

Citizen group pushes for trapping reform

By Mike Koshmrl | Posted: Wednesday, December 24, 2014 4:30 am

Snow King, Munger Mountain and popular trails scattered around the valley may be closed to some types of trapping if a proposal being pushed by a valley nonprofit has legs.

Calls for trapping reform have been formalized by Wyoming Untrapped, an advocacy group that recently released a 10-page document containing “requests, recommendations and a plan” for trapping regulations in Teton County.

Resident Lisa Robertson, who helped form Wyoming Untrapped in 2012, said her initial goal with the proposal is to change furbearer trapping regulations in Teton County beginning next year.

“We’re taking an incremental strategy, so that we can have some reasonable expectation of public safety as soon as possible,” Robertson said. “We’d like to do a lot more — we’d like to do a whole lot more — but this is what we know can get done in the next six months.”

The reforms being championed by Wyoming Untrapped begin with 500-foot setbacks along trails and seasonal roads in Teton County.

The list is long and reads like a hiker and skiers’ checklist: Game and Cache creeks, Crystal Butte Sheep Mountain, Crater Lake, Ski Lake and Jackson Peak are among the 20 proposed off-limits areas.

Two larger closures — in the greater Snow King area and around Munger Mountain — are also being pushed.

“Foremost, these should be two areas where recreationists can go on or off-trail without having to be concerned about a trapping presence,” the proposal said.

“The use of these areas is overwhelmingly skewed in the direction of hikers, mountain bikers and dog walkers to begin with. Trapping is entirely eclipsed by these uses,” it said.

The other change sought by the proposal would establish trap-free buffers along roads that close to vehicles in the winter and turn into defacto trails. They include Granite and Mosquito creeks, Teton Canyon, South Leigh Canyon and others.

“These changes reflect the unique needs of Teton County, an area with considerably high levels of outdoor recreation, outdoor tourism, and dog owners,” the proposal said. “We believe that Wyoming Game and Fish can move forward with this proposal, as we are confident the department has the capacity

to be true leaders in wildlife management and carry out this positive change for the Jackson Hole community.”

Fur trapping has deep history in Wyoming and Jackson Hole, and was the trade of mountain men like Davey Jackson who first explored the region. Many residents still run trap lines, and the practice occasionally causes problems in developed areas and with people’s pets.

Trapping was thrust into the news last month when three St. Bernard dogs owned by the Cardenas family were killed in legal snare traps in a four-day period at the base of Casper Mountain.

“The traps that killed my dogs were less than a mile from my house,” 20-year-old Savannah Cardenas told the Casper Star-Tribune. “Maybe a notice, if you are going to be trapping close to a neighborhood, maybe let the people in that neighborhood know so they can keep their children safe.”

Traplines closer to Jackson Hole have also caused occasional problems. In fall 2013 two dogs were trapped less than 30 feet off the shoulder of Fall Creek Road within a half-mile from residential Red Top Meadows.

In the Buffalo Valley a year earlier a dog required about \$2,000 of veterinary care after being caught in a foot-hold trap while on a walk, according to a News&Guide letter to the editor.

Wyoming regulations do not require trappers to notify pet owners whose pets they accidentally trap and kill.

Because Game and Fish has no jurisdiction over predator species such as coyotes and red foxes, Wyoming Untrapped’s proposal could not result in a straight prohibition against trapping in the high-use areas being targeted.

Tim Fuchs, Game and Fish’s regional wildlife supervisor, said that his department has the ability to specify snares that can be used, and to regulate the use of bait and how often traps must be checked. But Game and Fish could not put an end to coyote, fox and other predator trapping in places such as Snow King because of jurisdictional issues, Fuchs said.

“We have a very, very limited scope to affect any kind of trapping for predatory species,” he said.

Game and Fish, Wyoming Untrapped and the Wyoming Trappers Association have been in talks for a year about the proposal, Fuchs said.

“We’ll try to see if there is an avenue to address everyone’s concerns and try to find some change in regulation,” he said.

Changes to the trapping regulations for predators would require action by the Wyoming Legislature,

Robertson said.

“We’ll be able to eliminate the furbearing traps,” she said, “but the predator traps are still going to be out there until we get this through the legislative process.”

There is some precedent for putting areas off-limits to trapping in Wyoming, according to Wyoming Untrapped’s proposal. A number of state-run wildlife management areas are closed to the activity for certain months of the year, and beaver trapping has been prohibited in places such as Granite Creek with the intent of improving aquatic habitat.

Outside of Wyoming, trap-free setbacks bordering popular recreation areas have been instated in places such as Missoula, Montana.

Wyoming Untrapped aims to realize the changes it’s requesting through a “collaborative” approach, Robertson said.

“We as a community know what we want, and we’re going to push for as much as we can get,” she said.

Robertson encouraged residents to call or write Game and Fish ahead of the commission’s July meeting. Letters can be mailed to: Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Attn. Regulations, 3030 Energy Lane, Casper, WY 82604.