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# Governor signs bill to ban trapping of bobcats around parks

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BY IAN JAMES

Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill on Friday that will prohibit fur trappers from catching bobcats near national and state parks and other wildlife refuges in California.

The Bobcat Protection Act of 2013, or AB 1213, grew out of a controversy in the town of Joshua Tree earlier this year when a man found an empty cage trap on his property and other people noticed that bobcats they used to see had vanished.

The bill is to establish a no-trapping zone around Joshua Tree National Park effective Jan. 1. The bill also directs the California Fish and Game Commission to establish similar no-trapping areas for bobcats around other national and state parks, as well as around national monuments and wildlife refuges.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife says 1,499 bobcats were taken by trappers during last year's season, up from 457 bobcats two years earlier. Higher prices paid for pelts have been attracting more interest among trappers.

The bill, which was proposed by Democratic Assemblyman Richard Bloom of Santa Monica, will also prohibit trapping of bobcats on private land without the written consent of the owner.

In addition to signing the bill, Brown issued a letter asking the Legislature to work with his office "to secure funding to survey our bobcat population."

The Department of Fish and Wildlife has based its management strategy for bobcat populations on several studies carried out in California in 1978 and 1980. Those studies led to a statewide estimate of more than 74,000 bobcats

in 1981, and a "sustainable harvest" estimate of 14,400 bobcats per year.

Brown said that once a new survey is carried out, the Fish and Game Commission "should consider setting population thresholds and bobcat trapping tag limitations."

The bill's approval was applauded by residents of Joshua Tree and by the Center for Biological Diversity, which had pushed for the law.

"The bill would never have happened absent the incredible effort put forth by the residents of Joshua Tree, who are fiercely protective of the national park and its wildlife," said Brendan Cummings of the Center for Biological Diversity. He said the governor's statement was also significant "in that it recognizes that the department's current trapping policies are premised on outdated science."

Trappers and fur sellers had opposed the bill. Nathan Brock, a trapper whose cage trap set off the controversy in Joshua Tree, said bobcat populations are stable or expanding across the country. He noted that California has supported larger harvests of bobcats in the past and that wilderness areas have grown in the state.

“This bill was a solution looking for a problem. If bobcats weren’t cute this would be a non issue,” Brock said in an email following the governor’s approval of the law. “No one is trying to outlaw coyote hunting. No one is trying to stop raccoon trapping/hunting. Just bobcats. The bobcat is elevated to deity status amongst the bill supporters. It makes no logical sense.”