

2020-2021

MAP THE TRAP



ALASKA WILDLIFE ALLIANCE

WWW.AKWILDLIFE.ORG

WHO WE ARE

The Alaska Wildlife Alliance (AWA) is a nonprofit organization founded by Alaskans in 1978. We advocate for healthy ecosystems, scientifically and ethically managed to protect wildlife for present and future generations.

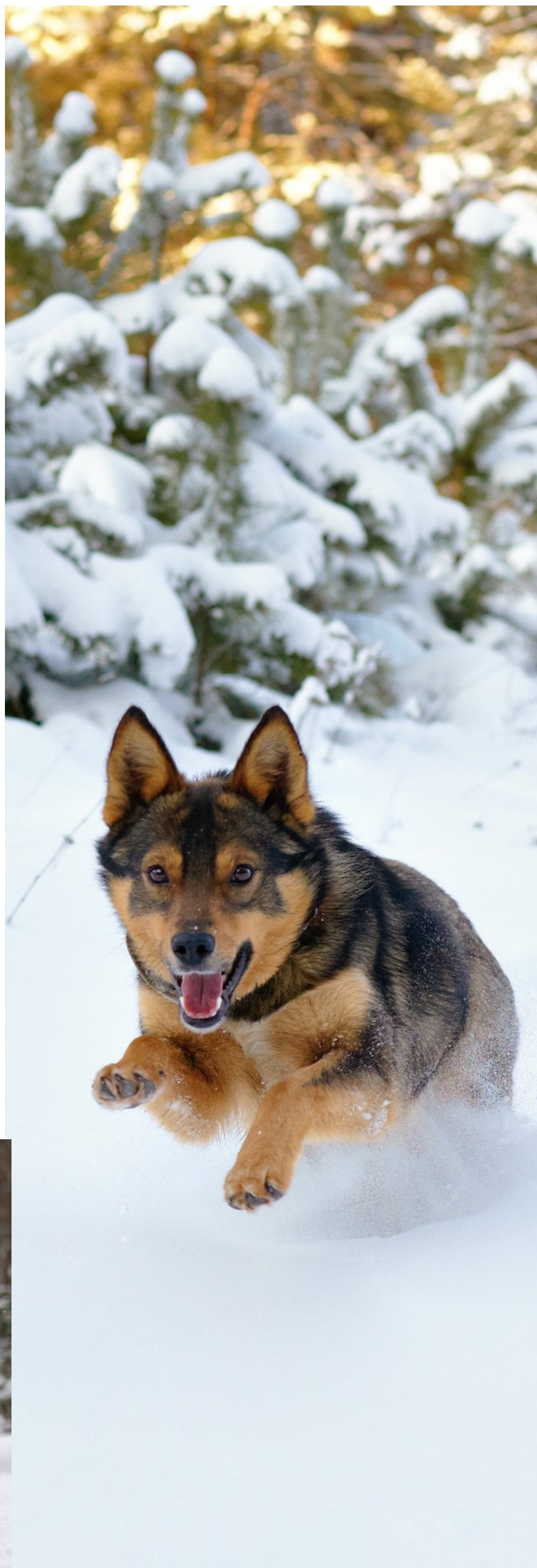
WHY MAP THE TRAP?

In Alaska, trapping is allowed on most public lands (which includes many trails and beaches) and on private property with the owner's permission. Between the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), Wildlife Troopers, and local authorities, there is no centralized database collecting information on public trap encounters. This makes it difficult to know how many pets are caught in traps or how often accidents occur.

This lack of information is what makes it hard for trail users, trappers, and wildlife managers to understand how and where traps affect recreation, if at all.

We sought the opinions of both trappers and non-trapping Alaskans to:

- Understand the impacts of traps, if any, on recreation.
- Solicit feedback from trappers and recreators on the topic of trapping in multi-use areas.



OUR METHODOLOGY

To understand the scope of trap encounters in Alaska, AWA launched two surveys:

- A 'Map the Trap' survey to serve as a repository for information on trap encounters during the trapping season. This survey asks respondents to report the date and location of a trap they saw, the type of trap they encountered, what activity they were doing when they encountered the trap, and the circumstances surrounding the encounter. The purpose of the survey is to collect information on trap encounters across all of Alaska to understand where and when conflicts are occurring, whether problem traps are being reported, and how (if at all) traps impact recreation.
- A survey to assess perspectives about trapping along recreational trails. This survey seeks to understand how Alaskans (including trappers) feel about trapping in multi-use areas and to collect suggestions on possible solutions in high-conflict areas.

The surveys were hosted on AWA's website, www.akwildlife.org, and advertised throughout the trapping season online and through AWA's mailing listserve.

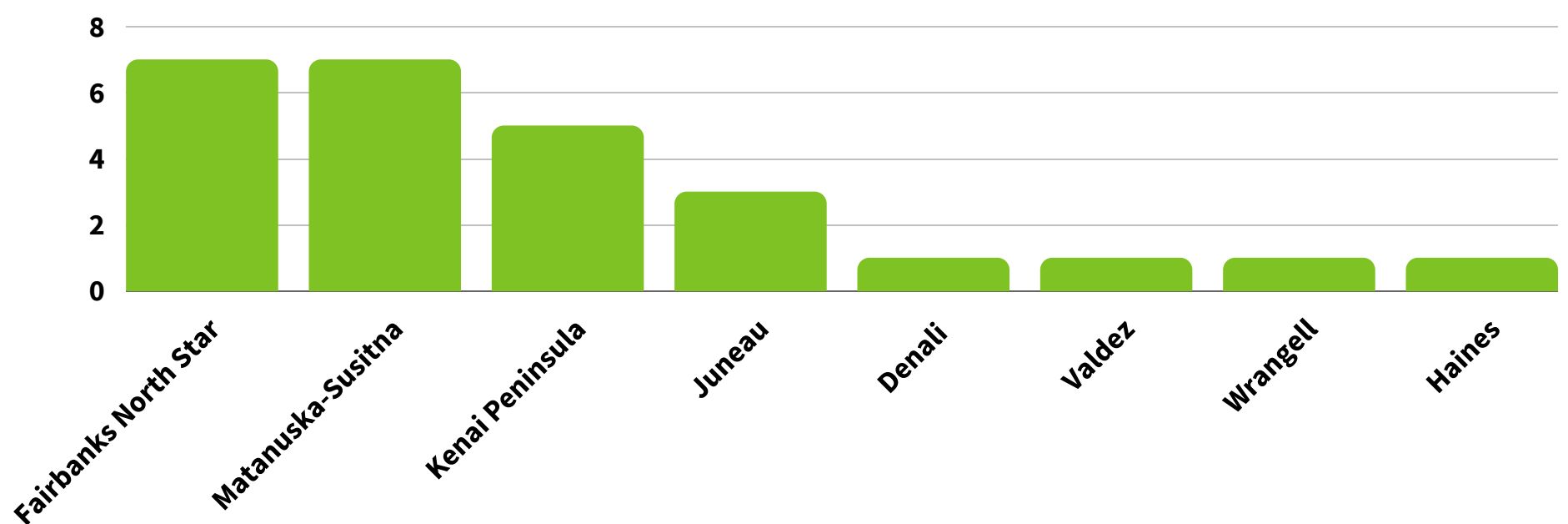
This report summarizes the findings of both surveys. Please note that these surveys only reflect the sentiments of those who voluntarily completed the survey on AWA's website. This report was compiled by Alaska Wildlife Alliance staff and interns from the University of Alaska, Anchorage.



WHAT WE FOUND: 2020-2021 TRAPPING SEASON

AWA collected 26 reports of trap encounters during the 2020-2021 trapping season.

2020-2021 SEASON TRAP ENCOUNTERS BY BOROUGH



LEASH LAWS AND REPORTING

Of the reported trap locations that could be determined, 16 traps were in areas with leash laws. In those 16 reported traps, two dogs were caught and one person was caught.

Ten traps were reported in areas without leash laws, and in those 10 traps, four dogs were caught.

Leash laws vary- not all require that dogs actually be on a leash. Some leash laws consider an animal to be "restrained" if they are on a leash OR off-leash but under voice or sight control. Some regional laws only require a pet be leashed if it is dangerous. Lastly, some areas with leash laws also allow dogs to be off-leash if they are sporting, such as in an agility event, or if they are hunting.



WHAT WE FOUND 2020-2021 TRAPPING SEASON

WHERE AND DURING WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE TRAPS RECORDED?

Respondents encountered the most traps while **hiking**, with other common activities being skiing, mushing, and trapping (see graph 1).

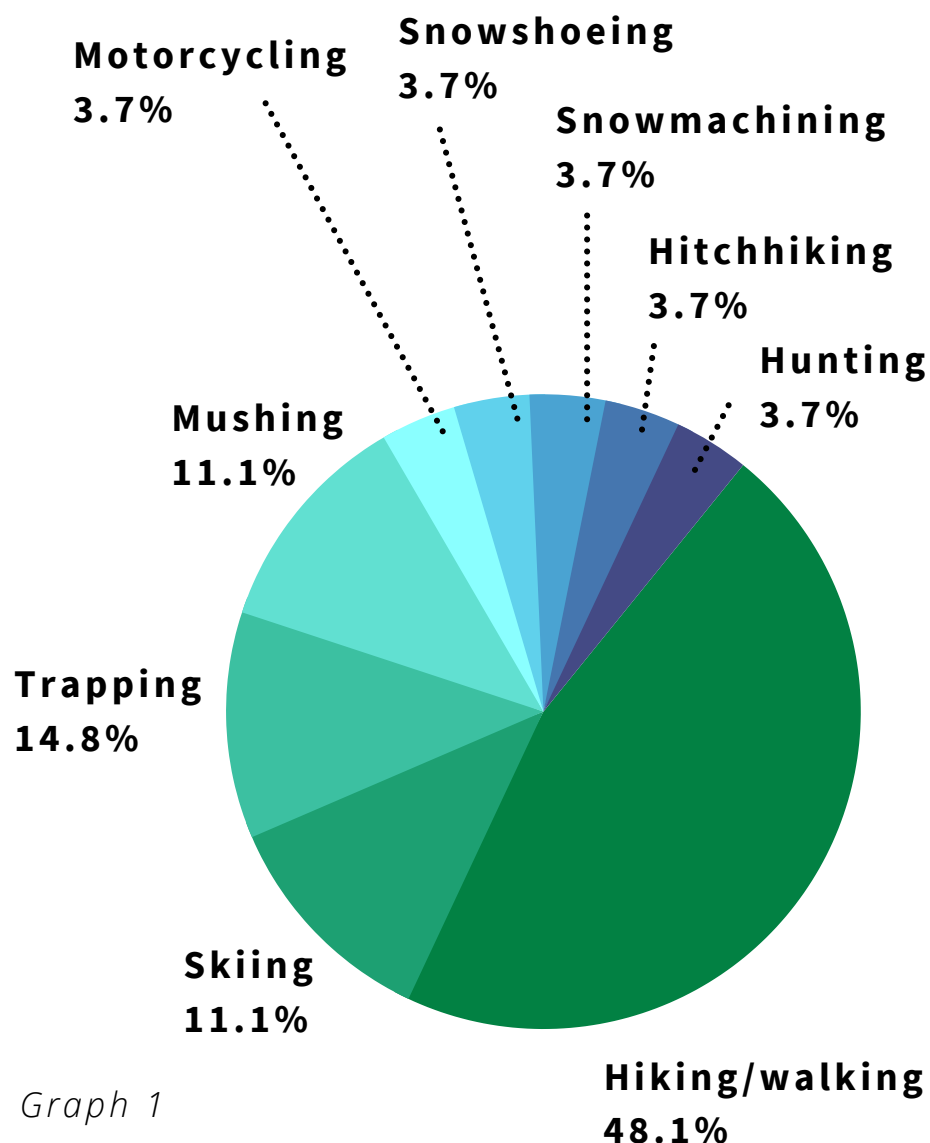
Encounters while walking include a hitchhiker who nearly stepped in a body grip trap set near a street light off of Parks Highway; a person who saw a snare four feet off of a plowed road in Fairbanks; and a respondent who was pulled from their motorbike after a snare caught their foot while riding in the Jim Creek Recreational Area.

69% of reported trap encounters were located in recreational areas, hiking trails, snow machining trails, and mushing trails.

31% of the reported trap encounters were found along roads, highways, and parking lots.

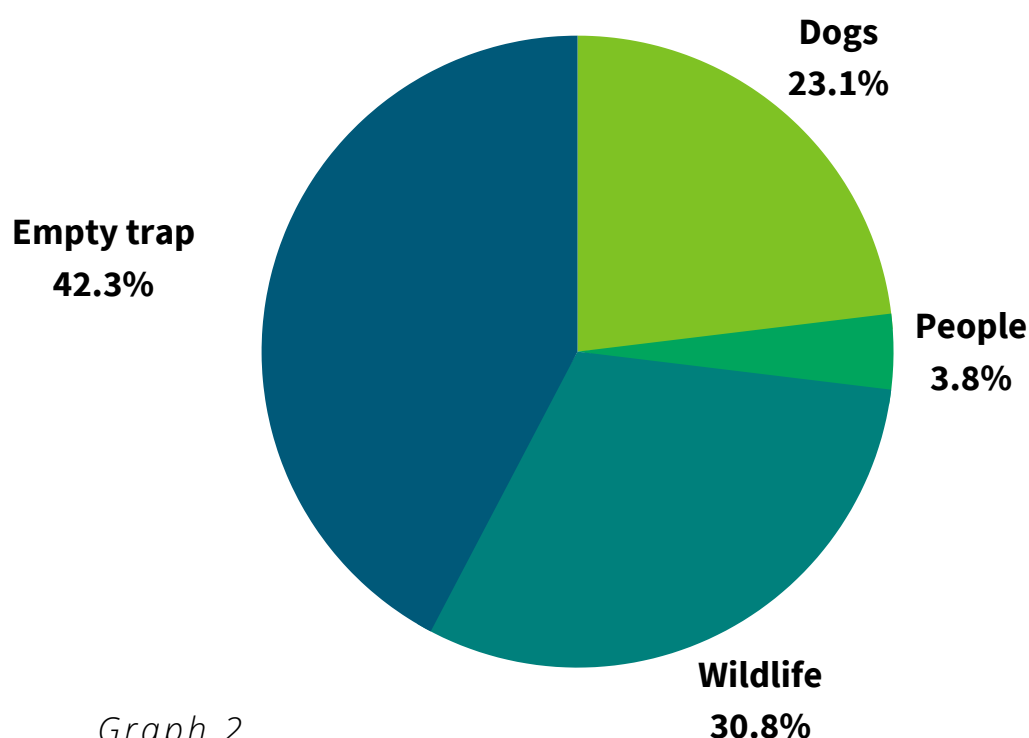
Of those who reported distances where traps were seen in relation to trails and roadways:

- 40% reported traps within 20 feet
- 40% reported traps within 21-100 feet
- 20% reported traps within 1/4-3/4 of a mile



Graph 1

TYPES OF ANIMALS RECORDED BEING CAUGHT IN TRAPS



Graph 2

58% of respondents who completed the 2020-2021 trap survey reported finding an animal in a trap at least once. 23% of those animals were dogs (see graph 2).

Only 26% of respondents from the 2020-2021 trapping season said that they reported the trap to at least one organization. Those organizations included: ADF&G, Alaska State Troopers, Alaska Wildlife Troopers, Interior Alaska Land Trust, Juneau Animal Control, and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

WHAT WE FOUND: SENTIMENTS ABOUT TRAPPING

In the survey regarding sentiments of trapping in multi-use areas, out of 110 participants, **39% of people** said dog owners have a responsibility to keep their dogs on a leash and obey leash laws.

ADF&G **recommends carrying a trap removal toolkit** to release a pet if they get caught in a trap. The gear in the toolkit includes: a stout rope (3/8”- 1/2” by 8’) or a strong leash, bailing wire or large zip ties to hold open trap springs, trap setters for opening body-grip traps, a short board or piece of plywood to put under a trap in deep snow conditions, and a muzzling device to keep a trapped pet from biting.

Less than 4% of 110 respondents reported carrying a trap release kit with them, many of them stating that they are too inconvenient to travel with. One respondent said that these kits are “a bulky set to carry around on short day skis in urban areas.”



The **Alaska Trapper's Code of Ethics** was created by the Alaska Trappers Association and ADF&G, and outlines trapping etiquette in Alaska. Many of the code's points are not bound by regulation.

1. Respect the other trapper's "grounds" — particularly brushed, maintained traplines with a history of use.
2. Check traps regularly.
3. Promote trapping methods that will reduce the possibility of catching nontarget animals.
4. Obtain landowners' permission before trapping on private property.
5. Know and use proper releasing and killing methods.
6. Develop set location methods to prevent losses.
7. Trap in the most humane way possible.
8. Dispose of animal carcasses properly.
9. Concentrate trapping in areas where animals are overabundant for the supporting habitat.
10. Promptly report the presence of diseased animals to wildlife authorities.
11. Assist landowners who are having problems with predators and other furbearers that have become a nuisance.
12. Support and help train new trappers in trapping ethics, methods and means, conservation, fur handling, and marketing.
13. Obey all trapping regulations, and support strict enforcement by reporting violations.
14. Support and promote sound furbearer management.

WHAT WE FOUND: EXAMPLES OF IMPACT

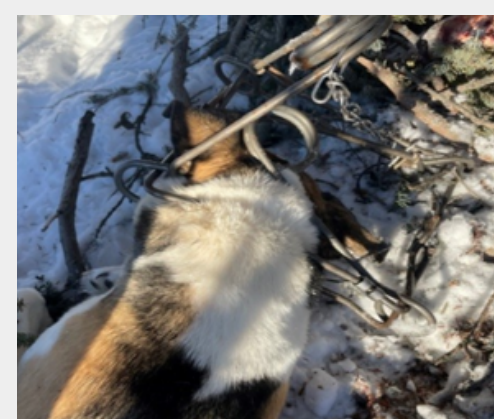
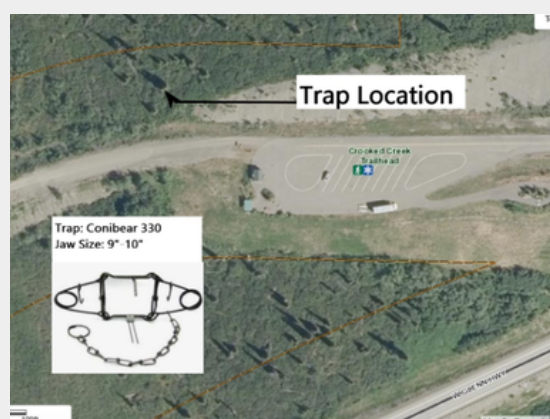
CASE STUDY: LOLA

On the afternoon of February 7, 2021, 13-year-old Robert Ahmasuk and his mother, Joni Spiess, were hunting for ptarmigan on the shoulder of Gunsight Mountain in Glacier View, Alaska. They parked at the pullout for the Crooked Creek Trailhead, located off the Glenn Highway. Robert brought his dog, Lola, a 4-year-old, husky mix weighing about 45 pounds. Lola was not on leash, however she was well-trained and under voice control.

After a two-hour ski, Joni and Robert were returning to their car on a heavily-used snowmachine trail. When they were 50-60 yards west of the trailhead, Lola left the snowmachine trail to a tree about 30 feet north of the trail. Robert heard a sharp yelp. He immediately took off his skis and went after the dog.

Lola was caught in a Conibear 330 trap. The trap was baited with meat and chained to a tree. Robert and Joni attempted to release the trap. They called and texted Robert's father in Nome (who is a trapper) for help without luck. They called the State troopers and attempted to find a video on YouTube on how to release the trap. About five minutes after Lola was caught, another trail user came by on his snowmachine. The passerby managed to release the trap using his belt. By the time the trap released Lola was dead- 6 to 7 minutes after she was caught.

The trail where the incident occurred is located on Alaska Department of Natural Resources land located within the Mat-Su Borough. Trapping in this area is legal, including using "body-grip" style traps on or near multi-use trails. The Conibear 330 is the largest 'body-grip' trap available in Alaska and is designed to kill quickly. Conibear 330 traps can be purchased online or at Cabela's in Anchorage for \$24.99.



The trap was set under a tree ~30 feet away from the snowmachine trail near the Crooked Creek Trailhead at Mile 118 of the Glenn Highway.

Lola in the trap about three minutes after she was caught

WHAT WE FOUND: SENTIMENTS ABOUT TRAPPING



SENTIMENTS ABOUT TRAPPING IN MULTI-USE AREAS



Many respondents were concerned about the erasure of an Alaskan tradition, with multiple trappers saying they have a positive reaction to seeing wildlife in traps.

Many also say that dog owners have a responsibility to obey leash laws and want to share trails and recreational areas with trappers.



Many respondent stated that they would feel safer if trappers marked their traps, and/or suggested various minimum distances from public trails and roads.

Several respondents reflected that trap encounters made them afraid for their dogs' safety and have changed where and when they recreate. Recreation activities include skiing, mushing, hiking, hunting, and more.

Since 2011, **100%** of trap setback proposals to the Alaska Board of Game **have failed**.

SUGGESTED TRAP SETBACK DISTANCES FROM RESPONDENTS WHO WANTED NO-TRAP BUFFERS AROUND TRAILS

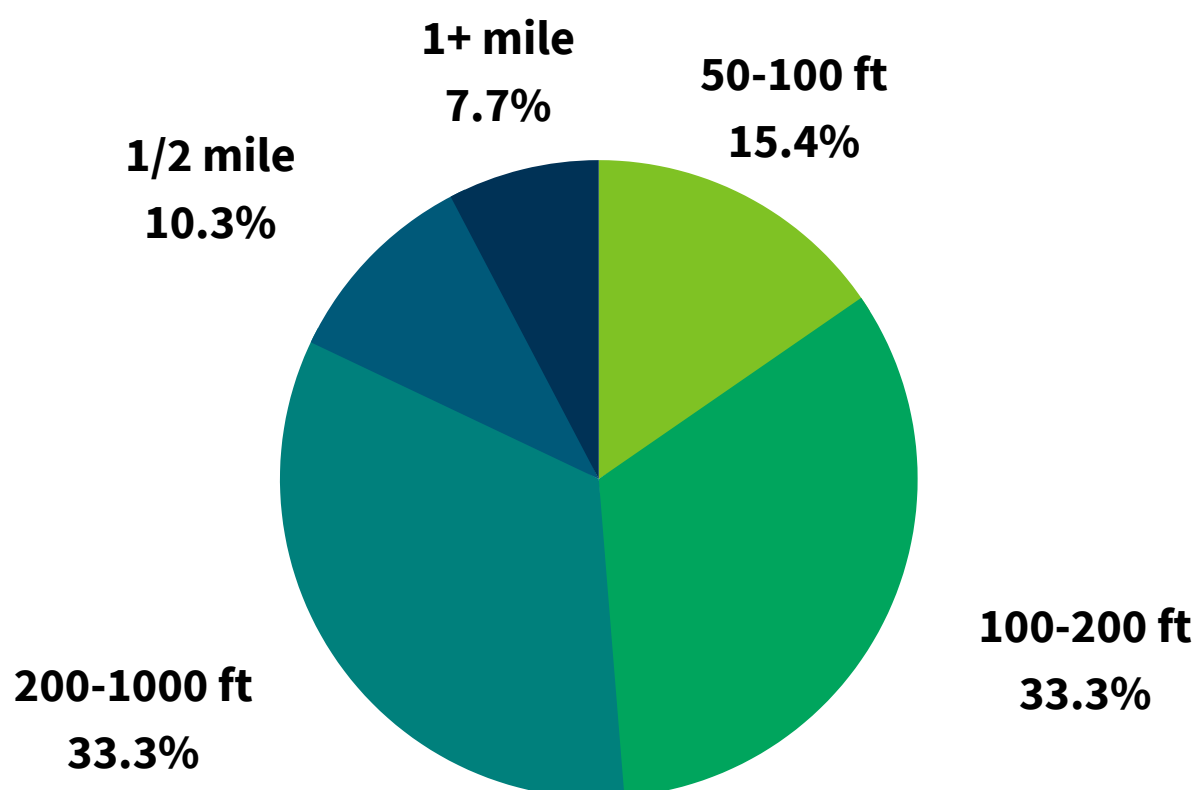




Photo by ADF&G

“ There is ample opportunity for all of us to enjoy the Alaska back country. The big problem is free-running dogs. If dog owners kept their pets on a leash, there would be no conflict. ”

Trapping is a useful component of wildlife management. However, sensible wildlife management requires constant evaluation of methods and regulations. This includes trapping. Alaska trapping regulations are due for re-evaluation.

” By failing to reasonably regulate trapping in high traffic corridors, dog owners are effectively being told that they are not welcome in certain areas. ”



Lola, who was killed by a baited conibear trap in 2021. Photo courtesy of Joni Speiss.

“

I am not against trapping in general, but I think that trapping within a few feet of heavily used public trails and trailheads is unethical and should not be permitted. It makes me hesitate before taking my dog ptarmigan hunting on public lands, which used to be one of my favorite winter activities.

”



Photo by ADF&G

I don't mind trapping, as I use to trap in my younger years. I just think that there should be a certain distance from trails people use for dog mushing, hiking etc. that eliminates worry of pets getting caught in.

“

I think it would be a great middle ground to require markings for traps.

”

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Review the [2021-22 hunting and trapping regulations](#) to know when trapping seasons start in your area. You can also view [areas closed to trapping](#) around the state.

In a specific game management unit, local regulations, ordinances, or state park rules may prohibit access, trapping, the use of firearms, or require an access permit. For information on land status, land ownership, and access, contact: BLM Public Information Center (Anchorage) at (907) 271-5960 or DNR Public Information Center (Anchorage) (907) 269-8400 or visit DNR's website at <http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/index.htm>.

Trapping seasons are open as early as September and can go through May, though most trapping occurs between November and March. [ADF&G states](#) "assume all maintained winter trails are traplines unless otherwise marked." ADF&G also [recommends](#), "if you encounter traps or snares, immediately leash your pet and leave the area."

A brochure, [Trap Safety for Pet Owners](#), produced by ADF&G and the Alaska Trappers Association, illustrates how to remove pets from traps and snares. Visit your local Fish & Game office if you would like a paper copy of this brochure. You can also [watch a series of short videos](#) produced by ADF&G on how to remove a pet from various traps.

It is against state law (AS.16.05.790) to move or tamper with any legally set traps or snares you may encounter. If you believe traps are illegally set, immediately notify the Alaska Wildlife Troopers, Alaska Fish & Wildlife Safeguard (1-800-478-3377) or the nearest Fish & Game office.

You must report incidents of trap removal or tampering to Alaska Wildlife Troopers. If you remove your pet from a snare, the law requires that you leave the snare in place after you remove your pet.

INCIDENTAL CATCH

Continuing to take, or attempting to take, furbearers at a site where a caribou, deer or moose has been killed as a result of being caught in a trap or snare is a violation. Any caribou, deer, or moose that dies as a result of being caught in a trap or snare, whether found dead or euthanized, is property of the state. The trapper who set the trap or snare must salvage the edible meat and surrender it to the state. A trapper who takes a caribou, deer, or moose incidentally may not use any part of that animal. If such a take occurs, the trapper must move all active traps and snares at least 300 feet from the site for the remainder of the regulatory year.

If you observe a violation of Alaska's Fish & Game laws, you can assist the Alaska Wildlife Troopers as well as be eligible for a reward by reporting the violation to the nearest office of the Alaska Wildlife Troopers. You can also call the Alaska Fish & Wildlife Safeguard Hotline at 1-800-478-3377.



Photo by ADF&G

WHAT NOW?

The 2020-21 trapping season was the first year of data collection for Map the Trap. AWA will refine and replicate this process annually to build a repository of information over time. The 2021-22 Map the Trap survey will be available year-round at www.akwildlife.org/safetrails.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

If you had a trap encounter that requires attention from the authorities, find your nearest [Alaska Wildlife Trooper office here](#). You can also [click here](#) to submit an encounter to ADF&G.

Additional external resources:

- [Alaska Department of Fish & Game](#)
- [Alaska Department of Natural Resources](#)
- [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries](#)
- [US Fish and Wildlife Service](#)
- [National Park Service](#)
- [US Bureau of Land Management](#)

If you wish to report a trap encounter to Map the Trap, visit www.akwildlife.org/safetrails and record your experience.

REGULATORY CHANGES

The Board of Game makes most decisions about the State's trapping regulations, including gear restrictions, setbacks, and rules around how frequently traps are checked and if they are labeled.

You can submit a comment to the Board of Game about your thoughts regarding trapping near trails [here](#). Learn more about the Board of Game process by [watching our whiteboard video](#) or visiting the Alaska Board of Game [website](#). If you have concerns or comments about trapping regulations in your community, reach out to your local [Advisory Committee](#).

| STATE | REQUIREMENT TO LABEL TRAPS | REQUIREMENT TO CHECK TRAPS REGULARLY | TRAP SETBACKS FROM TRAILS |
|---------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Alaska | No | No (except in GMU 1C) | Suggested, but not required (with the exception of Juneau which does have setbacks from specific trails); see more here . |
| Idaho | Yes | Yes | Yes; see more here |
| Montana | Yes | Suggested, but not required | Yes; see more here |
| Wyoming | Yes | Yes | Suggested, but not required; see more here |

The table above summarizes trapping regulations by state. Note that trapping regulations vary by land manager - private, municipal, and/or federal land managers may have different trapping regulations than those described above.



@alaskawildlifealliance



Thank you to University of Alaska interns, Yumeko Ziegler and Nick Kerle, and survey participants.

Alaska Wildlife Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization founded by Alaskans in 1978.

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