

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

**DR. LIZ TYSON, PROGRAMS DIRECTOR  
BORN FREE USA**

**SUBMITTED TO THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
WATER, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE SUBCOMMITTEE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**JANUARY 20, 2022**

Thank you to Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Bentz, and Chairman Grijalva for holding today's legislative hearing on the Refuge from Cruel Trapping Act (H.R. 4716), introduced last year by Congressman Nadler and Congressman Blumenauer. This important bill would prohibit the use of all body-gripping traps within the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWFS). These traps include steel jawed leg-hold traps, snares, Conibear traps, and their modifications. These brutal, indiscriminate devices have no place on land set aside for the protection of our native wildlife. Born Free USA strongly supports H.R. 4716, and we urge the Committee to take swift action on this bill.

Providing this testimony today is Dr. Liz Tyson, Programs Director of Born Free USA, an organization which has been at the forefront of the work to end the cruel trapping of animals within the NWRS and beyond.

Dr. Tyson, PhD, has worked in the field of animal protection and conservation since 2004. Her academic expertise is in the legal protection of wild animals. Dr. Tyson was awarded her PhD in Animal Welfare Law from the University of Essex, United Kingdom, in 2018. Her doctoral research considered the efficacy of legislation in protecting the welfare of wild animals in captivity. Her thesis was adapted and published as part of the Palgrave MacMillan Animal Ethics book series in September 2020. She is a Fellow of the prestigious Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. She has worked as an advocate for legislative change for animals throughout her career and now leads Born Free's efforts on trapping, and associated fur trade, among other issues.

### **Trapping in National Wildlife Refuges**

The NWRS was established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 and now encompasses 568 refuges, as well as 38 wetlands management districts and 5 marine national monuments, which, combined, comprise 95 million acres of land and 760 million submerged acres.<sup>1</sup> Within the system, more than 380 threatened and endangered species are protected across 356 of the individual refuges. The NWRS further provides habitat for 700 bird species, 200 mammals, 250 reptiles and amphibians, and 1,000 fish species.<sup>2</sup>

According to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), the National Wildlife Refuge System was established "to conserve America's wild animals and plants," and to "provide enjoyment and

---

<sup>1</sup> [Public Lands and Waters | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](https://www.fws.gov/public-lands-and-waters)

<sup>2</sup> [Refuge Animals From A to Z | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/animals)

beauty” to the millions of people who visit these lands each year. In fact, according to recent information published by DOI, national wildlife refuges attract more than 61 million annual visits.<sup>3</sup> With more than 2,500 miles of land and water trails, these refuges are popular destinations, and many individuals bring along their families, beloved pets, or service animals.

Yet, despite this mission, the use of indiscriminate body-gripping traps is permitted on 216 refuges, a total of 11.1 million acres of public land. This means that, not only is this cruel practice allowed in nearly 40% of all refuge lands—funded by taxpayers and set aside for the protection and enjoyment of our native wildlife—but that the public, their families, and their pets are at risk when visiting.

The simple truth is traps are indiscriminate – wholly unable to control who steps into them, be it the targeted species, an endangered or threatened species, a companion animal, or even a human. It’s therefore no surprise that multiple accounts of companion animals, children, and other humans falling victim to traps have been communicated to Born Free USA over the years. One such trapping victim is Maggie, a puppy who was caught in a leghold trap in Tennessee. Maggie was lucky to survive her ordeal but had to have one of her legs amputated.

### **MAGGIE’S STORY**

In early 2020, Maggie, a Great Pyrenees puppy, had the misfortune of being caught in a leghold trap in Tennessee.

She was only 12 weeks old at the time when she found a way out of her outdoor pen and wandered off her owners’ property, which was next to a wooded area where people often set traps for coyotes. Maggie was gone for two days before returning home with severe injuries to her paw and leg. Maggie’s injuries consisted of multiple fractures; all of her metacarpals in the paw were fractured and her carpus was also severely damaged. There was also significant soft tissue damage to the paw and leg. Due to the severity of Maggie’s injuries, and the probability of not regaining use of the leg, the veterinarian determined that it would be necessary to amputate the injured leg.

Thankfully, Maggie was adopted, and has thrived under the love and care of her new family and, now renamed “Bunny,” she gets around just fine on her three legs. She is one of the lucky ones.

### **The Cruelty of Trapping**

The use of steel-jaw leghold traps has been banned or heavily restricted in 108 countries around the world,<sup>4</sup> sadly, the U.S. is not one of those countries. Here, leghold traps can still be used by private citizens for recreational and commercial purposes in 48 of the 50 states,

<sup>3</sup> [Interior Department Announces Largest Expansion of Fishing and Hunting on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Managed Lands and Waters | U.S. Department of the Interior \(doi.gov\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Library of Congress. 2016. Laws on Leg-Hold Animal Traps Around the World. [online] Available at: <<https://www.loc.gov/law/help/leg-hold-traps/leg-hold-traps.pdf>> [Accessed 12 February 2021].

including within the NWRS. In addition to leghold traps, Conibear traps, other drowning traps, and snares are widely used as a means of catching and killing animals for their fur, because they are deemed a nuisance, or simply for fun.

Once in a trap, animals suffer in agony for hours or even days. In addition to the excruciating pain inflicted by the trap, trapped animals are also exposed to extreme stress, environmental elements, dehydration, starvation, and predation, with no chance of relief or escape. The cruelty of traps cannot be overstated.

When the trappers come to check the traps, the suffering of the animals worsens. Recent field research carried out by Born Free USA has evidenced animals in traps being bludgeoned multiple times in the head, face, and neck with baseball bats as trappers attempt to kill them. Rather than a swift death, these animals are forced to suffer even further as they experience a drawn-out, violent, and frightening death.

The indiscriminate nature of traps means that it is not just the intended victims who suffer in their millions, but any animal who happen across these barbaric, antiquated contraptions. Quotes from trappers gathered as part of Born Free USA's research confirm that family pets are caught, and we know from our own work of multiple family pets, or other animals, who have been maimed or killed by traps.

#### **Federal Legislative Solution Needed**

The Refuge from Cruel Trapping Act would provide a targeted solution to protect within the boundaries of NWRS. This would ensure that the refuges are able to be what they were always intended to be: havens where animals are safe from unnecessary harm. It would keep refuge visitors, their families, and their companion and service animals safe, and ensure that animals do not suffer as Maggie and countless others have.

In closing, we would again like to thank the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and this Subcommittee for holding this hearing. We are appreciative of this Subcommittee's goal to shine a light on the safety and welfare of our native wildlife and the millions of refuge visitors by focusing on the Refuge from Cruel Trapping Act. We are happy to answer any questions or provide more information or clarification. We look forward to working with you on getting this important legislation across the finish line.

Sincerely,



Dr. Liz Tyson  
Programs Director  
Born Free USA  
[liz@bornfreeusa.org](mailto:liz@bornfreeusa.org)  
830-965-2813