping would not be allowed," she said. "It has to be restricted from places where people recreate and live. That is a no-brainer to me."

What happened next shocked Muller. She was charged with stealing the trap, hindering lawful trapping and criminal mischief. The charges were later dropped.

"It was so outrageous," she said. "This was not about me taking an \$8 trap. This was about me saying 'Hey, this is not OK.'"

The Alaska Board of Game heard plenty of complaints from trappers last year after it approved restrictions requiring that traps and snares be placed 50 yards off trails and trailheads in Chugach State Park.

That move came after the game board approved trapping wolverines in the nearly half-million-acre state park near Anchorage. Warning signs about trapping are posted near trailheads and trails, but dogs are not required to be leashed in the park

Two dogs were caught in wolverine sets — the same as the number of wolverines, said Rick Sinnott, Anchorage area wildlife biologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. One of the dogs died.

The park is proposing that the board approve a 100-yard buffer on each side of designated trails and prohibit traps and snares within a half-mile of trailheads and developed facilities, said chief ranger Matt Wedeking.

"The restrictions are necessary to provide for public safety," he said.

The Alaska Trappers Association produced a video a few years ago to help educate the non-trapping public on how to recognize a trap line and release a dog if caught, said association president Randy Zarnke.

"There are irresponsible dog owners and there are irresponsible trappers," Zarnke said. "Dogs that are not under the control of a human, that is a violation right there. It is easy to criticize the trapper but the dog owner is at least partially at fault."

Zarnke said trappers and dog owners need to practice common sense.

The association doesn't want to see a statewide regulation restricting where traps and snares can be set, because that would only encourage the anti-trapping forces to push for more, Zarnke said.
