



Free Press Viewpoint

Take deadly traps off our public land

Mike Hayden, secretary
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Dear Mr. Secretary,
I am writing to ask you to correct an injustice, to right a wrong, to help preserve the future of our threatened outdoor sports.

I am asking you, please, Mr. Secretary, to get behind reform of the regulations on trapping on public lands.

It's a travesty, sir, that trappers are allowed to leave deadly kill traps on public land in violation of department regulations and the law. It's a travesty that even one hunter's dog should die a cruel death in such a trap.

First and foremost, if it remains legal to use conibear-type traps on public hunting lands, the regulations must require the trapper to post signs warning hunters, hikers and others about the hazard.

We should be told these traps are present so we can keep dogs and, yes, children away.

In the last couple of years, two hunting dogs have died in apparently untagged traps around Kanopolis Reservoir. Do we have to wait for more tragedies to change things? For, perhaps, a child to be injured?

First, enforcement of existing laws would help. The traps involved apparently were not tagged, as required by law, with the owner's name and address. Why were they in place in a public hunting area?

While recognizing the rights and benefits of trappers, as with any outdoor sport, shouldn't we expect them to follow the law and to respect the safety of others? Who stands to suffer more from this activity than legitimate trappers?

As our outdoor sports come under increasing pressure, don't we need all the friends we can get? Can we afford the page-one image of dead dogs in traps?

This nation loves its dogs, after all.

As a lifelong hunter and fisherman, I feel the need to both defend and promote outdoor sports. Our pursuits are threatened by declining numbers, disappearing habitat and the attack of those for whom harming any animal is wrong. Those of us who love the outdoors know hunters, fishermen and, yes, trappers respect and value wildlife.

If fact, I am not telling you anything when I say we know far more about wildlife and the outdoors than those who never leave the comfort of their couches.

Mr. Secretary, how will having more dogs die help us defend our way of life?

I think most hunters could see their dogs in the jaws of that trap. I speak from experience, because I have had to keep my dog away from traps at public hunting areas. I have had to save my dog from an illegal, untagged trap. (A snare, fortunately, and not a conibear, but hung on the fence of a public recreation area nonetheless.)

For the good of all outdoor sports, Mr. Secretary, I'm asking you to lead us out of this morass. Do the right thing.

Enforce the law and see that traps are tagged or removed. At a minimum, require signs around lethal traps. Better yet, ban kill traps from public hunting grounds, parks and other recreation areas.

The future of our outdoor sports faces enough threats without this.

Yours,

Steve Haynes, Oberlin

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Lights bring Christmas season alive

Lights are going up and on all over the neighborhood.

Around the corner, the retired couple has a whole fairyland in their front yard, and they're not the only ones. Some of these people are going to owe their first bill to the city when they get their electric bill in January.

I love it. I love every light – the big ones, the white ones, the colored ones, the ones inside, the ones outside, even the dull bulbs that are solar powered.

I have to admit, visiting a friend who had flashing snowflakes the other day almost made me have a seizure – and I don't even have epilepsy or any other seizure-type problem. Still, the thought and the effort were there in her yard, and it brightened the whole neighborhood.

Back down on my block, the next-door neighbors were the first to get with the spirit. They put a lighted Christmas tree on the front porch and rope lights around the railing on their back deck, which is right across from my back deck.

It seemed to get the season off to a fine start.

So the next weekend, I dug out our decorations and lights.

Steve strung the orange power cords all over



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

the yard and attached everything safely to the selected switches. He's my electrical person.

However, he had to leave town, so I was left to put up the lights.

Spreading the colored lights on the front bushes was easy. It wasn't even too hard to put them on the rose bushes, which usually aren't much fun to decorate.

The white strings went up on the forsythia bush on the side of the house, but the controller for the chasing lights was dead, dead, dead. I've never been that crazy about the chasing lights anyway. They give me a headache, so tossing them in the trash wasn't a hardship.

The "little" cedar tree in the back yard was a chore. It has grown from one foot to 15 or 20, and because it's bigger at the bottom than the top, it's really hard to put the lights on it with a ladder. I opted for a long-handled hook. I still didn't reach quite to the top, but it looks fes-

sive and you hardly notice that the bottom two strings are only half lit.

That left the aspen tree out front. I put the icicle lights on it since they won't work on our front porch. Passing by at night, I'm sure, people think that it must be some sort of sculpture. However, it's just icicle lights put up haphazardly because it was getting dark and cold, and because only about half of them are working. It looks sort of like my sculpture is melting.

This week, the neighbors across the street have their home decorated and the people at the end of the block, and so on and so on for block after block.

It may be the coldest, darkest time of the year, but not in our neighborhood. We have snowmen, elves, candy canes, icicle lights around porches, blinking snowflakes, beautiful trees inside and out and one melting ice sculpture.

Merry Christmas to all and to all a bright light!

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

To founders: thanks for the Bill of Rights

Under the First Amendment, I get to say most anything out loud without fear of government interference or retaliation. So I'd like to say ... "Thanks."

"Thanks" to our nation's Founders, who, after debate over whether we needed a First Amendment and the nine other amendments that make up our Bill of Rights, finally agreed that we did.

"Thanks" to James Madison and others who found the right 45 words to declare for more than two centuries that government could not intrude on or deny our core freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition.

And "thanks" to the citizens who, in a process that reached its zenith on Dec. 15, 1791 – 219 years ago this week – ratified those first 10 amendments that protect our core freedoms.

Consider how First Amendment freedoms have shaped the nation's progress:

Freedom of religion – providing that government may neither favor nor disfavor any particular faith, and that we as individuals may worship, or not, as we choose – has helped spare this nation from much of the violence and strife over religious differences that still afflicts much of the world.

Being able to speak and write freely about the issues of our time has allowed us – imper-

Other Opinions

• Gene Policinski
First Amendment Center

fectly at times, to be sure – to discuss, debate and determine our best solutions to some of the most vexing issues facing humanity, from slavery to women's rights to civil rights.

And, coupled with the freedoms already named, being able to assemble with like-minded citizens and having the right to seek justice from our leaders has time after time allowed the oppressed, the ignored and the needy to bring their cases to the court of public opinion and to the administrative and legislative halls of government.

Chief Justice John Roberts, in a recent U.S. Supreme Court case, stirring rejected a government claim that our First Amendment freedoms might depend at times on their benefit to society.

"The First Amendment itself reflects a judgment by the American people that the benefits

of its restrictions on the Government outweigh the costs," Roberts wrote.

We have these freedoms not because the founders or government bureaucrats granted them, and most assuredly not because a majority of us at any one time maintains them. We have them as part of our basic rights as Americans.

Not that many of us can name those rights – no more than six of 100 Americans could name all five in this year's State of the First Amendment national survey by the First Amendment Center. The national initiative "1 for All" – www.1forall.us – aims to change all that by encouraging our fellow citizens to learn about, and support, the First Amendment.

Considering that in many parts of the world there are people risking their livelihoods and even their lives to get some measure of the freedoms we have every morning when we awake, we should say "thanks" for them often, and pledge to know them at least.

This is a good day to get started on both.

Gene Policinski is vice president and executive director of the First Amendment Center, 1207 18th Ave. S., Nashville, Tenn., 37212. For information, go to www.firstamendment-center.org. You may contact him at gpolicinski@fac.org.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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