

A VICTORY FOR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT IN OHIO. . . ISSUE 2

DALE ROACH, Division Of Wildlife, Ohio Department Of Natural Resources, Columbus, OH 43224.

Abstract: During 1975 the Division Of Wildlife in Ohio faced a legislative battle that would have ended all trapping in the Buckeye state. The division, with help from the sportsmen, prevailed and the bill died in committee. Anti-trapping forces, following their legislative defeat, gathered the 235,000 signatures necessary to place an amendment to the Ohio constitution that would have banned all trapping. This amendment, known as Issue 2 was defeated by nearly a 2 to 1 margin. However, nearly 1.2 million people voted for Issue 2 and wanted to stop all trapping. Subsequently the Division Of Wildlife initiated an educational campaign designed to inform the uninformed and non-consumptive wildlife user that regulated hunting, trapping and even fishing are all a part of wildlife management. A bill was introduced and subsequently passed which mandated that all first time hunters take a hunter safety course and all first time trappers take a trapper educational course. A fee of \$5 was established for a trapping permit to partially finance the trapping educational program. Audio visual equipment designed to produce broadcast quality video tapes was purchased to be used in public school systems. The tape productions will teach youngsters all aspects of wildlife management, fish management, law enforcement and the overall responsibilities of the Division of Wildlife, the agency charged with managing all species of wildlife for the benefit of all people of the state of Ohio.

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Ohio's sportsman and the state Division Of Wildlife faced the most serious threat ever to wildlife management during the last decade. Anti-trapping groups from outside the state were determined to stop all trapping of furbearing animals. They fought in the legislative hallways and eventually against a constitutional amendment placed before the voters. The amendment was defeated but a loud and clear message was heard. Inform the uninformed majority and educate the younger generations.

In 1971 an article in "Field & Stream" magazine titled "Our Outspoken Opposition", written by Gary Sitton, stated, "The Opposition, referring to the anti-movement, is far from disorganized, and at some point in the future, coordinated action with some hefty sacks of cash might be possible".

As early as 1971 intelligent, organized and financially sound groups of anti's were emerging from various areas in the United States, Canada and Europe. But to launch an all out attack against all segments of hunting would probably have failed. The timing was *not right, therefore, it made more sense to chip away at individual aspects of sportsman's interests.* Logically where are our weaknesses? Where could they attack the vulnerability of wildlife management? Where could emotional questions be placed before the masses?

They had, undoubtedly, several choices, possibly bow hunting or trophy hunting. If you think in terms of your own state several will come to mind. But the 1 choice where there is a strong emotional base and even a better opportunity to remove a slice of wildlife management is trapping.

Ohio was purposely selected. It has 50,000 trappers, 600,000 hunting license buyers that weren't organized into 1 group, more than 11 million people, many living in metropolitan areas and Ohio is the number 2 state in total annual harvest of furbearing animals. Armed with the above information persons in the organized anti-movement felt they could stop all trapping in the buckeye state which would be a major victory for their cause.

They considered the easiest and quickest way to eliminate trapping was to introduce a bill into the Ohio legislature. Early in 1975 we found ourselves involved in a sometimes bitter legislative battle over the steel leg-hold trap. However, with the help of sports-minded individuals and sportsmen's clubs HB. 179 went down to defeat in the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee. It never reached the House floor for a vote. During the committee hearings, Cleveland Amory and his friends were asked to explain some of the language in their bill, such as "is there a trap that kills all animals humanely and instantly". They were advised this language was vague and could eventually end all trapping. They were asked to amend their bill. They refused. This revealed their intent. They were aware that any 1 judge could easily be swayed to decide no trap existed that kills instantly everytime.

Once the anti-forces in Ohio realized they could not accomplish their goal legislatively they quickly turned to the people of Ohio. It is particularly important to point out that the anti-forces in Ohio were not from Ohio. They were instead out of state organizations such as "*The Friends Of Animals, Inc., The Fund For Animals, The Humane Society Of The United States, Defenders Of Wildlife*". Others with different names, but all from outside Ohio and all with 1 common goal, stop trapping in Ohio and they would cross a major hurdle in stopping wildlife management as we know it.

The anti's get very emotional in their printed comments about wildlife management. Their comments and views go out to their millions of contributors and to legislators. Many find their way into newspapers, magazines, T.V. and radio shows. Some are paid advertisements, others are not. All have a message tied to emotions and asking for contributions.

From 1975 to early 1977 anti-trapping forces ran every conceivable type of advertisement—3-legged dogs, 3-legged raccoons and even a fawn standing beside it's mother lying dead with an arrow in it's side. Anything depicting horror, was used to stimulate people into giving money and convince them their cause was best for the animals.

With coffers bulging from contributions, and finding their path blocked legislatively, they found they could legally place the question of trapping before the people in the form of an amendment to the Constitution. Ohio law provides for this by gathering signatures on petitions equivalent to 10 percent of the votes cast in the previous gubernatorial election. Armed with emotional pitch and blank petitions volunteers set about gathering the necessary signatures. This was a monumental task and they failed n 1976, however. . . 1977 was different. More ads generated more contributions and in 1977 they succeeded in getting the necessary 235,000 signatures. The Division Of Wildlife, Ohio Sportsmen, Trappers And The Uninformed Majority were to vote on a constitutional amendment during November of that year. This amendment if passed could change wildlife management forever. The exact text that appeared on the ballot on November is as follows:

"Section one of this amendment would prohibit securing or attempting to secure possession of a wild bird or wild quadraped by means of setting and placing any device which is designed to close upon the animal's leg for the purpose of holding the animal, preventing its escape and confining it. Also the amendment would prohibit the use of other cruel trapping devices including a foot hold trap. Section two of the amendment makes it a crime to use such trapping devices and provides a civil remedy at law for any citizen who wishes to stop such inhumane trapping. A citizen may enjoin the use of such trapping devices in a court of common pleas and recover the court costs and reasonable attorneys fees involved in obtaining the injunction."

One can readily note that the language on the proposed amendment was incredibly loose, and phrases and descriptions used caused the proposed amendment to be subject to broad interpretations. Simply put, this proposed amendment would prohibit and eliminate trapping in the state of Ohio.

Steve Gray. He directs 1 man whose primary responsibility is to work with the media, radio, T.V., and newspapers.

We heard the message loud and clear to educate, inform and teach. Remember, there are merely a handful of anti's, anti-hunting, anti-trapping and yes even anti-fishing. The silent majority is merely uninformed, and they want to know. Tell them, teach them, inform them. If we had been doing just that possibly the uphill task of defeating Issue 2 in Ohio may not have been such a struggle. We don't want to go through it again, but we will if our right to manage the wildlife resources of Ohio is challenged again.