Wildlife advocates crowded into a California Fish and Game Commission hearing in Santa Rosa Thursday to express support for a ban on trapping and killing bobcats for their pelts.

The Bobcat Protection Act, which Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law in 2013, was originally intended as a ban on the commercial trapping of bobcats. But it was amended before he signed it only to prevent traps around wildlife refuges, national and state parks and wildlife areas in California.

The purpose of Thursday’s hearing was to hear what the public thinks about a proposal from Commissioner Richard Rogers to restore the law to its original intent and ban the trapping of bobcats and the sale of their pelts. Based on what they heard, the commission expects to return in June with a more concrete bobcat plan.

The vast majority of the 42 speakers supported restoring the ban.

“To kill a living creature without an adequate reason violates a fundamental principle of wildlife management.
Looking to science

“Science should be what they use to make a decision,” Lynch said. “I can talk about ethics all day, too, but this body is supposed to make decisions based on science.”

Terry Mullen, a Department of Fish and Wildlife game warden, said during the hearing that a ban on bobcat trapping could actually lead to more illegal poaching of bobcats.

He said that legal trappers often serve as the “eyes and ears” for wardens and help them bust poachers. Without the legal trappers, more rangers would be needed to track down the illegal hunters.

Bill Gaines, president of the California Outdoor Heritage Alliance, agreed.

“Banning bobcat trapping does cater to poachers,” he said.

Commissioner Michael Sutton wasn’t buying it.

“I’m skeptical, frankly, that a legal trade helps to control an illegal trade,” said Sutton, adding that this argument was also used to justify hunting elephants and rhinos in Africa, where the illegal trade of ivory and rhino horns is threatening to render both species extinct. In most cases, he said, poaching is not kept at bay by legalizing hunting.

Rick Hopkins, a wildlife biologist, argued that there is no scientific evidence that bobcat trapping is an effective wildlife management tool. Other speakers, some of them on the verge of tears, said the killing of such a beautiful animal is ecologically, ethically and economically bankrupt. It is simply outrageous, said one man, that bobcat killing is still allowed solely “so that people in far-off lands can have fancy bedroom slippers.”

The most poignant argument probably came from six children from Manor Elementary, a public school in Fairfax.

‘It’s just cruel’

“It is disgusting that people are killing the beautiful bobcats,” said Emerson Bergen, a fourth-grader. “When I heard about the bobcats being killed I was horrified... It’s just cruel that people could do such a thing to our beautiful creatures.”

The commission is expected to present new regulatory language on whether to amend the law in June.