

Memorandum

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Date: March 27, 2015

To: Sonke Mastrup
Executive Director
Fish and Game Commission

From: Charlton H. Bonham
Director

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Subject: **Presentation for April 9, 2015 Fish and Game Commission (Commission)
Meeting re: Update on Bobcat Protection Act Implementing Regulations.**

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has developed our proposed recommendation for delineating the boundaries in which bobcat trapping would be prohibited consistent with Fish and Game Code §4155(a, b). The boundaries are based on readily identifiable features in accordance with the statute. Additionally, as directed by the Commission, we will include in the regulatory package the option for a statewide ban on bobcat trapping.

Department staff from several units continue our evaluation of alternative fee structures for recovering the Department's costs to implement the bobcat trapping program under Fish and Game Code §4155(e). The Department's fiscal analysis of AB 1213 estimated a total cost to the Department of \$605,073 in the FY 2014/15 and ongoing annual costs of \$341,767 beginning in the FY 2015/16 for enforcement personnel. Those estimates were based on the effort to delineate and enforce closure areas around over 280 state and national parks, national monuments and wildlife refuges in California. The Department recommends a larger network of closed zones that encompass the majority of parks and protected properties, with property-specific closures surrounding individual protected properties that fall within areas that remain open to bobcat trapping.

It is important to note that regardless of the option that the Commission selects there will be enforcement cost. The Department's recommended approach will certainly require enforcement staff to ensure compliance with closed zones and specific protected property restrictions. But, under the option for a statewide ban on bobcat trapping, enforcement costs do not drop to zero.

Part of the Department's ongoing analysis has included seeking input from wildlife officers with the most experience in enforcing existing trapping regulations in areas where bobcats are regularly trapped in the Northern and Central Enforcement Districts. Based on that input and other factors, it is reasonable to conclude that the prospect of banning bobcat trapping in California will still likely require at least a similar level of enforcement effort.

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This projected similar level of enforcement is mostly a function of market prices, which could motivate some trappers regardless of the option selected. Bobcat pelt prices are currently about \$600 per good quality pelt, with prices for excellent quality pelts increasing to \$1,200. Although down from the record prices during the 2014-15 season of about \$2,100, the Department expects these prices to continue to draw trapping interest. Because of the amount of money to be made, the following is expected to occur if bobcat trapping is banned outright:

- Unlawful trappers will transition to leg hold traps, which are difficult to find, requiring additional surveillance efforts by wildlife officers. These traps are considered by many to be inhumane, and are illegal for use in California.
- As with many other CalTIPs, many leads to successful cases come from law abiding hunters, anglers and trappers who are our eyes and ears in the field. Legitimate trappers recognize the behaviors of unlawful trappers better than anyone and have been the source of many good cases. Hence, removing legitimate trappers from the field will likely reduce potential reporting of illegal trapping behavior.
- The probability of bobcats taken with a hunting license and a recreational bobcat hunting tag and being sold on the black market may go up considerably and result in increased enforcement effort.
- Spotlighting for bobcats may increase.

Either under the property-specific closure option or under a total trapping ban enforcement effort is projected to remain substantial. Of course, enforcement effort is not the sole factor that should be used for the Commission's determination. But, the perspective of wildlife officers with substantial experience in the field enforcing existing bobcat trapping regulations has not been a major part of the discussion to date. Therefore, we prepared this summary memorandum and as the Commission desires, enforcement staff will be prepared to brief the Commission with a short PowerPoint presentation as part of the Bobcat Protection Act update (Item 29) on April 9, 2015.

Please contact Chief David Bess, Law Enforcement Division at (916) 654-3812 or David.Bess@wildlife.ca.gov if you have questions or need additional information.

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