

Caution urged amid spate of trapped dogs

Dog trap tales

By Dylan J. Darling / *The Bulletin*

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At least a half-dozen dogs have been caught in traps around Central Oregon in the past 2½ months.

The reports to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Bend office represent a threefold increase in the number of dogs typically reported to have encountered a trap during trapping season, which runs from late November to early March. The office usually receives one or two reports each season, said Steven George, ODFW's district wildlife biologist in Bend.

Relatively warm winter weather, with low snow levels on public land around Central Oregon, could be the reason for the increase, George said. People and their dogs are covering land where traps are set.

"They are out wandering around more," George said.

The increase could also be a sign of the rough economy and high fuel costs, said Mark Prodzinski, an Oregon state trooper focused on fish and wildlife. Trappers may be putting their traps closer to town, and places where people roam with their dogs, to save gas.

Whatever the cause, both said dog owners should be prepared to free pets from traps.

What to carry

Along with a leash, which can be used to compress the springs of a trap, Byron Maas, a veterinarian at Bend Veterinary Clinic, said dog owners should carry wire cutters if out exploring public land in Central Oregon with their dogs. He said the cutters should be beefy enough to snip through the airplane-grade cable often used in snare traps.

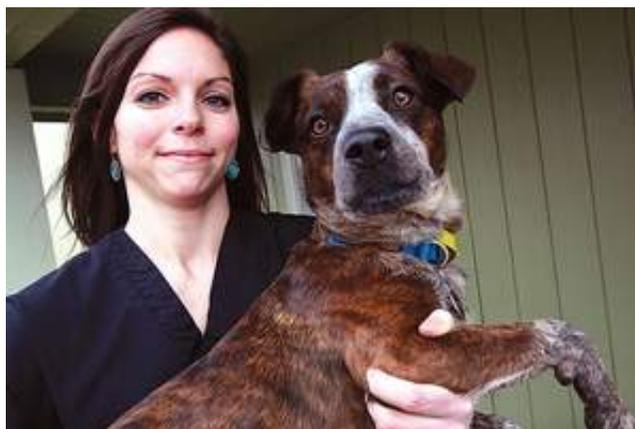
"I think those are the most dangerous," Maas said.

Snares constrict around an animal's neck or leg, cinching



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Veterinarian Lauren Stayer holds her dog Lucy, whom Stayer had to bring in to the Bend Veterinary Clinic for aid after she was caught in a trap.



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tighter as they struggle.

Having recently had a friend's dog become caught in a foot-hold trap during a horseback ride on Powell Buttes, Diana Levey, 71, of Bend, said she's now packing hammers, wrenches and a multi-tool in her saddle bag.

"I would take bolt cutters if I could carry them on my horse," she said.

If their dog does become caught in a trap, Maas said people should put a jacket or a blanket over the animal to calm it before attempting to free it from the trap.

"Usually the animals are going to be completely flipped out," he said. "They are going to be biting at everything, including the owners."

A veterinarian at Bend Veterinary Clinic, Lauren Stayer, 28, of Bend, recently had to help her dog Lucy after she was caught in a trap. Stayer said Lucy tried to bite her and her fianc e as they tried to free her. Unable to do so in the field, they brought the dog into Stayer's clinic, where she anesthetized L ucy and Maas removed the trap.

Stayer said she wants to keep walking her dog off leash.

"I still think it is important to get them out," she said.

But she said she will avoid going overland with Lucy.

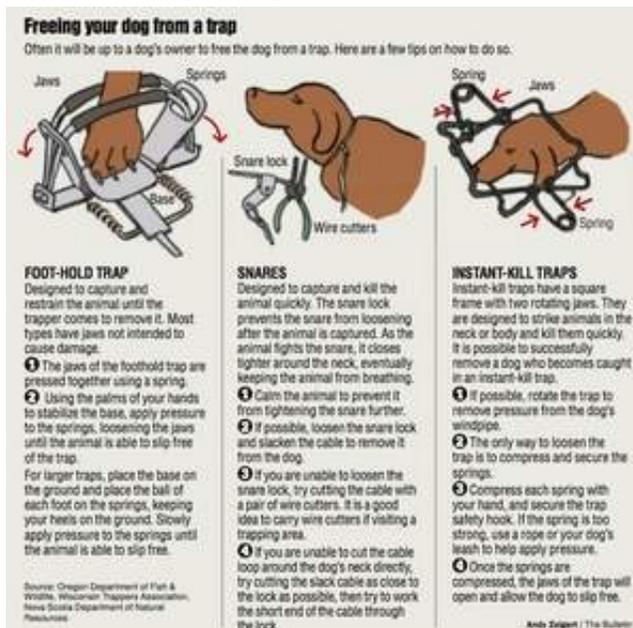
Dogs not the target

As much as dog owners don't want their pets caught in a trap, neither do the trappers, George said.

"Their goal is to catch their target animals," he said.

Those targets range from coyotes to bobcats to river otters to beavers, which George said trappers typically kill using a small-caliber handgun once the animals are caught in a trap if the trap itself isn't designed to kill them. Snare and instant-kill, or conibear, traps are designed to kill smaller animals. The animals are then processed into pelts, which are worth the most when made out of lush winter fur. A quality bobcat pelt can be worth \$400 or \$500, Prodzinski said.

"They can't make any money off their trap if a dog is in it," he said. "Once a trap is (sprung), they are no longer working for them."



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The trap that caught Lauren Stayer's dog Lucy.

Central Oregon is trapping country and winter is trapping season. And that can lead to dogs caught in traps.

Three accounts of recent dog encounters with traps on public land:

Lauren Stayer, 28,

Bend

Dog: Lucy, 2, heeler mix

Date: Feb. 4

Location: Near Tumalo

Trap type: Foot-hold

What happened: Stayer was searching for deer antlers with her fianc e. Unable to free Lucy from the trap, they carried her to their car in a dog crate before taking her to the clinic where Stayer works as a veterinarian. There, Stayer anesthetized Lucy and another veterinarian removed the trap.

Length of time in trap: Nearly two hours

Injury: Soft tissue damage

Diana Levey, 71, Bend

Dog: Shane, 3 or 4, Australian shepherd owned by a friend

Date: Feb. 1

There are 258 licensed trappers in Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties, said Michelle Dennehy, an ODFW spokeswoman in Salem. She said trappers typically put their traps away from areas where there will be people with dogs.

Along with the weather and economy, the experience level of trappers in Central Oregon could be changing this year, said George, the ODFW biologist. He said less-experienced trappers may put their traps on land close to where other people are recreating.

While most trappers avoid setting traps near trails, there are exceptions, Prodzinski said. Last year a new and ambitious trapper first set up a ring of snare traps near Haystack Reservoir, where he caught three dogs at once, and then near Culver, where he caught another three dogs at once.

“He’s not happy with me because I (kept) calling him up and saying ‘You’ve got to find better places,’” Prodzinski said. “Technically, he was abiding by the law, but he was not making any friends.”

No warning

There are no laws requiring trappers to avoid setting traps near trails or marking where their traps are located with flagging or signs, Prodzinski said.

“Trappers basically try to hide their traps from everybody,” he said. “... They don’t want people to steal them and they don’t want people to steal what’s in the trap.”

State regulations do require trappers to have a number on the trap so it can be tracked back to its owner, he said, and for trappers to check their traps set for furbearers, such as bobcats and beavers, every two days.

Having had his dog recently caught in a snare trap along the Metolious River, Jack Williamson, 56, of West Linn, said he’s looking into what it would take to make warnings about nearby traps mandatory.

“I believe the traps need to be flagged,” he said.

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Location: Powell Buttes

Trap type: Foot-hold

What happened: Levey and her friend were atop Powell Buttes, having ridden there on horseback. Shane became caught in a trap near the faint trail. Levey and her friend worked together to push on levers at the sides of the trap and open its jaws. They found a second trap nearby.

Length of time in trap: About seven minutes

Injury: Bruising to leg

Jack Williamson, West Linn

Dog: Kieri, 8, soft-coated wheaten terrier

Date: Feb. 11

Location: Metolious River near Wizard Falls Hatchery

Trap type: Snare

What happened: Williamson was heading back to his car from a bird-watching walk. Close to the hatchery, Kieri became ensnared in a trap set for river otters or beavers. The snare strangled her, knocking her unconscious. A hatchery worker freed her from the trap and after mouth-to-snout resuscitation Williamson was able to revive her.

Length of time in trap: Close to ten minutes

Injury: Pulmonary edema

— Dylan J. Darling