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February 12, 2014

Council File: 13-1284
Council Districts: All
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Honorable City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
200 North Spring Street
Room 360, City Hall
Los Angeles CA 90012

REPORT ON MAKING TRAPPING OF WILDLIFE MORE HUMANE

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. BAN the following types of wildlife animal traps:
 - a. Body-gripping traps;
 - b. Body-crushing traps;
 - c. Snares;
 - d. Deadfall traps; and
 - e. Dog-proof raccoon traps.
2. MODIFY Section 53.06.3 relative to acceptable box or cage traps practices; acceptable trap visitation schedules; penalties/fines; and humane treatment of trapped wildlife, as detailed later in this report.
3. DIRECT the City Attorney to prepare and present an ordinance to amend Los Angeles Municipal Code 53.06.3 to effectuate these recommendations.

SUMMARY

A motion (C.F. 13-1284 O'Farrell-Koretz) directed the Department of Animal Services, with the assistance of the City Attorney, to propose and present a report on the

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feasibility of an ordinance to outlaw inhumane animal traps. This report addresses that request.

BACKGROUND

Animal trapping is the use of a device to remotely catch an animal. Animals may be trapped for a variety of purposes including the fur trade, food, wildlife management, hunting, and pest control.

The Department's principal opposition to the traps that are recommended to be banned is they cause suffering and cruel death.

A second major concern is that these traps are indiscriminate in that they will be triggered by *any* animal of sufficient weight. In an urban area with significant mountain and canyon areas, Los Angeles is particularly prone to domestic animals being caught in these traps. And, these traps are often used unwisely. For example, a trap set on the ground for an animal entering a home on a roof may catch unintended animals.

Third, while these traps may indeed capture an animal causing a problem (living in an attic, for example) this does not address the cause of the problem. Only repair and exclusion of all animals from access to the entry point does that.

The traps that cause the most damage are snares and body-crushing traps which leave animals suffering or dying. Affected wildlife includes, but is not limited to bears, bobcats, coyotes, foxes, mountain lions, opossums, raccoons and skunks.

The Department is grateful for research conducted by the Humane Society of the United States to support these recommendations. However, Animal Services is also basing its recommendations from the personal experiences of Animal Control Officers (ACO). ACOs respond to calls ranging from roaming dogs, to tethered animals, to animals in distress/dying. The latter includes emergency calls of wildlife in a trap's clutches.

First-hand accounts of Animal Control Officers' experiences give some idea of the terrible effects of an inhumane trap's damage:

- In January 2013 in Cheviot Hills, a coyote was caught in a snare trap at the Rancho Park Golf Course. The veterinarian wrote: "*Coyote had a wire from snare trap wrapped all the way around the lower abdomen, stuck right above the top of the pelvis. The wire was very tight against skin; Animal Control Officers could not get wire cutters under the wire to remove it.*"
- In July 2013, a coyote in Silver Lake was found hanging by its neck from a snare set by a pest control company. The snare was so tight around the neck that it took several minutes to cut off the snare, which only tightened as the animal struggled to get free. This coyote was rescued by Animal Control Officers then sent to Wildlife Care of Ventura County for rehabilitation. The coyote's injuries were critical and it could not be saved.

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- In October 2013, a raccoon was found in Eagle Rock with an illegal body-gripping trap. This uses a high tension bar that crushes the head or limbs of animals caught in it. The raccoon was found with a foreleg caught in the trap, causing grave injury. The raccoon was determined to be irretrievably suffering and had to be euthanized after unnecessary suffering.

DESCRIPTIONS OF ANIMAL TRAPS RECOMMENDED TO BE BANNED

Four classes of device have traditionally been used in urban wildlife control work: body-gripping (leg- or foot-hold traps); body-crushing traps; snares; and cage, or box, traps. All can be inhumane through negligent care or use, but snares, body-crushing and body-gripping traps are inherently inhumane. The unacceptable and inhumane devices are described briefly below.

Body-Gripping Traps

Traditionally referred to as leg- or foot-hold traps, these devices are triggered by the weight of an animal stepping on it. The jaws slam shut on an animal's leg or foot with enough force to hold the animal in place. Concerns for the welfare of animals trapped by these devices led to padded jaws and traps which include a thin strip of hard rubber lining the metal gripping edges. The result may be fewer visible lacerations, yet padded traps may require higher spring force, which means the animal is held more tightly and can actually suffer more pain.

Major concerns for the welfare of animals trapped in these types of device have led to their being banned in many countries. Body-gripping traps will cause significant physical damage to wild animals ranging from bone fractures and twisted ligaments. Being restrained is also very distressing to wild animals; their instinct is to break free. They pull and twist to get out of the trap, which can lead to extensive injuries, even to the point of chewing or twisting their own foot off. If operators are required to check traps only every 24 hours, an animal can struggle over a prolonged period, be subject to weather extremes, experience significant suffering and even fall victim to predation.

These traps are largely indiscriminant and the number of "non-target" animals taken — domestic dogs and cats, rabbits, songbirds, raptors — usually goes unreported. Designs intended to be more species-specific, such as traps designed to capture only raccoons, can have such great clamping force that they cause unacceptable suffering. Non-target animals caught in traps can be theoretically released but not without injury which often is significant enough to compromise survival.

Body-Crushing Traps

Body-crushing traps are designed to clamp with extensive force on an animal's body and are designed to crush the neck and render an animal unconscious within seconds and dead within minutes. However, even when used under controlled circumstances they often fail to do so. In the field it is impossible to control the size, species, position and direction of the animal entering the trap and their performance

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has to be even worse. These devices have long been recognized as inappropriate for use in urban wildlife control.

Snares

Snares use a loop of wire or wire rope designed to close around the neck, torso, foot or leg of an animal. Neck snares are sometimes designed with locking devices intended to restrain but not choke their victims to death, but these are subject to failure. In other uses snares are highly indiscriminate and have all of the unacceptable qualities of body-gripping traps and worse, since they often close on body and neck as much or more than limbs.

Deadfall

A *deadfall* is a heavy rock or log that is tilted on an angle and held up with sections of branches (sticks), with one of them that serves as a trigger. When the animal moves the trigger which may have bait on or near it, the rock or log falls, crushing the animal.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO MUNICIPAL CODE

Not all traps are inhumane. Supporters of cage traps say that they are the most humane form of trapping, and in some countries is the only method of trapping allowed. Cage traps are used by animal control officers to catch unwanted animals and move them to another location without harm.

These traps are designed to catch live animals in a cage. They are usually baited with common items like cat food and tuna fish. Cage traps usually have a trigger located in the back of the cage that causes a door to shut; some traps with two doors have a trigger in the middle of the cage that causes both doors to shut. In either type of cage, the closure of the doors and the falling of a lock mechanism prevents the animal from escaping by locking the door(s) shut.

Culvert traps are also considered humane. This large pipe-shaped device operates like a cage trap and is designed to move a bear or mountain lion.

In truth, any device that captures and holds an animal can be inhumane. For example, the cage trap can cause deaths in the summer heat if the company doing the trapping doesn't frequently visit the trap.

The Department recommends making changes to an existing ordinance, Los Angeles Municipal Code Section 53.06.3. In addition to modifying LAMC Section 53.06.03 to ban certain wildlife traps¹, the Department is making the following recommendations relative to the use of cage traps:

¹ Proposed LAMC changes pertain to *wildlife trapping* only. It does not affect a resident's ability to trap animals such as rats, mice, pocket gophers, ground squirrels and moles.

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- 1) Box or cage traps, e.g., culvert traps, closely monitored may be used for rescuing a wild animal that is caught in a space or location where a human cannot reach. If the animal is healthy it would be released. If the animal is infirm and not irretrievably suffering, it would then be transported to a wildlife rehabilitation facility.
- 2) Box or cage traps (but not snares or body-gripping traps) for the purpose of educational research on the effects of rodenticide secondary poisoning, or other harmful introduced chemicals or substances into the environment and its effects on wildlife, shall be allowed by government agencies that are under a government grant for such a study. The information gathered is to further protect wild animals from said dangers. Wildlife involved in these studies would be tagged and tracked by said government agencies. No such trapping would be allowed by the general public claiming to be doing a study. At no time would live animals be allowed to be used to lure the target wild animal².
- 3) Box or cage traps shall not be placed in areas exposing wildlife to extremes of weather conditions such as, direct sunlight, or out in the open on rainy days; additionally, said traps shall not be placed near the edge of a pool, areas adjacent to electrical wiring, gas lines, in locations containing dangerous debris, on rooftops, on unstable locations such as a ledges, awnings, limbs of trees, areas where they might be harassed by household pets or other animals.
- 4) Baits for the purposes of trapping wildlife shall not contain any form of poison, rodenticides or any other harmful chemicals whatsoever.
- 5) Section 465.5 of the California Code of Regulations requires that traps must be inspected and trapped animals removed at least once daily. The City of Los Angeles shall require a trap inspection every 12 hours; however, traps that utilize technological devices such as cameras that notify trappers of immediate capture of the animal will count as one trap visit. An inspection will still be required the first morning visit of the trap in the hours between 5am to 9am and the second visit of the trap between 5pm to 9pm.
- 6) Any trap set without identifying information or in violation of state and local laws, such as a company setting traps which do not have the company name, or trapper name and phone number of the trapper not clearly posted on the trap, shall be confiscated by the Department of Animal Services. A fine of \$1000.00 shall be paid by said trapper to the Department of Animal Services for return of said trap. Should the trap not be claimed within seven working days, the trap shall be destroyed and disposed of. Officers impounding traps shall post notice as to the location of trap confiscation clearly showing where the trap was taken and indicate violation of trapping regulations for impound of the trap.

² Currently the National Park Service is doing such a study on rodenticide effects on bobcats in the Santa Monica Mountains.

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7) Wild animals that are trapped by agents, companies, nuisance or pest control operators that have permits to engage in legal trapping of wildlife shall remove animals trapped immediately and no longer than two hours of capture, one hour of capture on any day that the outdoor temperature is over 80 degrees. Trappers shall follow 465.5 of the California Code of Regulations for disposition of the wild animal.

8) Wild animals that are caught by companies, nuisance or pest control operators in traps that are sick, injured, crippled or infirm may be delivered to wildlife rehabilitation.

The Department will work closely with the City Attorney in developing the draft ordinance.

FISCAL IMPACT

None. Commercial trappers should be able to transition to more humane trapping methods with minimal impact on their businesses.

Brenda F. Barnette

BRENDA F. BARNETTE

General Manager

Cc:

Honorable Councilmember Paul Koretz, 5th District
Honorable Councilmember Felipe Fuentes, 7th District
Honorable Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell, 13th District
Patricia Whelan, Office of the Mayor
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