

Traps get trashed at State House

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By Erin Prediger/Daily News Correspondent
GHS
Fri Sep 14, 2007, 12:12 AM EDT

BOSTON -

Holly, a 4-year-old pitbull mix, lounged on her back at the State House yesterday, begging for a belly rub. But the dog wasn't there simply for pleasure.

In December 2006, she was the unintended victim of a padded leghold trap in Barre. The trap crushed the bones and damaged the tendons and nerves in her front left leg, resulting in amputation.

Holly's injuries were cited yesterday at a press conference called to support a current law that restricts the use of body-gripping traps.

Advocates argue these type of traps are cruel and inhumane and prolong suffering for animals before they die. Supporters of the ban also say traps do not distinguish between targeted animals and innocent ones like Holly.

However, some hunters and trappers argue these traps are necessary to control wildlife populations. They claim the trap ban is the work of special interest groups.

"They need to leave wildlife management up to the professionals rather than animal rights activists," said Jim Wallace, the executive director of the Gun Owners Action League. "They have no background or experience to justify them getting into the wildlife realm. These people just don't want any trapping, period."

Wallace said one of the traps currently banned, the conibear trap, was designed in Canada for a humane society looking for a more-humane trap.

But opponents of trapping say there are other forms of wildlife management that are more effective.

"There are all kinds of alternatives that work that are nonlethal, humane, and long term," said Stephanie Hagopian, the state program manager of Massachusetts and Rhode Island for the Humane Society of the United States. "Removing them by hunting and trapping is a short-term solution at best."

Advocates say many wild animals, such as coyotes, are territorial. If one animal is removed it is simply an invitation to another to move into the territory.

"You're basically putting up a 'for rent' sign," said Scott Giacoppo, the deputy director of advocacy for the

Massachusetts Society for the Protection of Animals.

Hagopian said ending the trapping restrictions would only give sportsman more opportunities to hunt and kill animals rather than create a solution to conflicts between local residents and wildlife.

“The laws are already moderate and comprehensive,” said Hagopian.

The issue will be discussed at a Monday hearing before the joint committee on Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment in Spencer.