



Group files suit to block Minnesota trapping

by **Bob Kelleher**, Minnesota Public Radio
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An animal rights group has filed suit to stop Minnesota trappers from catching and often killing endangered species. The California-based Animal Protection Institute says it filed papers in federal court in Minneapolis.

Duluth, Minn. — The Animal Protection Institute says it's filed suit to force the State of Minnesota to abide by the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Traps set for predators are also killing endangered animals. According to the Institute's Camilla Fox, the animal advocacy non-profit first sent the DNR a notice of a potential lawsuit last spring.

"We filed a letter of intent to sue to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in April of this year," Fox says. "Our letter detailed our concerns regarding the illegal take of threatened and endangered species such as Canada lynx, bald eagles, grey wolves. And our letter asked them to make the necessary changes to protect these species."

However, Fox says, the DNR never replied. Fox says her group has accumulated documentation that at least 24 bald eagles have been trapped in Minnesota over a 15-year period. At least half died. She says more recent documents show that rare Canada lynx have been caught.

"Between 2002 and 2005, at least 13 Canada lynx have been incidentally trapped in snares and traps set for other species," says Fox. "And generally these types of traps are set for fox, coyote, bobcat, fisher, martin."

These are all predators, she says, that are found in the same areas where Canada lynx may live and hunt.

The suit asks for changes in Minnesota trapping rules. It doesn't specify how, but changes could include less lethal kinds of traps, or banning trapping where endangered species might get caught.

"They need to look at their trapping regulations, and look at what changes need to be made to ensure that lynx, bald eagles, grey wolves, are not trapped and harmed or killed in these devices," Fox says.

DNR wildlife biologist Mike DonCarlos says he hasn't seen the lawsuit, and would be unable to comment on it.

But Gary Meis is skeptical. Meis is president of the Minnesota Trappers Association. He says he's never seen an endangered species in a trap.

"I know of no cases myself," Meis says. "I hear rumors. But I have never seen it or witnessed it myself."

Meis wonders how serious a problem it can be if it's that rare. And he says trapping is not the way most endangered animals die.

"I could bet my bank account against theirs, that there's more endangered animals that are hit by cars, trains, etc., than are caught by traps," says Meis.

And Meis wonders whether the Animal Protection Institute's motive is to protect endangered

animals.

"Well, they have an agenda, just like all organizations have an agenda," Meis says. "It's my personal opinion that they'd just like to put an end to trapping. Their opinion is that they have a legal opening under the Endangered Species Act to go about doing that. And we disagree wholeheartedly."

This is the second lawsuit in the courts against Minnesota trapping. Earlier this year the wolf advocacy group Help Our Wolves Live, or HOWL, and the Humane Society of the United States filed suit against the DNR. That suit is based specifically on the threat to Canada lynx from Minnesota trapping. It also claims the state's trapping program is violating the Endangered Species Act.

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