

Proposal snares many sides into the pest control debate

Farmers and animal rights activists disagree on the targeted trapping methods of Ballot Measure 97

By Andrew Adams
Oregon Daily Emerald

Junction City sheep rancher Cleve Dumdi, who runs several thousand head over 30 fields, once lost five sheep to one coyote in only two weeks. At \$90 per sheep, and with the current competitive market, Dumdi said state Ballot Measure 97, which would ban most animal traps, would hurt the business of his family-owned ranch.

Mari Margil, conservation coordinator for the Oregon chapter of the Sierra Club, disagrees. She sees the traps in question as a vicious, antiquated method of animal control that creates many more dangers for people, pets and ecosystems than it does benefits for ranchers.

Dumdi and Margil represent the two sides in the debate over the anti-trapping measure, which has farmers claiming their livelihoods are threatened and animal rights activists arguing the traps are just downright cruel.

The group Protect Pets & Wildlife drafted Measure 97, which would prohibit the use of steel-jaw leghold traps and other traps commonly used to capture mammals. It would also make the sale, purchase and exchange of raw fur obtained through the use of such traps illegal, as well as the use of poisons sodium fluoroacetate and sodium cyanide.

Measure 97 would, however, allow for special use permits from the Department of Fish and Wildlife for padded jaw traps and non-strangling foot snares for dealing with pests, if a landowner could successfully prove that they had tried alternative methods of pest control.

Supporters of the measure, however, have a hard time acknowledging that there is any need for traps.

Kelly Peterson, campaign manager for the measure, said that many animals suffer for days after being caught in traps, before dying from starvation or escaping after chewing off their own limbs.

Peterson said her group gathered 104,000 signatures, 15,000 of which were taken in Lane County,

Measure 97 would prohibit the use of animal traps, including steel-jawed leghold traps, and would outlaw the sale and harvest of fur using such traps. It would also ban the use of the poisons sodium fluoroacetate and sodium cyanide.

Proponents say the measure will put an end to the use of unnecessarily cruel traps that indiscriminately snare animals.

Opponents say the measure would take a vital element of the agricultural business out of the hands of farmers and ranchers.

to place the measure on the state ballot. She said they received signatures from Harney, Klamath and Willowa counties, where the chief industry is agriculture. This, Peterson said, proves that some farmers do support the measure.

"It's not just a West-versus-East thing," she said. "These traps affect

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Kelly Peterson
campaign manager for
measure 97

family pets, they're so indiscriminate."

Peterson said she grew up in the country, and most of her family still hunts. She said she understands how some of the farmers against Measure 97 feel, but she can't overlook what she sees as the wanton cruelty of the traps.

"There's real difference in hunting and taking an animal quickly, than in trapping it and letting it suffer," she said.

She said farmers and ranchers should look to alternative methods, such as electric fencing and territorial animals, including dogs and llamas, to keep predators at bay.

"Sometimes there are legitimate reasons for traps, but we're trying to make it a last resort rather than a first response," she said.

Rancher Dumdi said he uses electric fences as much as he can, but with a herd as large as his spread out over several different fields, he needs every method of coyote control there is. Dumdi said he doesn't use traps just because he has a personal vendetta against the

predators, but because his business requires it.

"We're not just out there to massacre coyotes, but when we have a coyote hit the herd, I get the trapper and we try and get it," he said.

To place traps, Dumdi said he has to notify all neighboring land owners and put up signs. He said he also has to obtain a permit from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. To Dumdi, this is already a lengthy process, and if he had to prove to the department that he has tried alternatives to trapping, it would only give pests and predators more time to damage his herd.

Margil, the conservation coordinator for the Sierra Club, said her group supports Measure 97 because of the adverse effect trapping has on Oregon's environment. She said endangered and threatened animals often are trapped and die, and poisons can have devastating effects on food chains.

"Smaller rodents can eat the poison and get into the food chain and then kill endangered species," she said.

She has little sympathy for ranchers and farmers who she said are too reliant on traps and should not even be targeting predators in the first place. When asked about the opposition's arguments about Measure 97 being too restrictive, she was quick to respond.

"I don't buy into that whatsoever," she said.

In addition to the Sierra Club, Measure 97 is supported by several of the Oregon chapters of the Audubon Society, 11 veterinarians and the senior vice president of the Humane Society of the United States.

Groups that are opposed to the measure include: The Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Association of Oregon Counties, Oregon State Grange, Oregon Golf Course Owners Association and several other organizations.

Andy Anderson, executive vice president of Oregon Farm Bureau, a farmer's advocacy group that is opposed to Measure 97, said the main reason his group opposes the measure is that it would hinder state farmers' ability to protect crops from damaging pests that kill livestock, eat crops or tunnel beneath crop fields and into irrigation ditches. He also found fault with the measure's wording. The measure would prohibit all "body gripping" devices, which he said could be used by animal activists to outlaw many essential tools of the livestock industry, such as squeeze

chutes, head gates and even lariats.

"While the proponents are saying it isn't their intent," he said, "our lawyers tell us they think they could make it stick."

Anderson said agriculture is a tough business to make money in, and Measure 97 would only make it tougher, eradicating a bureaucratic rigamarole that would make it hard for farmers to deal with pests.

"Right now, if farmers have a problem, they can go take care of

it," he said. "Measure 97 would create a whole new rule-making process."

He also said that while the department can't make an official stand, he has heard from Department of Fish and Wildlife workers that Measure 97 would limit the department's ability to manage state lands. Retired fish and wildlife directors have filed statements in opposition of the measure in the voter's pamphlet.

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