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# Organizing an Anti-Trapping Campaign [A Step-by-Step Workbook]

The following is a step-by-step outline to help you organize an anti-trapping campaign. While it is by no means exhaustive, these steps will serve as a useful guide for first-time and seasonal activists alike who want to work on an anti-trapping campaign and, ultimately, end the use of cruel traps in our country.

A) Choose between the basic types of anti-trapping campaigns:

*Targeted Campaigns*

Targeted campaigns have a higher success rate because they focus on an incremental change(s) that may appear reasonable to all interested parties. (An effort to outlaw leghold traps with serrated teeth is an example of a targeted campaign.)

*Broader Reform Campaigns*

Broader reform campaigns have a lower success rate because they seek broad changes that may appear more radical. They will incur greater opposition from trapping and hunting interests that wield a tremendous amount of power at the state and federal levels. (A total ban on the use of all body-gripping traps is an example of a broader-reform campaign.)

*Educational Campaigns*

If trapping, hunting, agricultural, and other related interests are so well entrenched that even the smallest incremental change (or targeted campaign) may be impossible, an educational campaign highlighting the negatives of wildlife trapping may be the way to go. The short-term goal is to bring attention to the issue and educate the public. The hope is that the campaign will educate the public as to why cruel traps are not needed and one day sentiment will change enough to allow for some improvements. (A public-service campaign, with billboards, radio, and direct mail, is an example of an educational campaign.)

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B) Decide on the specific anti-trapping campaign:

Whichever type of campaign is mounted, everyone involved must agree on the rationale and anticipated outcome. Unless these are spelled out from the beginning, activists who have rallied in support of a state legislative bill may become disillusioned and even angry when they discover the bill had no chance of passing (more likely with a broader reform campaign). Similarly, activists seeking incremental changes, such as a ban of a particular type of cruel trap, should be aware that, if they win, trapping will likely continue with other types of traps that may be even worse than the trap they outlawed (more likely with a targeted campaign).

When deciding the type of campaign to mount, keep in mind that anything that makes it more difficult and/or expensive for trappers to continue may discourage many trappers from trapping altogether.

Ideas for Anti-Trapping Campaigns on a Local Level:

- Ban all trapping in your city* — most citywide trapping bans are enacted to “protect people, children, and companion animals.”
- Ban the sale of all fur products in your city or county — a great way to get the “issue” in the media.

Ideas for Anti-Trapping Campaigns on a State Level:

- Limit the use of body-gripping traps on public lands* — could be positioned to address the dangers body-gripping traps pose to domestic animals and threatened and endangered species.
- Prohibit springtime trapping* — remind state commissioners that it is biologically unsound and inhumane to kill animals in the spring, leaving young to starve to death.
- Shorten trap-check times in state trapping regulations* — trap-check times should not be any longer than 24 hours.
- Mandate that trappers receive written permission to trap on private lands*
- Require trappers to post signs where traps are set*
- Mandate competency training and tests for trappers*
- Require trappers to report the number of non-target animals trapped and killed*
- Make it illegal for trappers to sell fur from animals trapped for predator or “nuisance” control purposes*
- Restrict or prohibit the use of traps in high-use recreational areas* — such as campgrounds, hiking and ski trails, roads, residences, or other developed areas.
- Limit the size of traps and the number of traps one trapper can set*

If you're not sure which campaign will be best for your situation, call API at (916) 447-3085.

Notes:

C) Starting an anti-trapping campaign:

1. *Gather your information*

Request from your state wildlife agency — usually from the “furbearer biologist”:

- State trapping laws
- State trapping regulations
- Your state wildlife agency’s publications on trapping, including its rules, and information provided in any trapper education course (in which you may want to enroll)
- Statistics on the number of trapping licenses issued, number of animals trapped by recreational and commercial trappers, and recent pelt prices from fur-buyer reports
- Population data on furbearer populations in the state (don’t be surprised if the agency has little or no such information)
- Reports of all trapping-related law enforcement actions and any public complaints about trapping filed with the agency in recent years
- Information on non-target animals caught in traps (again, the agency may have little or no information, but it’s worth having this fact in writing)

Contact veterinarians and request:

- Reports of trap-related injuries, including photographs or videotape and get permission to use the names of anyone involved with the incident

Contact wildlife rehabilitators and request:

- Reports of trap-related injuries, including photographs or videotape and get permission to use the names of anyone involved with the incident

Search newspaper databases and the Internet for stories about:

- Domestic pets or children harmed by traps
- Incidents of public outcry when a wild animal has been spotted caught in a trap

Find one or more long-time activists from your area and ask about:

- Trapping initiatives that have been done in the past
- Information about your state wildlife agency, its trapping program, and any “friendly” or “unfriendly” employees who work there

2. *Set the scope of your campaign*

It's very hard to run any type of "absolute" campaign. Chances are you will not be able to ban all types of trapping and will have to consider some "exceptions." To figure out what those might be, ask yourself:

If my campaign succeeds, how will it affect . . .

• Homeowners/landlords who trap rats and mice? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

• Backyard gardeners who battle woodchucks, gophers, or moles? \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

• "Nuisance" and pest-control companies? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

• Farmers and ranchers who trap animals to protect their livestock/crops? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

• Scientists or wildlife biologists who trap certain species for research/relocation/reintroduction purposes? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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• State and federal programs that trap animals that may prey upon threatened and endangered species? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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• Programs that trap animals ostensibly to protect public health and safety? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

• Neighborhood beautification and historic preservation groups who battle "nuisance" animals at some of the sites they maintain? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Learn about "non-lethal wildlife control." Think about the exemptions that can be contained in the language of the anti-trapping measure that you are campaigning for that would satisfy these groups concerns while still meeting your mission. Always make sure you know the proven humane methods for resolving wildlife conflicts so you do not inadvertently endorse a method that is even crueler than the one(s) you seek to eliminate.

3. *Determine the legislative or administrative means of achieving your goal*

- For *targeted campaigns* calling for a moderate change in trapping regulations, start with the state agency
- For *broader reform campaigns*, bypass the agency and go directly to the legislature

(*Note* that a statewide trapping change requires that your state legislature or state wildlife agency implement the change. In general, the legislature can enact wildlife laws at will. However, in many states the legislature has issued a broad mandate for the executive branch of government to adopt regulations as necessary to protect the state's natural resources. This means the state wildlife agency and its oversight board or commission can regulate trapping as it sees fit.)

- For *local campaigns*, you will have to work with the city council, county board of supervisors, or some other local government entity vested with the authority to implement and amend laws
- In 24 states, *public ballot initiatives* allow the public to propose and vote on ballot measures, including changes in trapping laws. Between 1990 and 2000, voters in five states (AZ, CA, CO, MA, WA) passed initiatives banning or restricting trapping practices. Know that ballot initiatives are a huge undertaking, especially statewide, and require a great amount of money and widespread support.

- Whatever route you take — state legislature, state wildlife agency, or local government — there will already be procedures in place for introducing and considering proposed laws or regulations. Ask about and learn these procedures.

- Legislative bodies may also have attorneys available to help you draft your proposed law or ordinance.

- Seek an influential sponsor for your measure, ideally a powerful state or local legislator who can be a huge boost to your campaign. Also seek advice from other groups or individuals that regularly lobby the legislature or state wildlife agency.

Notes:

**4. Reach out to allies**

Developing a broad base of support will greatly increase your chance for success. Set up meetings with the following groups and present your anti-trapping campaign. Your goal is to ask them to sign on as an endorser. Before writing your law or regulation, you should contact key groups in your state or local area to make sure their concerns are addressed. Then they are sure to be on your side.

Start with the most likely allies, such as animal and environmental advocacy organizations. Find names and numbers for:

- Local Animal Shelters & Humane Societies \_\_\_\_\_

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- Veterinarians and wildlife rehabilitation individuals and organizations \_\_\_\_\_

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Next contact organizations who might need a little more convincing to sign on as an ally to your campaign. These groups are important because not only will they provide a wide range of support, but they will help your campaign to be perceived as “more mainstream.” Find names and numbers for:

- Homeowner and neighborhood groups \_\_\_\_\_

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- Organic and natural farmers \_\_\_\_\_

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- Civic and religious organizations \_\_\_\_\_

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- Progressive political parties such as the Green Party \_\_\_\_\_

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- Well-known and/or influential individuals in your area \_\_\_\_\_

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- Other \_\_\_\_\_

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5. *The elements of the campaign*

The two main components of any anti-trapping campaign are:

- a) educating the general public; and,
- b) convincing decision-makers to enact the change you seek.

Most people have a basic understanding that trapping wildlife is cruel, even if they don't oppose it. You may find people who believe trapping, or specific traps, are outlawed when in fact they are not, or who believe that trapping does not occur on public lands when in fact it does. Your challenge is to provide these people with factual information. Educating the general public can also help you convince the decision-makers.

Notes on Resources for Trapping Information:

Credibility is your key to success! Campaigns must be based on facts, not misconceptions. Remember, if your credibility begins to erode, so will your support.

## Using the media

Local media — newspapers, radio, television, even the Internet — can play a major role in helping your message reach both the general public and the decision-makers. Start by preparing a folder for the media that contains concise fact sheets and relevant information about your campaign. Your folder, or “campaign press kit,” should contain:

- A simple “overview” that explains your campaign
- A list of the kind of traps that are legal in your state
- A list of the species that it is legal to trap in your state
- Make it clear what your campaign will do (e.g., ban body-gripping traps for wildlife)
- Make it clear what your campaign will not do (e.g., will still keep legal live-traps such as cages for solving conflicts with wildlife)
- The actual text of your measure
- If your opposition speaks out against your proposal, prepare a rebuttal fact sheet with succinct responses to their criticisms
- Any relevant newspaper articles or stories that relate to your campaign (e.g., stories on companion animals or children who have been harmed or killed by the types of traps you seek to ban)

Always have one or more knowledgeable persons available to speak with the media about your campaign.

## How to get the media interested in covering your campaign

Encourage news coverage by notifying the media of a specific event, such as a public demonstration, or a legislative or administrative hearing on your proposal.

Be prepared to contact the media immediately if a trapping tragedy occurs in your area. If anyone alerts you to a situation in which an animal, wild or domestic, has been brought in with trap injuries, check it out, and then notify the media.

Even when the media have little or no interest in your campaign, there are still ways for you to get your message out:

- Submit “Letters to the Editor” and “Guest Opinion” articles
- Many papers have “Speak Out” phone lines where readers may voice opinions
- If a newspaper has phone-in or email polls, suggest a poll with a question on trapping
- Radio and television stations also offer their own versions of public forums. Investigate what is available and use these media outlets to advance your cause
- Submit stories, opinions, and letters to on-line media outlets as well

Diligent and consistent use of these forums can inexpensively keep a campaign before the public and generate

continued support for your goals. But remember that media will probably present “the other side” as well. Anticipate this and include solid facts that will counter those given by the other side.

### Taking your message to the public

In addition to using the media, you can reach the public directly, in as many ways as you can think of. For example:

- Table at busy locations (always check to see if you need a permit from the police department)
- Leaflet during other demonstrations and public gatherings, like free concerts in the park
- Contact social, civic, and other groups and offer to provide a speaker for upcoming meetings
- Other ideas \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When engaging the public, always have printed material available. Your handouts should include:

- Very simply, what it is you propose
- What they can do to help
- How they can contact you or your group in the future
- If you have a specific legislative or regulatory proposal under consideration, tell the public how they can contact the decision-makers (by mail, email, phone, & fax) to express support for your measure

When tabling, some of the things you'll want to have include:

- The above handout
- Postcards or paper available with pens and extra chairs so individuals can sit down and write a supportive note to the decision-maker(s)
- Try to find a location with access to electricity so you can bring a TV/VCR and continuously show trapping footage (available from API).

Your goal is to make it easy for people to act right away, when they are motivated. Petitions and emails are not especially effective since they carry little weight with decision-makers, which is why providing paper and pens to write a note is important. Even pre-formatted letters that require only a signature do not hold nearly as much influence as personal communication from a constituent.

### Taking your message to decision-makers

In the end, a relatively small body of elected or appointed officials will decide the fate of your measure. If yours is a state bill, it will be assigned to a legislative committee probably dealing with natural resources and/or agriculture for a hearing and vote before it can proceed to the full legislature. Make every attempt to meet with each decision-maker in person to discuss the merits of your proposal and to answer any questions he or she

may have. When attending these meetings, it's important to bring along one or more constituents as well as any influential supporters.

If a public hearing is scheduled, rally your supporters to attend and arrange for witnesses with diverse backgrounds to testify. Some examples include:

- A rancher who uses non-lethal techniques instead of traps to deter predators
- A person whose companion animal was injured or killed in a trap
- A veterinarian who has seen the injuries a trap can inflict
- A hiker or wildlife photographer who doesn't want traps placed near a trail
- A biologist who can address the impacts of trapping on endangered species

If there is no public hearing but a vote is to take place, have as many supporters as possible attend. Distribute pins they can wear, or provide something to let the decision-makers know that a large number of people care about the issue. This public display of support for "our side" can affect their vote.

Even a "win" does not mean it's over

If you win, celebrate! But make sure to plan your next move — such as guarding against any legal or legislative challenge to your successful measure. If you lose, take all you have learned during the campaign and put it to good use when you try again — as you should! Also, remember that you educated a number of people with your message. Public education is key to the success of any anti-trapping campaign and, over time, an educated public can push for positive changes for animals!

The campaign to end the trapping of wildlife will be long and difficult, with both wins and losses along the way. But nothing will be accomplished if attempts are not made, again and again. We may lose some battles but, with hard work and dedication, we will make this planet a kinder and gentler place for wildlife!

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