

Leg-holds make for gruesome animal deaths

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

No tool in Wildlife Services' arsenal kills more nonselectively – or slowly – than the leg-hold trap.

Since 2000, more than 90 species of wildlife have died by mistake in agency traps, including pronghorn antelope, mule deer, river otters, swift foxes, badgers, porcupines and federally protected bald eagles, government records show.

But whether animals are caught accidentally or not, they often struggle for days and die of exposure, injuries and other causes long before a trapper returns to the site.

"They suggest traps be checked once a week, but that's all it is, a suggestion," said Gary Strader, a former Wildlife Services trapper in Nevada from 2006 to 2009. "There are traps that are not checked for literally months at a time."

By then, little is left but steel and bone. "I've found traps that were Wildlife Services that were never checked, come across them years later with skeletal remains of skunks or badgers or coyotes," said Tony Wasley, a mule deer biologist with the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

Leg-hold traps have been banned in more than 80 nations and outlawed or restricted in eight states, including California, where voters in 1998 passed a proposition banning leg-hold traps, but allowing padded traps in some situations.

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