

## **The Fallacy of a Right to Trap on Public Land**

Dave Reilly

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In a letter to the Dispatch on July 15 titled *Stop Stepping on People's Rights*, the author quotes extensively from the Constitution of the United States in claiming that the rights of trappers would be undermined if sport trapping is banned on Grand Island town-owned land (i.e. if Version A of the Trapping Law is passed). Of course there is no constitutional right to trapping, so the author's claim falls back to a position that Version A would undermine the right of certain citizens to use public land in the pursuit of "Safety and Happiness."

The author of the aforementioned article has stated in a 2016 public meeting that there are three active trappers on Grand Island, or .000147% of the population of 20,374 (based on 2010 Census). Sport trapping would exclude others from utilizing that same Town property for other recreation, and diminishes the rights of the many citizens who want to enjoy and experience nature and wildlife in its pristine form, without the concern for discovering a trapped animal in anguish and without the potential safety issues associated with traps.

It is important to recognize that the proposed legislation on trapping would not limit trapping on the 8300 acres of private land—much more than what the Town owns. It would only ban sport trapping on Town-owned land. One trapper has reported that he has at least fifteen private properties on which he traps, and Supervisor McMurray has stated that other private land owners have offered their properties to the trapper. So this issue is not about the right to trap, it is only about the right to sport trap on public land (sport trap meaning to trap and kill animals for pleasure or for financial gain).

There are many activities that are not allowed on public land. For example, it is not permitted to cut down trees. And the logic of a proposed ban on sport trapping would be similar anti-logging legislation. Everyone should be able to enjoy trees or wildlife on public land. Neither belongs to one person, and if one person were to exercise the theoretical right to take them, it would be at the expense of every other citizen wanting to enjoy the trees or wildlife in their natural setting, alive. And there are many people who want to experience nature in as pristine a form as possible.

There is no collective benefit to be gained from sport trapping on public land. In other words, the trapper is the only person who would make money by selling the pelts, or receives the theoretical "Happiness" that would go along with trapping and killing wildlife. But research has shown that there are tangible benefits to experiencing nature in an "undisturbed" form: psychologists have demonstrated that it can improve cognitive abilities and psychological wellbeing, there are demonstrated benefits to physical health, not to mention the spiritual and social effects that have been measured and documented. Environmental and biological research has also quantified benefits to biodiversity and ecological preservation.

For those who try to argue that sport trapping on public land will address rabies and other wildlife diseases, Version A of the proposed trapping law allows for nuisance trapping with a permit. So if there were a legitimate nuisance issue, the law would not inhibit the Town from addressing it. That said, Gary Suhowatsky, NY State Dept. of Health Research Analyst, in Testimony before the NY State Assembly Subcommittee on Wildlife, reported that "Trapping selectively kills the healthiest and most mobile

animals in the population and leaves behind the most sickly and sedentary members to perpetuate the spread of, and elevate the incidence in, the diseases in wildlife populations... Nothing short of a total ban on trapping will ever restore health to our wild animal populations.”

In sum, for listening to the residents of Grand Island who have asked for a sport trapping ban on town-owned land—1,450 petition signatures; hundreds of letters and postcards to the Town Board; and local and national organizations that have endorsed and supported the public request—Supervisor McMurray and the other board members who do the same and support Version A should be commended.