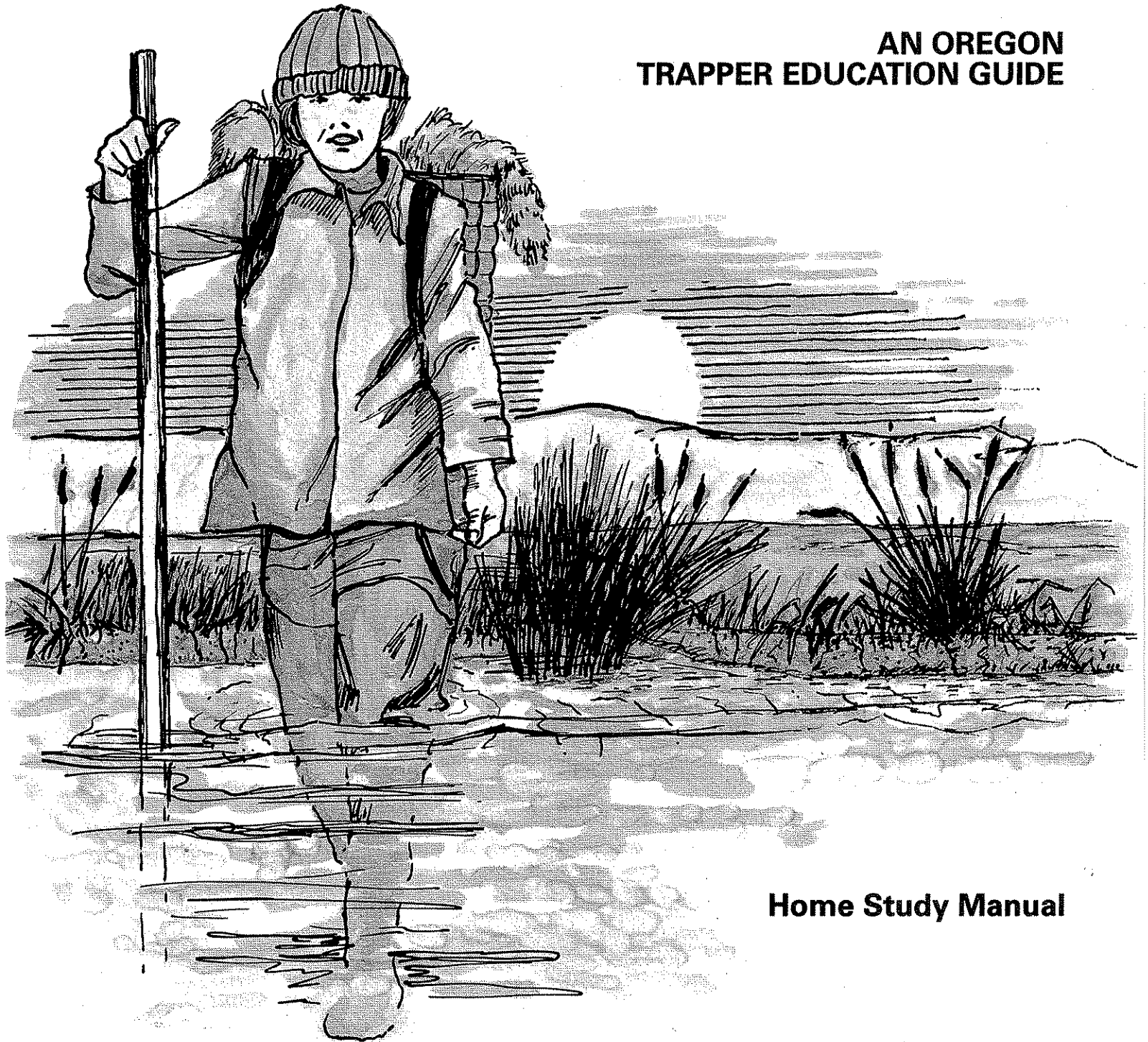


Responsible Trapping

**AN OREGON
TRAPPER EDUCATION GUIDE**



Home Study Manual

Introduction

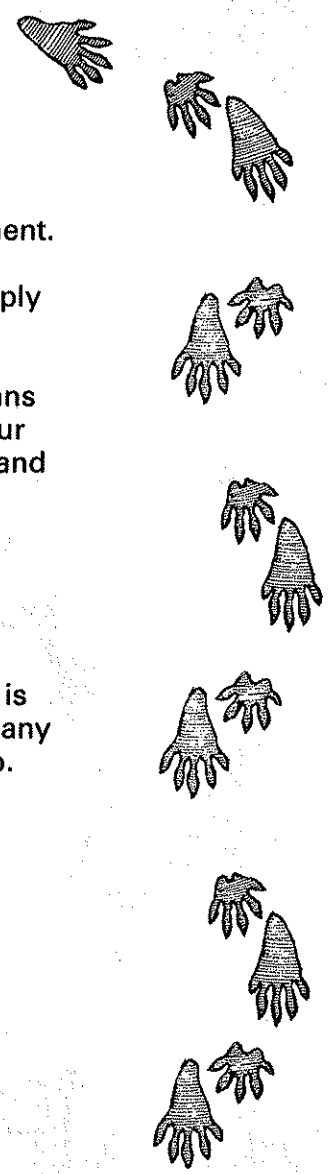
SO, YOU WANT TO BE A TRAPPER...

This course is the beginning of what could be a lifetime of outdoor enjoyment. Trappers are among the keenest outdoor observers, a skill that must be developed and sharpened through years of experience in the wilds. If you apply the knowledge you gain in this course and practice faithfully, you can also develop this skill.

The title of this manual is **Responsible Trapping**. Responsible trapping means more than just setting traps and preparing pelts; it means *you* must meet your responsibility to landowners, to the "catch," to other trappers, to the public, and to yourself. Being a *responsible* trapper is hard work, but it is necessary if trapping is to survive as an outdoor recreational activity in the future.

We see the world changing all around us. Some people now question the need for trapping, even though it is an old and respected art. Each trapper's knowledge and conduct will play a large part in the future of the sport. What tomorrow will hold is really up to *you*.

Responsible Trapping is your main source of information for this course. It is not a complete manual; trapping is an art that you will have to practice for many years and keep learning during your entire life. This is what good trappers do.



Get Set to Trap

A TRAPPER EDUCATION HANDBOOK
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511 Eastlake Avenue E. P.O. Box C-19000
Seattle, WA 98109
(206) 624-3845

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VOCABULARY

camouflage—disguise.

carnivore—flesh-eating animal such as a lion, tiger, or bear.

conserve—to keep from loss or being used up.

dispatch—to put to death quickly.

ethics—the principles of right or wrong.

gambrel—horizontal board with hooks.

habitat—place where an animal or plant naturally lives or grows.

harvest—gather and bring home for one's use.

inhumane—unfeeling; cruel.

lure—attract with a bait.

natural resources—materials supplied by nature.

nocturnal—active in the night.

predator—one who hunts other animals.

prime—of greatest value or best quality.

renewable—able to be replaced by new material or a new thing of the same sort.

sets—the traps and their lures together.

surplus—amount over and above what is needed.

tainted—decayed; spoiled.

trapline—area where traps are set.

violate—break a law, agreement, promise, etc.

wetlands—swamps or marshes, especially as an area preserved for wildlife.

1 Oregon's Trapping Heritage

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Explain the importance of trapping to the exploration of Oregon.
- Identify the reasons for the decline of some furbearers.
- List three traits of a good trapper.

Oregon's history is full of tales of trappers and trapping. The trappers were the first group of white men to push into the Oregon Country and establish outposts. The stories of this beautiful region and the profitable fur resource to be found here encouraged others to come to the area. So in many ways, trappers were responsible for the early settlement of our state.

The Sea Traders

In 1778 during his third voyage, Captain Cook traded for a cargo of sea otter pelts with the Indians at Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island. These pelts were later sold in Canton, China at very high prices. A great demand developed for the pelts, encouraging Spain and Russia to come to the area to trade. Soon, the Americans came too. It wasn't long before the Americans were the most active traders in the area. They continued to operate trading voyages and trade with the Indians until about 1805, when the demand for fur fell off in China.

Trappers Come to Oregon

Meanwhile, another demand for fur emerged in Europe. Hats made from beaver pelts became very popular. Wealthy Europeans paid high prices for hats and clothing made from beaver, mink, and other furs.

British fur companies began pushing westward seeking beaver for the European market. The North West Company was formed in 1775 by the British, and it was not long until the first trading posts were established on the upper Columbia and Fraser Rivers.

The British wanted to establish trading posts as far as the Pacific Ocean. But John Jacob Astor's American company, the Pacific Fur Company, established Fort Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia in 1811 first! When the war of 1812 began a year later, Astor sold out to the North West Company when he learned that a British warship was on its way to the fort. So, the British again controlled the fur trade in the Oregon Country.

Attempts by Americans to re-establish control over the fur trade ended in failure. In 1821, the British North West Company combined with the Hudson's Bay Company under the leadership of Dr. John McLoughlin. Fort Vancouver, completed in 1825, served as the center of the Oregon Country fur trade until 1849. Fort Vancouver was an active trading center during this period. For instance, between 1834 and 1837, 405,472 beaver pelts alone were sold at the fort! The company moved to Vancouver Island in Canada when Oregon became a U.S. Territory. Many trappers moved north with the company. And because of the uncontrolled harvesting, many beaver populations were left at dangerously low levels.

People and Furbearers

Even though the days of the free-ranging trapper were numbered in Oregon, it did not mean that trapping came to an end. Early settlers found trapping to be an important source of food and money during winter months. Since there were still no limits on how many furbearers could be taken, some species were seriously over-harvested during this time. In addition, wolves, coyotes, cougars, and bobcats were damned because they preyed on the growing numbers of livestock. In 1843, the Territorial Government established bounties on these predators to control livestock losses.

As more and more people came to Oregon, loss of habitat and continued trapping and hunting took their toll on furbearers. Finally, Oregon passed laws protecting some furbearers in the 1890s. For instance, the season on beaver trapping was closed in 1899 and did not reopen until 1917.

Many new trapping laws were passed by the legislature in 1913 to protect furbearers, some of which are still in force today. They classified otter, mink, fisher, marten, and muskrat as furbearers, provided for an open trapping season from November 1 to February 28, prohibited the use of game birds or animals for bait, prescribed a penalty for disturbing the traps of others, and required trappers to report their catch annually.

Protective regulations based on the 1913 law have continued to be enforced, although some have been changed over the years. One of the most important changes came in 1932 when the legislature granted the Game Commission authority to set trapping regulations. Another significant change was made in 1961 when Oregon discontinued bounty payments, thus recognizing that this program was ineffective as a means of controlling predators. The regulation and management of all furbearers remains an important job of the Department of Fish and Wildlife today.

Today, furbearers have made a strong comeback. Trapping is an outdoor recreational activity that continues to attract many people who enjoy the natural world. Running a trapline is a frontier experience for some trappers. For others, the fascination of trapping lies in its difficulty. A successful trapper needs keen powers of observation, good outdoor skills, and a complete knowledge of furbearers, management, and furbearer regulations.

2

Trapping and Wildlife Management

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Give three examples of renewable resources.
- Identify three reasons why the furbearer resource needs to be managed.

Two Kinds of Natural Resources

Throughout the 20th Century people have become more aware about our natural resources. There are two kinds of natural resources: non-renewable and renewable. Non-renewable resources can never be replaced once they are used. Some examples are oil, natural gas, and coal. There is only a certain amount of each in the earth and they cannot be grown. Once they are used up they are gone.

With renewable resources, certain amounts can be used with no danger of running out. This is because they can reproduce themselves. An example of a renewable resource is timber. Trees grow back when they are cut down. People must be careful though not to cut down all the trees—only a certain amount can be harvested. Enough trees need to be left to grow for harvest in the future.

Furbearers, and all wildlife, are renewable resources too. Like trees, beaver can reproduce to “grow back” their populations. But people must not harvest too many beavers. Remember what the early trappers did? They caused the beaver to become scarce in many parts of Oregon.

Furbearers can be a never-ending resource if trappers follow a few guidelines. These guidelines are called principles of wildlife management. These principles are important because they 1) prevent furbearers from becoming scarce, and 2) permit limited use of this great wildlife resource.

Principles of Wildlife Management

But why is it necessary to “manage” wildlife? In Chapter One, you learned what happened when the beaver was trapped without any management. In a few

years, there were hardly any beavers left to trap. Wise management allows trappers to use some of the furbearer resource, but not all of it. This way, there will always be animals to breed and produce young for the next year. Management also tries to place the number of animals in balance with the *habitat*. When furbearers are not in balance with the habitat, some will die because of lack of food, lack of shelter, or disease.

In addition, many furbearers cause damage. For example, beavers flood crop fields and mink raid chicken houses. As any farmer knows, a few raccoons can ruin a whole crop of corn. One other danger that comes with too many furbearers is the spread of disease. Large populations of foxes are more likely to spread rabies and distemper among themselves. They may also pass these diseases to farm animals or people.

A surplus of animals damages the land in other ways, too. Muskrats dig tunnels through the land around a pond and cause flooding. If too many furbearers live in one area, they will eat up the supply of vegetation. This will destroy the habitat for not only the furbearers, but all other animals as well.

In pre-colonial days *predators* such as the mountain lion, wolf, and bear acted as a natural control on the furbearer population. These predators are not common in most areas today. So trapping is needed to help control the number of furbearers.

Although the furbearer population (like all animals) varies because of weather or available food, their population remains fairly constant today. Managed trapping does not endanger the wildlife resource. It actually protects the furbearer resource and its habitat by controlling the number of furbearers.

Wildlife management ensures that only surplus animals are harvested so proper population levels are maintained. Laws and regulations are used to govern these harvests. Trapping seasons are established, during the fall and winter months. Annual limits and regulations are set based on furbearer population levels. By following these laws, trappers allow wildlife to reproduce in the spring to “grow back” their population after the fall and winter harvest.

Money from the sale of hunting licenses is used for wildlife programs. These programs research new ways to let all people fairly use the nation’s lands and waters.

Wildlife management practices can include setting up game refuges and wildlife management areas to provide suitable habitats for furbearers to reproduce. Other habitat management programs help land-owners to maintain and improve the habitats on their land. These programs encourage research on wildlife populations on which hunting and trapping regulations are based.

Yesterday trapping was important in developing the nation. Today it is an important management tool in the wise use of our natural resources for the future. Through the principles of wildlife management, furbearers, like trees, are a renewable resource for trappers to harvest every year.

3 Trapping Ethics and Responsibilities

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Explain why trapping is a privilege and not a right.
- Define the word ethics.
- List the four things trappers have a responsibility to.

Furbearers are a public resource. Through laws and regulations the public permits the harvest of furbearers. But this harvest is a privilege, not a right, for trappers. This privilege can be taken away by the public if the public thinks that trapping is *inhumane* and a threat to the furbearer wildlife resource.

Trappers must do more than follow the law. The best way to protect the right to trap is by following a code of behavior called *personal ethics*. Although thousands trap each year they are only a small fraction of the country's citizens. Practicing the following code of ethics will give trappers a strong sense of responsibility and ensure that trapping will remain a part of outdoor recreation and wildlife management programs.

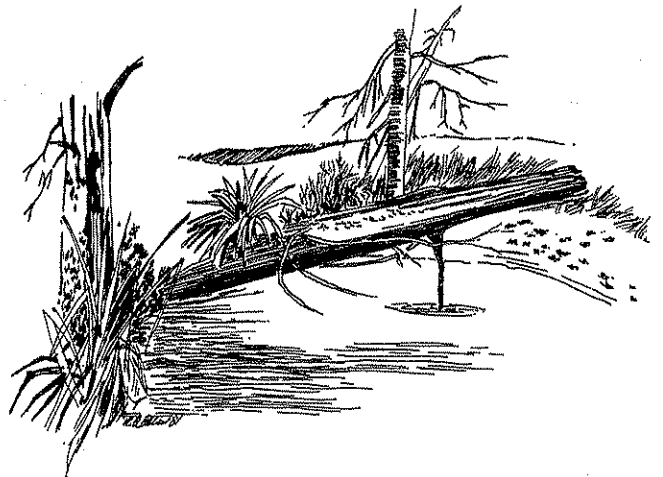
A Code for Responsible Trapping

1. Have landowners' permission before trapping on their land.
2. Do not set traps in areas where farm animals may be caught.
3. Make drowning water *sets* if possible.
4. Check traps regularly, preferably in the early morning.
5. Record trap locations accurately.
6. Identify all traps with your license (brand) number.
7. Dispose of animal *carcasses* properly so as not to offend others.
8. Make an effort to trap in areas where there is a surplus of animals.
9. Promptly report the presence of diseased animals to wildlife authorities.
10. Support and help train new trappers.
11. Know and follow all trapping regulations.
12. Support enforcement of all regulations.
13. *Dispatch* trapped furbearers in a humane manner.

Responsibility to the Resource

A successful trapper learns all about furbearers by spending as much time as possible in the field. Pre-season scouting can be enjoyable and helpful. It offers the chance for studying furbearer population signs, their activities, travel routes, and feeding areas. This improves your trapping results in the field.

An area with both food supply and good habitat is the best place to trap since furbearer populations are likely to be highest there.



An important rule of successful trapping is that a few well-made sets make better catches than many poorly made sets. So do not make more sets than you can handle. Too many sets can lead to sloppy trap tending.

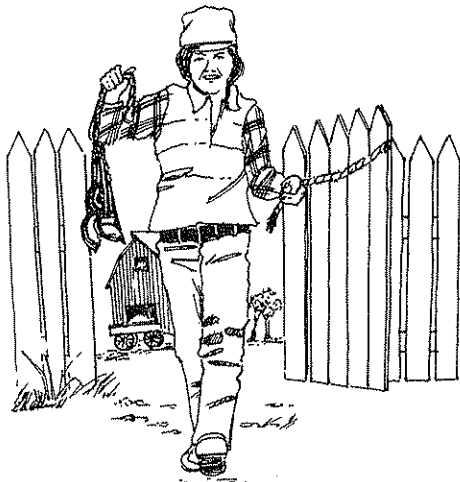
A major part of your personal ethics as a trapper is to check traps regularly. Early morning is the best time to run your trapline. Many furbearing animals are more active at night and likeliest to be trapped at that time. Prompt collection of any trapped furbearers is humane.

The non-trapping public will be quicker to understand the merits of trapping if all steps are taken to trap as humanely as possible. This includes use of the right types and sizes of traps, proper sets, the use of drowning sets whenever possible, and the prompt checking of traps.

Responsibility to the Landowner

Always get landowner permission to trap on private land. This is both a legal requirement as well as a matter of common sense. Breaking this rule could lead to arrest for trespassing, loss of traps, and fur catch.

Many landowners welcome responsible trappers. Just remember that you are a guest when you are on someone else's land. Use good manners! Be careful to leave livestock gates as you found them.



Do not make your sets where non-target animals, such as house pets, are likely to find them. Avoid the use of baits and lures that attract the wrong animals. Let the landowner know where your traps are set to help prevent accidents. Release non-target animals quickly and carefully. Return any trapped pets to their owners or notify them quickly. Conduct yourself in such a way that you will be welcome to return.

Responsibility to the Public

Furbearers are a natural resource that belong to the trapping and non-trapping public alike. Trapping laws and regulations are made for a purpose. They are to conserve the furbearer resource.

Each year wildlife agents make many arrests for violations. The violators arrested are actually thieves, stealing from a public resource. Trapping violators are a threat to you, because they give trapping a bad image. Illegal trapping is the cause of some landowners closing their lands to any trapping.

Follow and support the trapping regulations by reporting any trappers you notice violating any laws. It is your job as a responsible trapper to report violations. Here's how:

CALL THE *TURN IN POACHERS (TIP)* PROGRAM HOTLINE

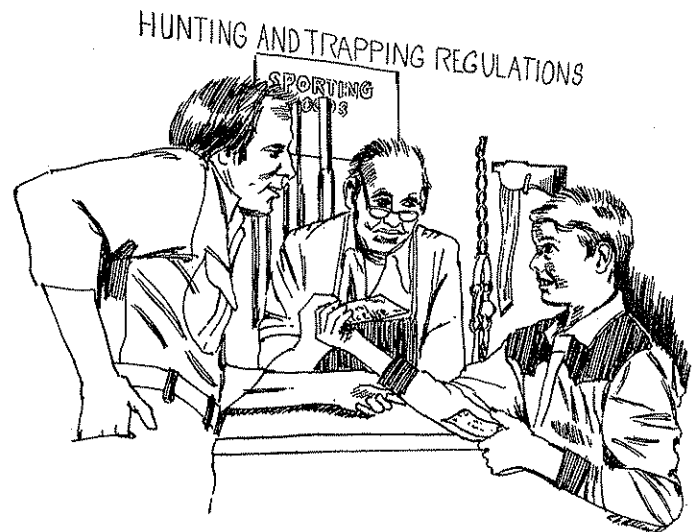
1-800-452-7888

Things to remember when reporting:

1. Vehicle description (color, license number, make, and model).
2. Names and addresses of violators, if known.
3. Place and time of violation.
4. The violation that you saw.
5. Who did what (driver, passenger, etc.).

Failure to properly dispose of carcasses of trapped animals is also a threat to all trappers. Many times this can offend the public. One good method is to eat them! Beaver, muskrat, opossum and raccoon are all good table meat. It is also possible to use part of the carcass as bait or to sell it to a fur dealer. Finally, a fourth way to solve this problem is to bury them in a good place. This recycles them back into the natural environment.

The future of harvesting furbearers depends on public acceptance of the sport. The public is more likely to support the taking of furbearers if they know that the furharvesters are conducting their activities in a responsible manner.



Responsibility to Other Trappers

Make a practice of going out of your way to avoid another trapper's sets. Do not even walk close to them out of curiosity, because any human scent you leave lessens the trapper's chances.

Respect another trapper's territory. Do not set a trap where someone already has a trapline. Your trapping activity may reduce the chances for either of you to make good catches. It would also be poor sportsmanship.

Your biggest responsibility to other trappers is to follow the Code for Responsible Trapping at the beginning of this chapter. The future of trapping depends on public acceptance. If the public thinks too much trapping is done without regard for the future of furbearers, all trapping could be outlawed. Your best defense against losing this privilege is a strong sense of personal responsibility. This will make a good image for the sport of trapping which will benefit all trappers.

4 Trapping Equipment

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Describe the differences between the three major kinds of traps.
- List five pieces of equipment needed for land trapping and three others needed for water trapping.
- Identify the importance of lures and baits.

The right equipment is important to the trapper. Equipment should be of high enough quality to do a good job. It should be enough to permit efficiency on the trapline. Proper equipment will add to the pleasure and profit of trapping.

Traps

Traps are the most important item because they actually catch the furbearer. The most commonly used trap is the leghold trap. Its operation is simple: when the furbearer steps on a pan in the center of the trap, two smooth arms, called "jaws", are released and come together, gripping the leg. The leghold trap does not have teeth; the toothed trap is illegal in most states and provinces. The popularity of leghold traps is due to their versatility. They come in several sizes

and can be used both on land and in water. Leghold traps can be set to capture specific furbearers and avoid nontarget species. When an unwanted animal is caught it usually can be released unharmed.

Leghold Traps

There are three basic types of leghold traps: the **longspring**, the **coilspring**, and the **underspring** or **jump trap**, which is similar in shape to the coilspring.

Longspring traps are harder to hide, but they are also heavier—an advantage in drowning the catch. When easy concealment is not a problem and the extra weight is an advantage (as in beaver trapping), either single or double longspring traps may be the best choice.

Coilspring traps have the advantage of being smaller than longspring traps and are useful when space is limited. They are the fastest of the foot-hold traps, and are often used in trapping predators.

Underspring or jump traps are more compact (like coilspring traps), and are easier to hide than longspring traps. They are also a little lighter to carry than the longspring. Some manufacturers produce both single and double underspring traps.

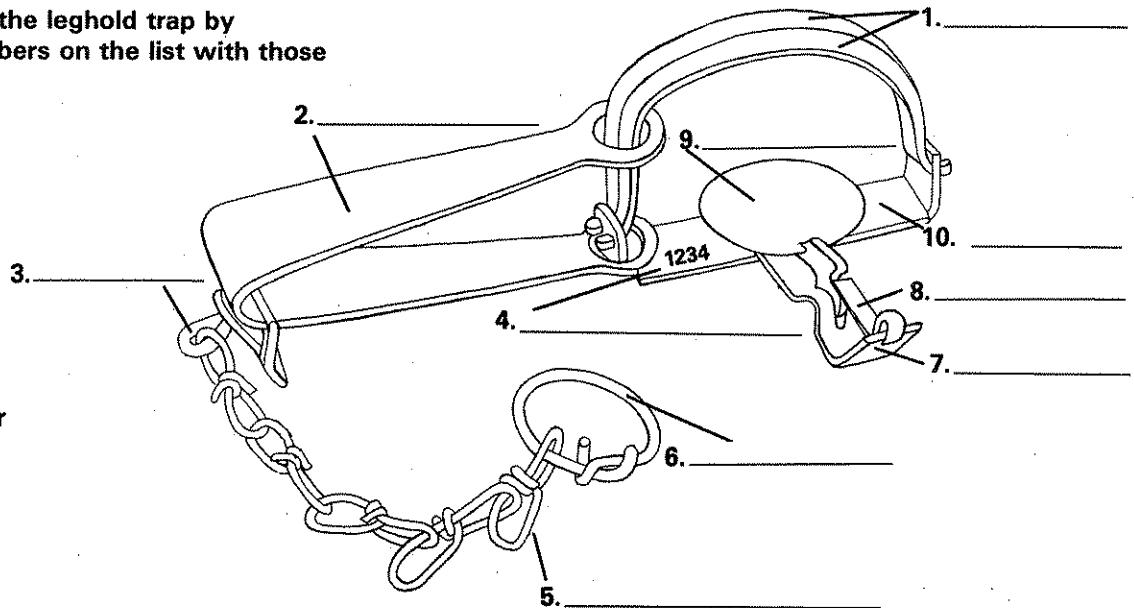
Stoploss traps are also available from several manufacturers. They have an additional spring-loaded jaw or guard that prevents the catch from escaping. Many muskrat trappers use these kinds of traps almost exclusively.

Leghold traps come in the following sizes: no. 1 for muskrat, mink, skunk, and weasel; no. 1½ for opossum, mink, raccoon, and fox; no. 2 for fox (although no. 1½ is recommended for all fox trapping); and nos. 3 and 4 for beaver. It is usually wise to use the no. 1½ on a water trapline where strong, active furbearers such as raccoon and mink are being sought. Only traps with good springs and in good

SKILL BUILDER

Label the parts of the leghold trap by matching the numbers on the list with those on the diagram.

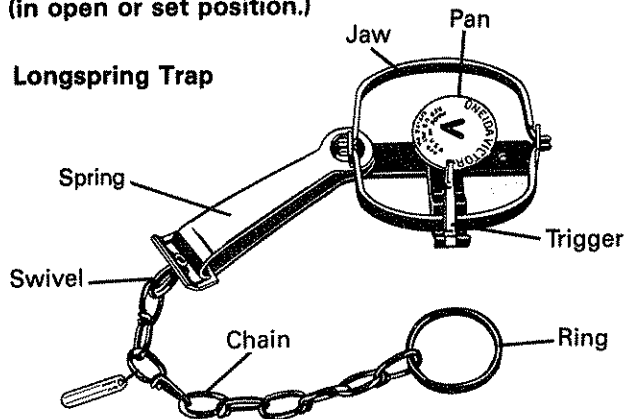
1. Arms or Jaws
2. Spring
3. Swivel
4. Brand Number
5. Chain
6. Ring
7. Cross
8. Dog
9. Pan
10. Bottom



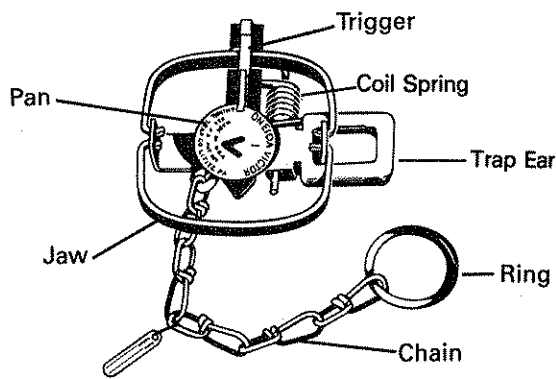
Basic Leghold Traps

(in open or set position.)

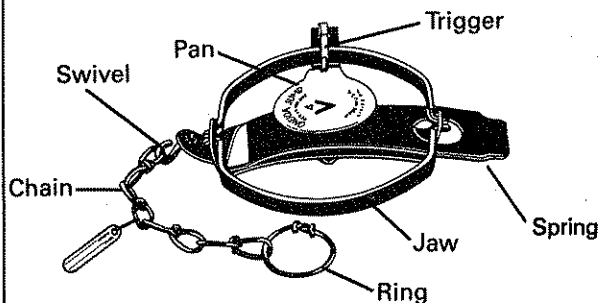
Longspring Trap



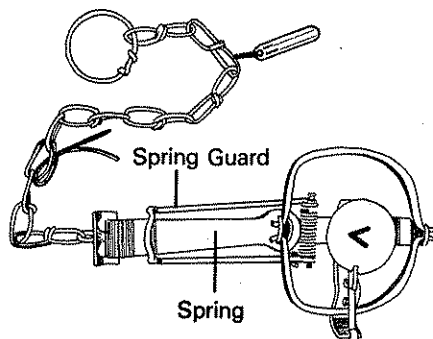
Coilspring Trap



Underspring or Jump Trap



Longspring Trap with spring guard attachment



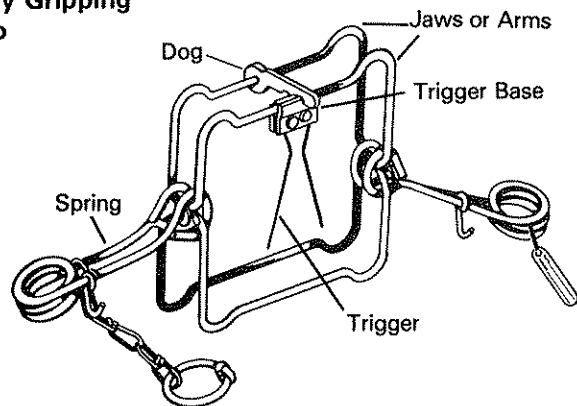
working order should be used. Opportunities when furbearers cross a trap are limited and each one should count.

Body Gripping Traps

In recent years the body gripping type of trap has been increasing in popularity. It is made so that a furbearer passing through it is caught in a body hold which usually kills quickly. These are useful and efficient traps. One danger of the use of large-sized body gripping traps on land is that they may capture or kill pets or unwanted, non-fur wildlife. For this reason, Oregon has some restrictions on dry land sets for these kinds of traps. For water sets, the traps should be completely under water to avoid capturing non-target animals.

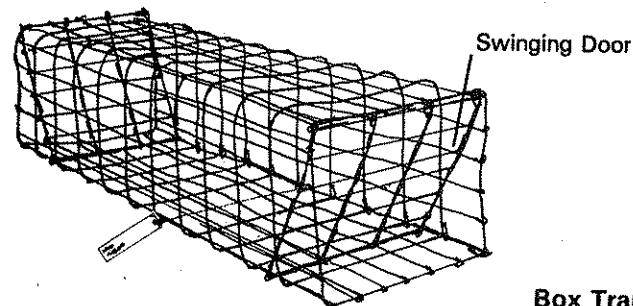
The Conibear and Bigelow brands are the two most commonly used types of body gripping traps. The body gripping traps come in the following sizes: 110 Conibear and 6½" Bigelow for muskrat and mink, 120 Conibear and 6¾" Bigelow for muskrat and mink, 220 Conibear for raccoon and mink, and 330 Conibear used for beaver trapping.

Body Gripping Trap



Box Traps

Several different kinds of box traps are popular for muskrat trapping. These box traps (also known as colony, cage or basket traps) are constructed of wire mesh. Their size varies with a muskrat-sized opening on each end. The trap is placed under water in a runway and the muskrat and sometimes an occasional mink swim through the one-way swinging trap door. They cannot get out back through the door opening and they soon drown. Several muskrats can be captured in a box trap at one time.



Box Trap

Equipment for Water Trapping

In addition to traps there are several items of essential equipment needed to run a successful trapline along a stream, marsh or lake.

1. **Hip boots or chest waders**—important for warmth and comfort and in allowing the trapper to reach good set locations along a stream or marsh.
2. **Packbasket or burlap sack**—needed for carrying traps and other equipment. A packbasket is ideal because it is easy to keep clean (just wash it out with clean stream water) and it keeps your hands free to handle traps and make sets.
3. **Trapping stick**—with hook on the end for retrieving traps from deep water. The stick can be used for testing stream depth while wading.
4. **Extra trap tags**—to attach to traps that are missing their tags. The tags sometimes come off when the traps are transported.
5. **Trowel**—used to dig trap beds. It should be long and sturdy.
6. **Stakes**—used to anchor traps for drowning sets. The stakes can be cut from lumber or metal, or they may be green limbs sharpened on one end. Wood stakes can be cut along the stream when you are setting your traps.
7. **Wire**—needed to attach traps to drowning stakes, to repair, shorten, or lengthen chain, and to hold traps and bait in place. Be sure to use high quality wire; 14 gauge wire is recommended for water sets.
8. **Pliers**—for cutting wire and making repairs to traps.
9. **Hatchet**—used to cut and drive stakes, cut brush drags, or break ice.
10. **Knife**—for cutting guide sticks and for cutting bait. Always carry a sharpening stone as well.
11. **Trapping clothes and accessories**—including a warm coat and hat (trapping, particularly around water, can be a very cold job), rubber gloves, good socks, sturdy holder for your hunting license and trapping permit.

Always make sure that you do not have leaky hip boots or waders. Wet feet on a trapline can be miserable. Take good care of all your equipment and it will last a long time and make for a successful trapping season.

Equipment for Land Trapping

Land trapping requires some additional equipment when compared to the equipment needed for water trapping. The key is to keep your equipment in good condition, in neat order and above all, clean. Go out with a good fox trapper on a trapline some day and watch how meticulous the trapper is when caring for the trapping equipment.



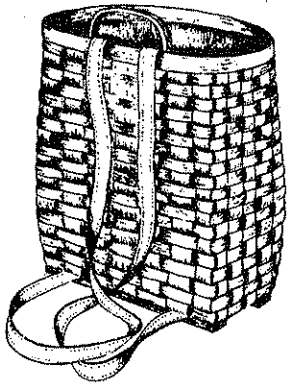
1. **Packbasket**—needed to carry your equipment in. Good substitutes for a packbasket are a backpack, a bucket, or a burlap sack. Remember to keep these containers free of any foreign odor that could get on your traps or other equipment.
2. **Dirt Sifter**—to cover traps and bait when making dry land sets. Sifters can be purchased at most trapping suppliers or you can make your own. Get some 1/2- or 3/4-inch lumber and a piece of 1/4-inch hardware cloth. Build a small open box three or four inches deep, ten inches long, and six inches wide. Staple the hardware cloth onto the bottom of the box.
3. **Trowels**—to dig trap beds for sets such as dirt holes and post sets (we will talk about these sets later). You can buy a trowel at a trapping supplier or from a garden store. Both the 12" long and 18" long trowels are recommended.
4. **Hatchet**—for driving stakes.
5. **Stakes**—a very important part of your equipment. Metal stakes are best for dry land trapping. Stakes can be made from 1" angle iron, sections of steel fence posts, or pieces of 1/4" to



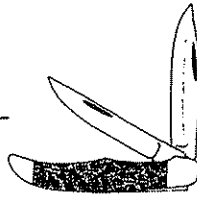
SKILL BUILDER

Equipment for Water and Land Trapping

Label the water and land trapping equipment by matching the numbers on the list with the equipment shown here.

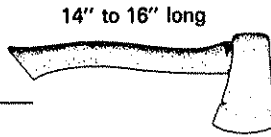


6. _____



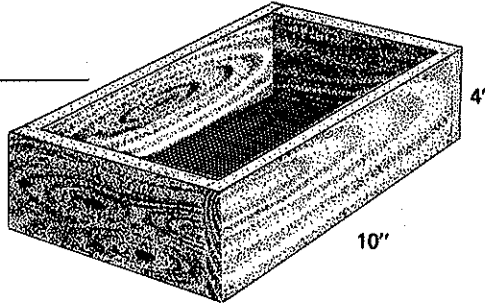
1. _____

7. _____



1. Packbasket
2. 12" long trowel
3. Trap tags
4. Wire
5. Pliers
6. Knife
7. Hatchet
8. Gloves
9. Hooks
10. License holder

14. _____

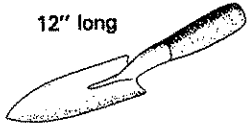


For Water Trapping

11. Hip boots or waders
12. Trapping stick
13. Wood trap stakes

For Land Trapping

14. Dirt sifter
15. Metal trap stakes
16. 18" long trowel



2. _____



9. _____



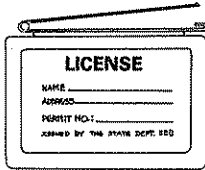
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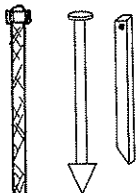
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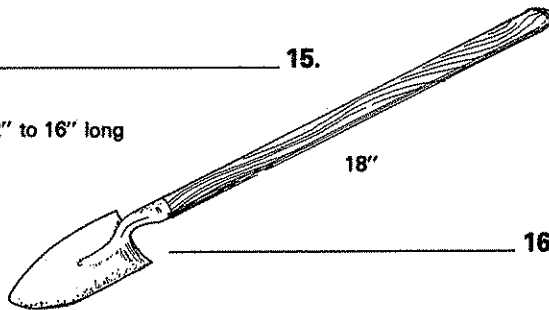


10. _____



15. _____

12" to 16" long

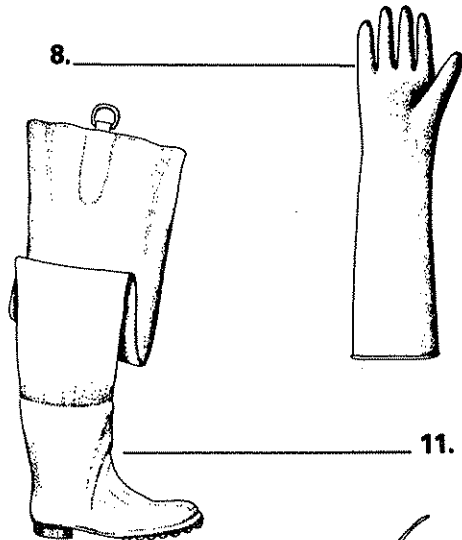


16. _____

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11. _____



1/2" steel rod. The stakes should be 12" to 16" long and sharp on one end. For the steel rod, a triangular piece of metal should be welded on the end for a driving point. Drill a 3/8" hole at the top of the stake. The trap chain can be fastened to the stake with a nut, bolt and lock washer or with an S hook.

6. **Trap pan covers**—the cover is used to prevent dirt from sifting under the trap pan — making the trap inoperative. Pieces of wax paper precut to cover the pans are inexpensive and do a good job of keeping dirt and stones from getting under the pan. Some trappers feel these are unnecessary, and point out that they may carry human odors.
7. **Gloves**—gloves are needed to keep human odors off your traps and other equipment when you are making sets or preparing your equipment. Good trapping gloves can be purchased at trapping supply stores or from stores that sell work clothes. Dry-land trappers sometimes use cotton gloves, while many trapper prefer rubber gloves for all of their trapping.
8. **Other clothing and accessories**—You should wear footwear that can be washed off occasionally. Be prepared to dress for cold weather and always have your hunting license and trapping permit properly displayed in a weatherproof holder. A knife, wire, and pliers will come in handy also.

Equipment Preparation

October is a good time to prepare traps for the approaching harvest. A waterproof name and address tag should be attached to each trap. Old traps should be repaired and conditioned. On leghold traps, all edges should be rounded off with a file where they will touch the animal's leg. They should also be adjusted so that when set, the trap pan and jaws are level. Late-model coil spring traps have a pan adjustment bolt that should be tightened so the trap will not be triggered by the weight of a small mammal or bird that might accidentally step on it.

All equipment used in trapping must be clean and free of foreign odors. When traps come from the manufacturer they are coated with oil. Before they can be treated with a coloring and descenting agent, that oil must be removed. A detergent, wood ashes, or a caustic soda solution will remove it. All the traps should be checked and adjusted so that pans sit level. A small piece of wood or wire should be placed between the jaws to hold them open. The traps, chains, drags, and stakes, along with any other metal equipment, can then be dyed.

Many coloring and deodorizing agents are used by trappers. Logwood chips or crystals, berries, hemlock bark, oak bark, and maple bark are some of the commonly used agents. A strong, hot solution of the material is kept at a simmer and the traps are left in it until they become black. The dye coat prevents or slows



rusting, and makes the trap easier to conceal. New traps are much more difficult to dye than are traps with a previous dye coat or a fine film of rust.

After being dyed, the traps should be hung in the open air and away from foreign odors. They should be handled only with clean gloves after being treated. Traps that pick up foreign odors or food odors should be retreated before being used again for dry-land sets. Every effort should be made not to contaminate the traps with lure, bait, human scent, or blood from previously trapped animals. Similar precautions should be used with all other items that are left at a set. Clean traps are no good if odors on a drag or stake give the set away.

Lure and Bait

Many expert trappers consider *lures* to be an important part of their equipment. The odor of lure gets the attention of the passing furbearer, attracting it to the trap to investigate. If the set has been properly made, the furbearer will be captured. But no matter how good the lure is that you are using, you will not catch the furbearer if the set is not properly made. Lure is considered to be especially important in trapping the wary mink, beaver, and fox.

Beginning trappers often search for a miracle lure that will bring an animal in on the run from miles away. There are no such lures. The best long distance call lure might attract a fox from 50 yards away if it is placed right, and the proper weather and wind conditions exist. But the trapper is still going to have to make the set near where the target animal normally travels.

There are many good lures and baits on the market today. Ask your instructor and other experienced trappers for their opinions about the use of brand named lures and baits.

Gland Lure

These are made up of different parts of various animals, usually the reproductive tract. This scent is more valuable for *carnivores* such as foxes. When using gland scent, too little is better than too much. Two or three drops at a set is sufficient. A little more may be used during freezing weather.

Food Lure

These are often extract of such items as fish oil, anise, eggs, and peanut butter. Larger amounts of these scents may be used at the set.

Curiosity Lure

These are blends of oils, exotic musk, beaver and muskrat castors, and even perfume. Curiosity scents should be used in moderation and are generally not as effective as gland scent and food scent.

Urine

Urine is extremely valuable in trapping for fox or coyote and has some value in trapping mink and raccoon. Care must be taken to obtain pure, undiluted urine. Occasionally skunk essence is added. This makes an excellent human odor eraser.

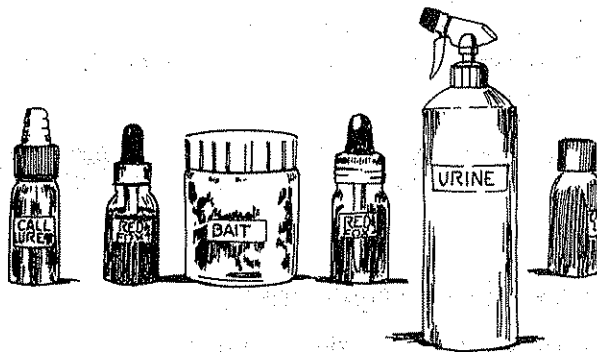
Natural and Tainted Baits

These are made from chunks of meat taken from fish, woodchuck, beaver, muskrat or other carcasses. They can be used natural or fresh, or they can be used tainted. *Tainted* baits should be used in small amounts. All baits of this type should be kept free of fly eggs and maggots. To keep bait from further rotting use liberal amounts of powdered borax.

Using Bait

When using bait in dry land sets, particularly feathered or furred bait, keep it covered to prevent hawks and owls from getting caught. Even a small chunk of meat inside a dirt hole will attract bluejays and crows if uncovered. Eggs make a good raccoon bait, but when egg shells are left exposed they will also attract birds. Remember that mammals depend primarily on their sense of smell to find food, whereas birds depend on their sense of sight.

Always use bait that will attract only the animals being sought. This is particularly important when trapping in more populated areas. For example, do not use dog food as bait.



NOTES

5 Getting Ready for the Season

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Explain the difference between public and private land.
- Give examples of places to trap furbearers.
- Identify five furbearer signs.
- Know where to find out about trapping regulations.

Obtaining Permission from the Landowner

Early planning and preparation will pay off in a successful trapping season. First, it is necessary to find a place to trap. On private lands, this means getting landowner permission to scout out potential areas. Landowners are often willing to grant permission to trap furbearers that are damaging crops, burrowing into pond dams, or doing other types of damage. Trapping can be of great value and benefit to landowners. Check with local authorities in your area to determine whether or not trappers are required to have the landowner's written permission for trapping on private lands.



Scouting

In seeking a place to trap, wetlands should be the first place to look: creeks, rivers, ponds, lakes, swamps, and marshes. Furbearers are most numerous around water areas and they can be best trapped there. Try scouting for fur on an autumn fishing trip.

Scouting for fur has interested outdoorsmen for centuries. Muddy water in a stream might have meant beaver to the fur trapper of the far West, or the presence of Indians. Today, muddy water in a stream might mean muskrats to the fur prospector, or the presence of another trapper.

The trapper must learn to recognize signs of furbearers—tracks, scats (droppings), food remains, trails, and homesites. In scouting, these furbearer signs should be especially watched for: tracks in soft mud, trails leading in and out of the water, feeding locations and dens. It is wise to write down the kind and amount of sign observed by unit. For example, the number of furbearers present, locations where productive sets can be made, and the number of traps needed. October is a good month for scouting.

Each furbearer leaves some distinctive sign. Muskrat tracks can often be recognized by the tail drag mark; raccoons leave large hind footprints shaped much like a baby's foot; mink tracks are usually paired. The scats of each furbearer are often distinctive as to size, content, or place of deposit; they may point the way to good trapping sites. Muskrats leave their pellets on rocks or logs protruding from the water. The large scats of raccoons are deposited on logs or drift piles and they are often filled with corn, berries, grapes, and other fruit. The illustrations of tracks in this booklet will help the trapper to recognize the real thing in the outdoors.

Scouting should be done near sources of food in the fall—furbearers fatten while food is plentiful before winter. Muskrat sign is common in wetlands near fields of corn. Raccoons often gather in or near cornfields. Mink are also found in wetlands. Practice in scouting will teach the trapper where to look.

Know the Trapping Rules and Regulations

Buy your trapping license before the season comes in. Do not wait until you are ready to set your traps, before you think about getting a license.

A good trapper will have permission slips from the landowner where he or she is planning to trap, along with a license.

When you buy your license you should receive a digest of trapping regulations. Study these regulations closely. When you think you know and understand the regulations, have a friend or another trapper quiz you. Remember, if you are unsure of a regulation, consult the expert—your state wildlife biologist or the State Police Game Division.

6 Setting Your Traps

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

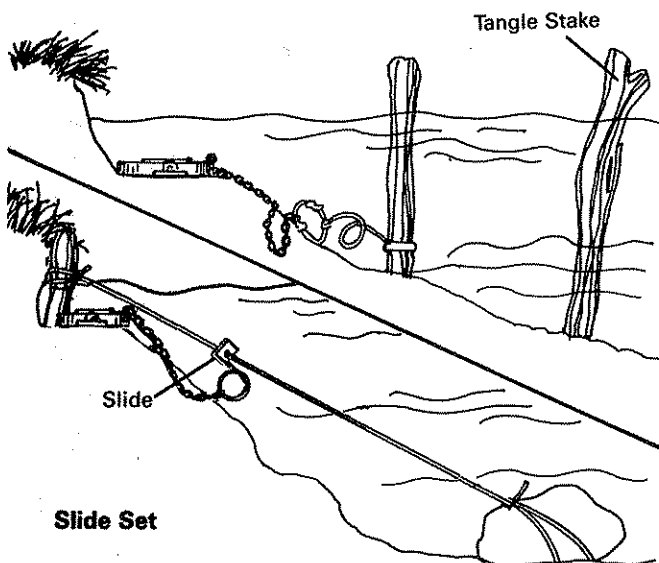
- Identify a set for muskrat, raccoon, mink, beaver, fox, skunk and opossum.
- Run a trapline.
- List five ways to prevent trap theft.
- Describe how to release a non-target animal.

Now let's learn about the most important part of trapping and that is making the actual trap sets. It is best for the beginning trapper to start out by making only water sets. The furbearers that live in and around wetland habitats include two important furbearers: muskrat and raccoon.

Water sets are easier to make than dry land sets because human odor around the set is washed away by the water. Water sets usually catch more than dry land sets. This is because furbearers are found more often around streams and marshes where there is food and cover.

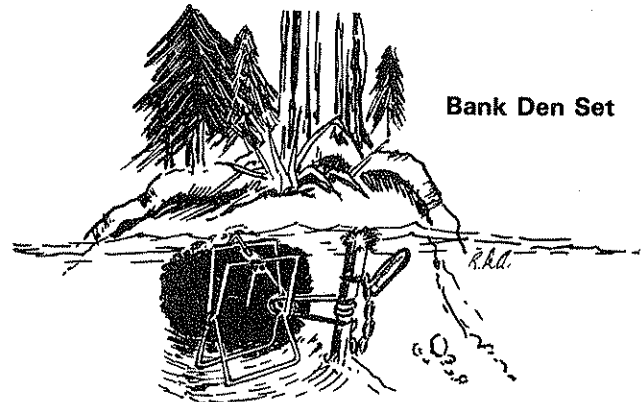
Muskrat Sets

Musk rats are common furbearers and are popular with trappers. They are easy to trap and clean to handle, for they have a sweet, musky smell. They occupy a limited home range that is easy to understand. Musk rats are consistently the most numerous furbearers trapped.



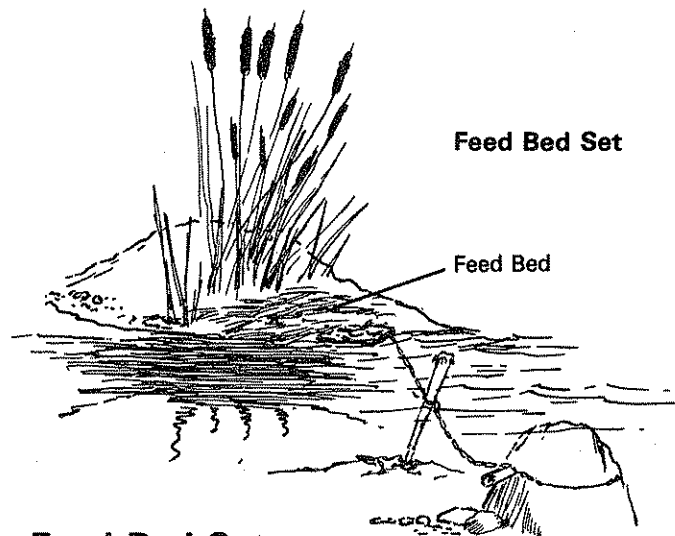
Slide Set

Perhaps the best set for muskrats is the slide set. The trap is set in two or three inches of water where the muskrat leaves and enters the water. The trap should be set in line with the slide, so that the jaws, when released, are parallel to the bank. Additionally, set the trap so that the captured muskrat can easily reach deeper water (on a slope). With a longspring trap, the end of the spring should be rotated toward the trigger mechanism so both jaws will lie flat. The trap should be wired to a stake, rock, or bag of rocks in deep water. A tangle stake can be driven in about halfway between the trap stake and the water stake or rock; the trapped muskrat will dive and wrap the chain around the tangle stake. The weight of a 1½ trap or the use of a tangle stake will ensure that the animal drowns quickly after being caught.



Bank Den Set

A body gripping or a cage box trap placed at the entrance of a muskrat bank den is another good set. Look for freshly dug dirt in front of the underwater den opening to see if it is an active den.



Feed Bed Set

In marsh or swamp trapping, traps can be set at feed beds—piles of vegetation scraps where muskrats feed regularly. If the feed bed is large, more than one trap may be set. Traps should be placed where the

Runway Set



animal climbs onto the feed bed, and they should be staked in opposite directions. Since mink and raccoons also visit these feed beds, traps should be properly covered. An unused feed bed can attract furbearers again by the use of lure.

Runway Set

In shallow water, where drowning is not possible, body gripping traps can be used. They are set in trails and runways and camouflaged with vegetation.

Raccoon Sets

Raccoons are big and strong, and sets for them must use good no. 1½ traps. Since raccoons sometimes pull out of a solidly staked set, you may want to use a drag instead. As the drag gives, the animal cannot get a solid pull. Along a stream, a two inch sapling about six feet long makes an ideal drag. In open areas a two-pronged metal drag can be used. Check with trappers in your area to see how they handle raccoon sets.

Many raccoons are taken in sets made for muskrats or mink, especially in blind sets (which are described in the following section on mink trapping). They also can be trapped at baited **cubby sets**—these are sets where the bait is placed within an enclosure and a trap is set just inside the entrance.

Overhanging Bank Set

The trapper should be careful not to set traps where dogs may be running. An overhanging bank which is too low for dogs to run under is an excellent location. A bait of fish or honey should be attached to the bank, under the overhang, and a no. 1½ trap placed in the water beneath it, with the trap chain wired to a rock in deep water.

Drain Tile Set

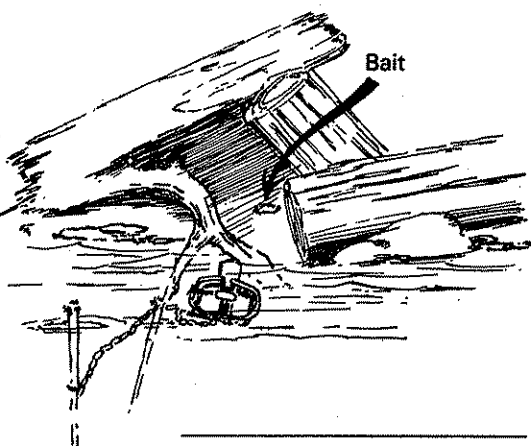
Raccoons roam in natural openings and burrows along the stream bank. They also frequent drain tile

SKILL BUILDER

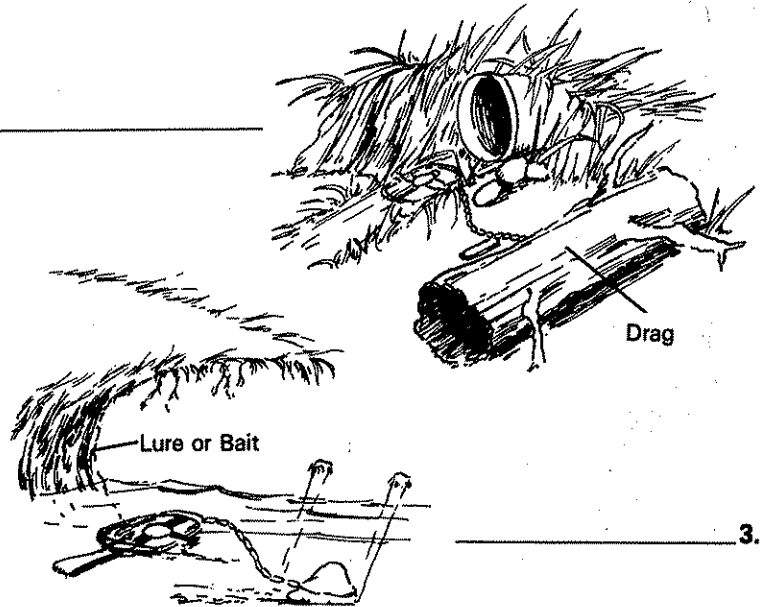
Raccoon Trap Sets

Match the raccoon trap sets with the correct labels listed below.

1. Drain Tile Set
2. Cubby Set
3. Overhanging Bank Set



1. _____



openings and the ditches that flow out of these tiles into the larger stream. Remember not to set traps in tiles under well-traveled roads, since it may offend some people.

Mink Sets

This wary, king-sized water weasel is one of the most difficult furbearers to trap. Although an occasional mink is taken in a muskrat set, successful mink trapping requires sets that are adapted to the mink's habits.

Many mink are taken in blind sets made by careful and observant trappers. By following tracks, places can be found where the mink passes through a narrow site—such as under tree roots or between rocks—or is forced into the water by a tree, rock, or other obstruction. Since mink are creatures of habit and will follow the same route repeatedly, a well placed trap at these bottlenecks in the trail will catch the mink on its next trip.

Pocket Set

The pocket set is one of the standard sets used by good mink trappers. A steep bank must be chosen. Starting slightly below the water level, a small hole is dug into the bank. The bottom of the opening where the trap will be set should be two inches below the water level. The hole should slope upward toward the rear, with the back part three or four inches above water level. The bait—a piece of unprotected fish, muskrat, or mouse—is placed at the back of the pocket, along with mink lure. A bunch of wadded grass with lure on it can be laid there, or a twig dipped in lure can be stuck into the earth. The trap is set in the opening, lightly covered with small water-soaked leaves, grass, or watery mud. It is then staked so the mink can reach deep water and drown immediately. The pocket set is also a good raccoon set.

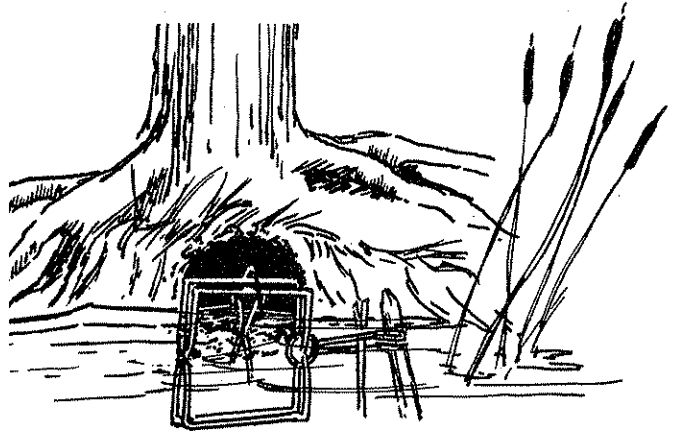
Waterline Den Set

Almost every waterline den which is partly out of the water will attract passing mink, for such dens have crayfish, frogs, and minnows during cold weather. The trap should be set in the mouth of the den unless the water is too deep, in which case the trap should be moved back into the den two inches under water. Dens of this type can be best trapped by body gripping traps. Depending on the type of trap, the square or round frame covers the hole and must be camouflaged lightly with grass or other vegetation.

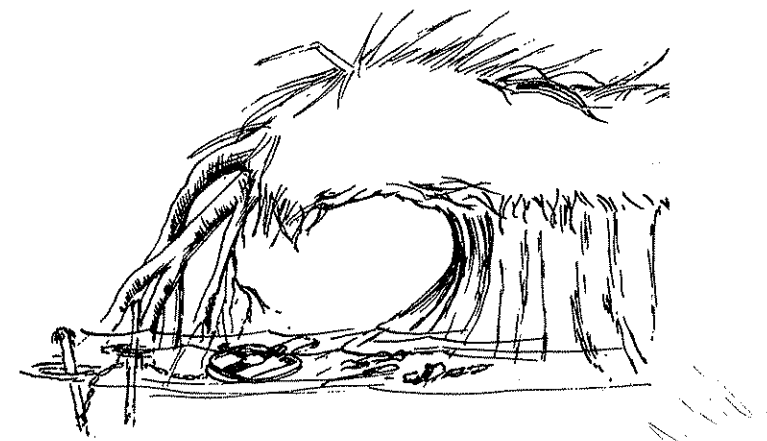
Blind Set

Set your trap along overhanging banks, under root clusters, or around shoreline obstructions that mink would normally investigate.

Waterline Den Set



Blind Set



Pocket Set



Beaver Sets

The romance of beaver trapping is part of our history. Beaver trappers led the way across the nation. They were the first to discover the rivers and mountain ranges as well as the wildlife populations of North America.

After the unregulated fur harvests of early American history nearly eliminated the beaver, colonies slowly began to reappear in the mid-1930s. They had become so abundant in some areas by the early 1950s that it was necessary to livetrapped surplus beaver where they had become a nuisance and move them to areas where they were wanted. They thrived in most locations, and eventually beaver trapping seasons opened.

Since the beaver is an aquatic animal, water trap sets are used to capture them. In late fall and early spring, beaver are trapped in open water. In the heart of winter, traps are set through the ice. Since the fur quality improves as winter progresses, the pelts that bring top dollar are caught through the ice or just after it melts.

All traps are set to ensure the beaver will drown quickly. In some sets a large rock drag is wired to the trap chain to pull the beaver down once it is caught. The beaver is powerful and intelligent and may escape if not drowned within a few minutes.

Beaver trapping requires special equipment since they are the largest furbearers. Equipment for capturing them includes heavy longspring traps, large body gripping traps, a long-handled ax for cutting bait and chopping holes in the ice, and a small shovel for digging or building up trap beds. Since all beaver traps must be set under water, special gear is necessary. Long-sleeved rubber gloves and a trap hook are necessary.

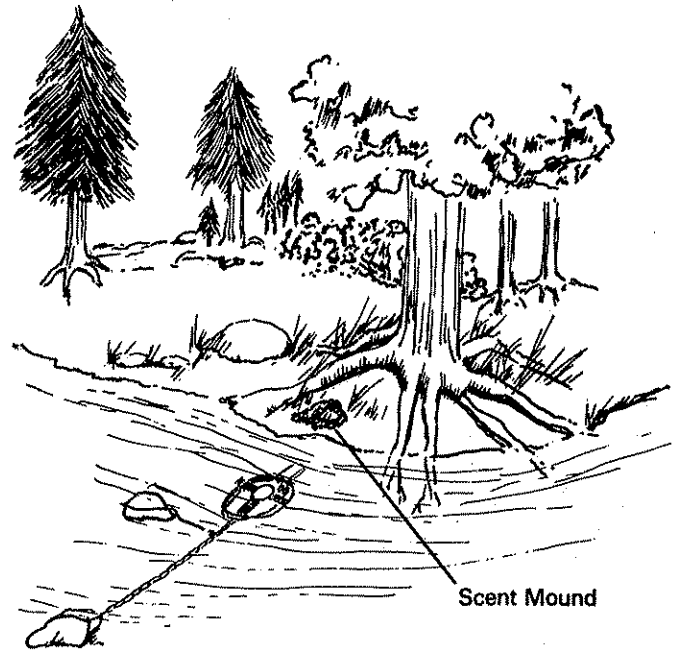
Beaver Slide Set

One set that works well on beaver is similar to the slide set used for muskrats. The set can be used at a slide or at any spot where beaver can be lured to a bank set. It can even be used when the water surface is frozen if an opening is broken near the shore. A large rock (or cement block) weighing 50 pounds or more is wired to the end of the leghold trap chain and an eight-pound rock is wired to the chain within a few inches of the trap to pull the beaver down quickly once it is caught.

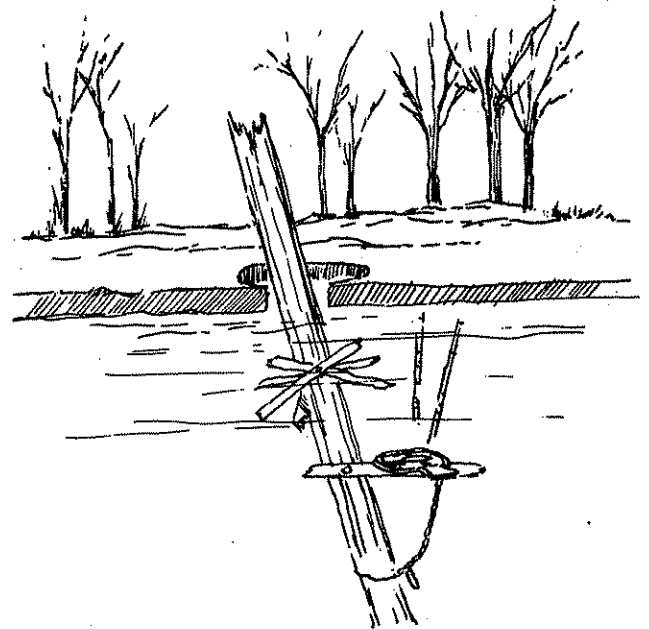
The trap should be set in shallow water. The bottom is dug away or built up to the proper elevation with the small shovel. The trap is set eight to 12 inches away from the bank, and the heavy rock drag is placed in deep water at chain length. The slide wire with sliding lock can also be used, although the two-rock method is better.

A few pieces of food, such as freshly cut aspen boughs, should be put on the bank. Other suitable bait includes wild cherry, apple, or whatever beaver are cutting locally. The last step is adding lure to the boughs.

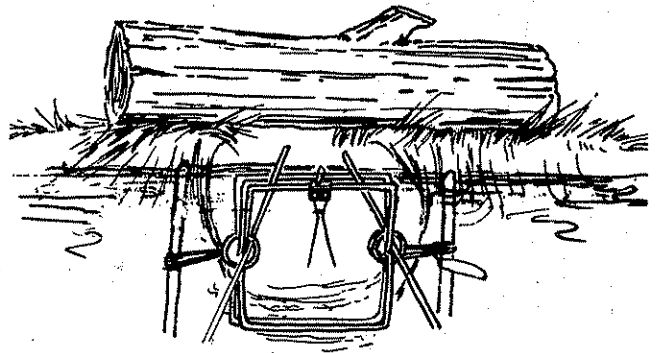
Scent Mound Set



Pole Set



Canal Set



Scent Mound Set

A variation of the slide set, the scent mound set, is effective along streams where beaver are using bank dens. A mound of mud is placed on the bank, near the water's edge, and a few drops of lure are added to it. Three or four inches from shore, a leghold trap is set under water. An eight-pound rock is wired to the chain near the trap and a 50-pound rock is wired to the end of the chain in deep water. The beaver will drown immediately after it is caught. Use the slide wire with sliding lock on a mud bottom stream where rocks are not available.

Pole Set

Where ice is thick and low temperature makes an open water set impossible, an under-ice set—often called the pole set—can be used. A hole is cut in the ice in the general vicinity of the beaver's lodge or den. Traps should not be set too close to a beaver lodge, as a trapped beaver may alarm the other occupants of the lodge.

Insert a dead pole, three to four inches in diameter, into the hole. The pole should be long enough when

touching bottom to extend above the ice. Set it at a right angle to the bottom. Fresh aspen or other boughs are nailed to the pole just above the trap and crosswise to the pole. The trap is tied with wrapping cord to a platform immediately below the bait.

The cord will break when a beaver is caught and attempts to pull away. Two dead sticks inserted into the bottom just behind the bait sticks will prevent bait stealing. The trap chain is wired to the pole. The hole is then filled with the chopped ice, which will freeze solid. When a beaver is captured, it will drown under the ice. This set can also be made with a body gripping trap.

Canal Set

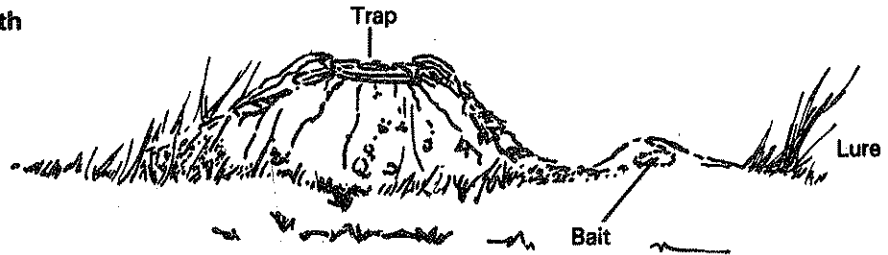
The canal set (a type of runway set) with a body gripping trap is one of the better beaver sets, either under the ice or below the surface in open water. The bait sticks are placed between the jaws and through the trap spring into the mud, to hold the trap upright. The trap is anchored securely. In open water a small log or limb should be placed over the trap to force the beaver under water and into the trap. The large body gripping traps used here are very powerful and are not recommended for use by young trappers.

SKILL BUILDER

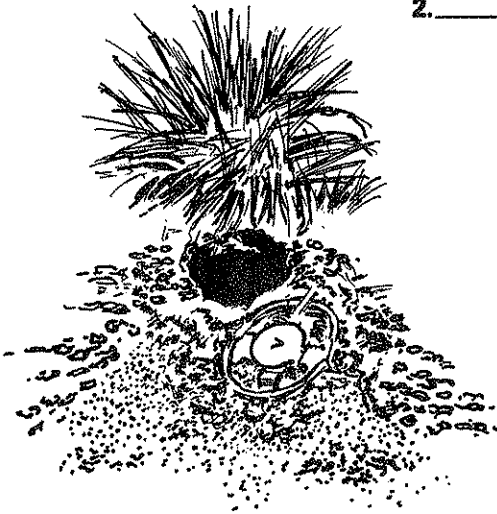
Fox Trap Sets

Match the fox trap sets pictured with the correct labels listed below.

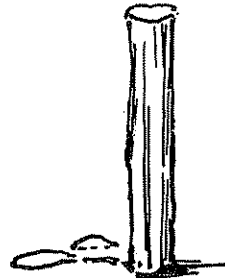
1. Dirt Hole Set
2. Mound Set
3. Post Set



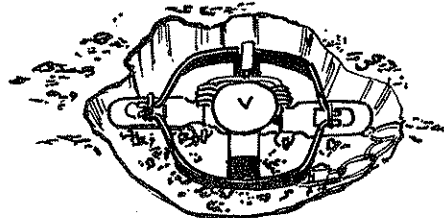
2. _____



1. _____



3. _____



Coyote Sets

The greatest factor in coyote trapping is knowledge about the habits of the coyote and the ability to use common sense and sensible tactics. Coyotes are intelligent mammals, at home in flat, open country. In the spring and summer coyotes are primarily limited to one area. In late summer, fall, and winter they may roam over a larger area. Coyotes are opportunists and tend to kill or eat whatever is easiest to obtain.

Coyotes follow regular paths and crossing places. They like to walk wherever it is easiest for them to walk. They like high hills or knolls from where they can survey the situation. They establish regular scent posts along their paths. They depend upon their keen ears, nose, and eyes to protect them from danger.

There are many different ways and places to set traps and catch coyotes. Described here is the most popular method.

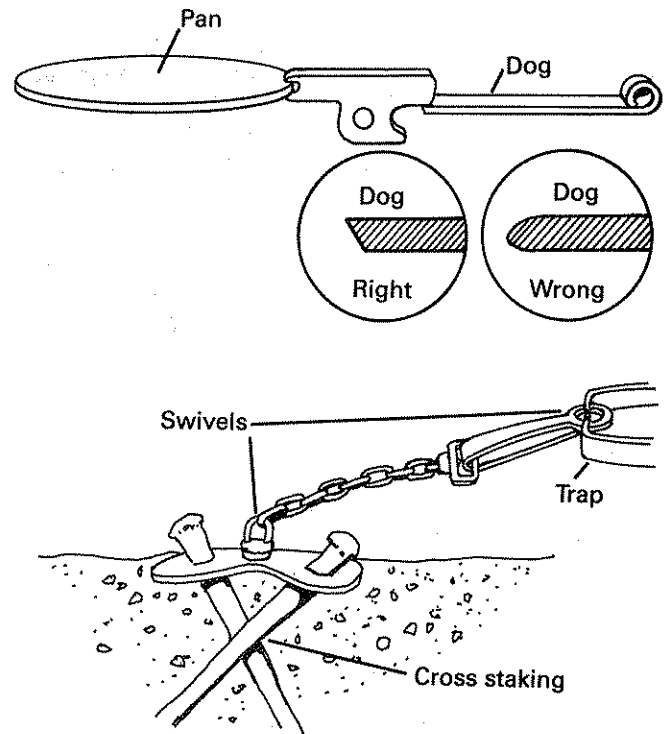
Post Set

The first step in placing traps at a post set is to survey the area and determine the best location. Traps should always be placed in an open, flat area. Wind currents, dispersion of scent, and visibility are all important factors to consider in placing the trap sets. Consider the prevailing wind direction. Place the set upwind from the path so the wind will carry the scent stream across the path where the scent can be picked up and followed to the set. Choose a level spot as close as possible to the coyote's path. Place the set so the coyote's approach is over level, open ground.

After the site has been selected, set two No. 3 offset jaw traps. Remember, coyote traps are larger than those used in fox sets. The traps should be placed in a trench approximately 3 feet long, 7 inches wide, and 3 inches deep. Use the cross-staking method to attach traps. This prevents the animal from "pumping" the stakes out. Allow 12-18 inches of chain with heavy swivels at each end. The top of the stakes should be even with the bottom of the trench. The stakes should be at least 18 inches long, or longer if the soil is loose. Place one of the set traps at each end of the trench. Remove or add soil until the trap pan and jaws are about one-half inch below the level of the surrounding ground. Be sure that the pan sits level with or slightly below the trap jaws. Pan tension should be heavy with very little travel of the pan. This is done by filing the dog with an undercut (see illustration). Rounded trap dogs will cause too many missed catches. Place a pan cover over the pan or place moss or lichens under the pan. Sift soil over the set, covering the entire trench back to ground level with the exception of directly over the traps. The trap should be set about one-quarter inch below ground level.

In the center of the trench, over the buried stake, place an object that can be easily seen. An object such as a clump of grass, small stake or stump that projects about six to eight inches high should be used. When

Post Set



this is completed, place up to an ounce of coyote urine on the projection. Carefully brush out all tracks and signs of activity, and carry away all loose soil.

Bobcat Sets

As a general rule, bobcats frequent rocky washes around the points of rough hills, and are often found in thickets of river bottoms, dry washes, or brushy draws. Little sign is left, in most instances, as an indication of a bobcat travel-way or hunting route. This animal is seldom seen or observed in the wild, being of a secretive nature. This permits it to live close to agricultural areas when habitat is suitable. In selecting a site for trap sets, one should be guided by the tracks of the animal and by other traces of its presence. Such places as leached limestone ridges, limestone cap rock, or eroded caverns and holes surrounded by extensive underbrush form the ideal habitat for the bobcat.

Blind Set

When the trail of a bobcat has been found along or leading from its rocky lair, place traps near these trails. The Victor No. 3N trap is best for bobcats. Place traps in holes dug directly in the trail of the bobcat close to such obstructions as exposed roots, rocks, or clumps of weeds. The bobcat seldom steps on obstructions in its path, but usually over them. If the double set is used, the trap holes should be only about one inch apart, separated just far enough to prevent interference of the jaws when the trap is sprung. Dig each hole only slightly larger than the size of the trap and just deep enough to hold the set trap. Allow the trap to be slightly lower than the level of the surrounding ground.

Post Set

When using the post set method, the traps should not be placed in the runway proper, but on either side of it, or on one side only, and parallel to the trail. Set the traps in the same manner as described for the blind sets, between the trail and the spot selected for scattering the scent. This spot should be no more than six to eight inches from the trap. In placing the scent, take advantage of any stubble, bunch of weeds, exposed root, or object known as a scent post. Bobcats usually have their scent posts slightly off the trail, on stubble of range grasses, on bushes, or even on an old bleached-out carcass. When the ground conditions are right for good tracking, natural scent posts may be detected by the claw scratches and the small mound of dirt where the bobcat has covered its excrement. Such habits are similar to those of house cats. In passing along its trails, the bobcat will usually revisit these scent posts.

tail meat in the hole out of sight of birds. A piece of fur or tuft of feathers may be placed more than 15 feet from the set. This will help attract the cat's attention. A few drops of catnip or fish oil can be used at the opening of the hole.



Dirt Hole

The dirt hole set is also effective in trapping bobcats. The dirt hole set should be placed near a travel route used by the bobcat. This set works well along rocky ridges traveled by bobcats. For bait, use a freshly killed cottontail rabbit. Place a bloody piece of cotton-

TRAP SET GUIDE

Furbearer	Trap Sets	Trap	Bait	Lure	Pelting
Coyote	Mound, dirt hole, scent post, carcass	Victor—3N, double spring	Fresh meat, spoiled meat, fish oil, rotten eggs, mice	Urine (coyote)	Cased, fur out
Red and Grey Fox	Dirt hole, mound, post	No. 1½ or 1.75 coil spring	Same as coyote	Urine (coyote or fox)	Cased, fur out
Badger	Dirt hole	Victor—3N	Fresh meat	Commercial	Cased, fur in
Mink and Weasel	Waterline den, blind, pocket	Any 0 to 2	Fresh fish, fresh meat	Commercial	Cased, fur in
Muskrat	Slide, bank den, blind, runway, feed bed	No. 1 trap	Apples or carrots, tender twigs	Anise oil, commercial	Cased, fur in
Beaver	Pole, slide, scent mound, runway (canal)	Conibear 330, No. 4 double spring, No. 3 coil spring	Tender willow or cottonwood twigs	Beaver (castor, commercial)	Open and rounded
Raccoon	Cubby, blind, overhanging bank, drain tile	Conibear 220, No. 1½ coil, No. 2 double spring	Meat or fish	Commercial	Cased, fur in
Opossum	Cubby, dirt hole, mound, post	No. 1 to No. 1½ trap	Spoiled meat or fish	Commercial	Cased, fur in
Bobcat	Dirt hole, blind, flag set, mound, scent post, cubby	No. 3 trap	Fresh beaver, fresh cottontail	Urine (bobcat), catnip	Cased, fur out
Skunk	Cubby, dirt hole, mound, post	No. 1	Spoiled meat, stale egg, dog food (fish flavored)	Commercial	Cased

Fox Sets

Since fox pelts come into *prime* condition earlier than those of other furbearers, fox trapping can be done earlier. It is a demanding sport, differing in several essentials from the methods already outlined. Fox trapping is done on the uplands, away from water. Special tools are required and different sets are made to catch foxes. Baits and lures are a must in fox trapping.

Number 1½ coil spring traps should be used for fox trapping. They will hold any fox, yet not injure a dog that might accidentally be caught. In fox trapping, great care must be taken to keep the traps clean and free of offending human odors such as cigarette smoke. Traps must be carefully cleaned, dyed, and waxed.

Dirt Hole Set

The dirt hole set is the simplest, the most widely used, and undoubtedly the greatest taker of foxes. Although there are many variations, the following paragraphs describe the basic set.

The trap location should be in the open, away from fence rows and fence corners. Foxes will be where the mice are—in the open fields, except during very wet years. The trap is set upwind from a fox runway so that lure scent is carried downwind to the passing fox. The fox will follow the scent to the trap.

A trap site should be chosen where the soil is fine and easy to work. There should be little or no ground cover. Select ground cover that will make covering the trap easy, not difficult. Usually a low log, small bush, or weed can serve as a backstop which will prevent the fox from approaching the set from the rear.

Then dig the hole and trap bed. The dirt hole should be six inches deep, with a diameter of four inches, and placed at the top of the triangle of dirt thrown from the hole. It should be dug on a slant, never straight down or straight in. The trap stake is driven in flush with the earth in the center of the trap bed. The trap chain should be shortened to two links to prevent the fox from making long lunges which might permit him to jerk free.

All fox traps should be staked to a short chain or attached to a movable drag; if a drag is used, the chain should be four feet long. A good stake is recommended in most cases.

The trap should be bedded close to the hole. The trap should be turned so the spring is to the side of the hole and one jaw is at the front edge. This arrangement usually will allow a dog to investigate the scent without getting caught, since a dog will not step as close to the edge of the hole as a fox will. A piece of wax paper or a maple leaf is placed over the trap pan and under the jaws so that dirt will not lodge under the pan and prevent the trap jaws from closing.

Now sift one-half inch of dirt over the trap. A dirt sifter made from quarter-inch hardware cloth is necessary. The hardware cloth is nailed to a lightweight six by eight inch wooden frame three inches high. The sifter screens out small stones and

chunks of roots or sod which might clog the trap.

Then place a small piece of bait in the bottom of the hole and throw a little dirt in to hide it. Put a few drops of fox lure at the upper edge of the hole and in the hole. Then, using the fork, scratch the entire site lightly to resemble a fox's digging and scratching. When you leave make as little disturbance as possible. The fox's curious nature will make it try to uncover something it can smell but cannot see. The trap in front of the hole will catch the fox as it steps in to scratch out the dirt and bait with one paw. It is important to remember that lure will not improve a poorly made set.

Mound Set

The mound set relies on the fox's habit of going to a high spot to look over anything new or suspicious. A large bait is buried in the ground near a big ant hill or other mound, such as a bale of hay or straw. The trap is set on top of the mound. The fox will first circle the bait, then climb upon the vantage point to investigate the potential food, and there it will be caught. An advantage of this set is that unwanted furbearers and pets will not be caught if they visit the bait. The trap is set where the fox's peculiar behavior will cause it to investigate.

Post Set

The post set should be made in a clear area along a fox's travel lane. The trap is placed in a trap bed similar to what is made for the dirt hole set. The center of the trap should be six inches from the post. Foxes naturally mark their territory by urinating on clumps of grass, on old fence posts, or on small trees in a clearing. The trap is bedded and covered with sifted dirt. Fox urine is then squirted on the post or whatever you are using for a post. Hopefully the next fox through that area will smell the urine on the post and come to the set to remark the territory or get a better sniff of the urine.

Skunk and Opossum Sets

These two furbearers can be caught in the same sets that are made for foxes. The dirt hole set especially will catch opossums and skunks. When an opossum is caught in a fox set the trap should be reboiled to remove the opossum odor. **Do not** make sets for opossums and skunks in den holes or woodchuck burrows. These burrows are often used by other kinds of wildlife such as rabbits.

The cubby set can be used to catch opossums and skunks. Remember—both the trap and bait must be covered in all land sets. Use tainted bait and make sure the trap is well back into the cubby opening to avoid catching dogs.

Running the Trapline

The trapline should be run regularly in early morning. Frequent checking of traps is the ethical and businesslike way to run a trapline. Wherever possible, sets should be made to cause immediate drowning, so that trapped furbearers will not escape or alarm other furbearers in the trapline area. Whether

trap sets have caught anything or not, they must be checked to see that they are in proper operating condition.

Trappers must practice cleanliness along the trapline. They should avoid smoking or leaving too much human scent in any form in the trapping area, so wary furbearers will not be frightened away. Trappers should strive constantly to improve their skills, to make every set better than the last one. Attention to details will give the best possible results.

Do not litter and be careful when cutting stakes to avoid damaging the landowner's trees. A good trapper leaves the area "unmarked" as possible. Not only does neatness make for good landowner relations and a more productive trapline, it also helps to deter trap and fur theft.

Preventing Trap Theft

Trap and fur stealing have plagued trappers for many years. But there are some steps you can take to prevent, or at least help to curb the practice.

1. In addition to the trap tag, mark your traps with either your initials or a particular number.
2. It is a good practice to dye all your traps, even muskrat traps, and try to camouflage all your sets. If a thief cannot find them, he cannot steal them!
3. Do not brag about your catches and, even more important, keep your trapping locations a secret.
4. Keep track of your set locations on paper or draw a map. Do not use flagging to mark trap locations. If you must use something to mark the sets, then use something natural such as a stick.
5. Check your traps when no one else is around, preferably early in the morning.
6. Do not make sets close to roadways or other places that have a lot of human activity. Sets made in roadside culverts and ditches are prime targets for a thief.
7. Finally, get to know the other trappers in the area and look out for each other's sets. Do not be afraid to ask the identity of strangers around your line, but always approach them in a friendly manner. Remember, it is a violation to disturb the traps of another. If you see someone doing this, get a car or hunting license number and report it to your local Game Protector.
8. Do not set near hiking trails or roadways.
9. Ask landowners to keep their pets tied while you are trapping.
10. Ask farmers to inform hunters that traps are set on their property.

TRAP SETS		
Set	Location and Description	Furbearers
Blind	In a narrow opening (natural or manmade) in furbearer's travel lane, in or near water; trap staked for drowning where possible	Mink, raccoon, muskrat
Bank Den (including Waterline Bank Den)	Below water surface at entrance to a den along stream or pond side	Muskrat, mink
Cubby	In an enclosure (natural or manmade, in hollow tree, rocks) with bait and trap inside.	Raccoon, skunk, opossum
Dirt Hole	Upwind of a fox travel lane in open country, in dug hole with bait and lure in hole, trap in front	Red fox, gray fox, opossum, skunk
Drain Tile	Along natural opening and drainage ditches that feed into larger streams.	Raccoon
Feed Bed	On a feed bed, at site where muskrats approach; trap staked in water for drowning	Muskrat
Mound	On an elevated structure (anthill, straw bale), with large bait on ground below	Red fox, gray fox, opossum, skunk
Overhanging Bank	Below water surface under overhanging bank with a drag attached for drowning; lure is placed on the bank under the overhang.	Raccoon
Pocket	In a tunnel dug into steep bank of stream or pond, with bottom sloping upward from 2 inches below water level to 3-4 inches above water level; bait and lure at back of hole, trap at opening	Mink, raccoon
Pole	Under ice; pole set on pond bottom at right angle to bottom, extending upward through ice; bait and trap attached to pole	Beaver
Post	In a trap bed located about 6 inches from a stick, post or tuft of grass. Urine is placed on the post	Red fox, gray fox, opossum, skunk
Runway	In shallow water where drowning is not possible; body gripping trap set in runway	Muskrat, beaver
Scent Mound	On stream bank near water's edge; lure placed on mud mound, trap under water below mound	Beaver
Slide	Just under water at point where furbearer enters or leaves water	Muskrat, beaver

Non-target Animals and Pets

Many unwanted catches can be prevented by proper placement of the trap at a set. Keep in mind that most dogs are longer legged than furbearers. Dogs, unlike foxes, walk with a sort of sideways canter. At the dirt hole set, place your trap in the middle of the trap bed and up close to the hole. That way many dogs will miss the pan.

Sometimes, despite precautions, pets or other non-target animals will be taken in traps. If this happens, remove the animal from the trap and return a pet to its owner. Do not just allow it to run home limping. If a dog is not licensed and the owner cannot be found, call the local dog law enforcement officer, and allow him to take care of it. Remember that pets and hunting dogs can be extremely valuable; care must be taken to release them unharmed.

Releasing Non-target Catches

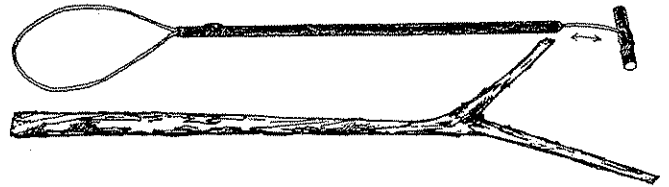
Releasing non-target catches, especially dogs, can be a problem. Approach the situation with caution. Do not take a chance of being bitten. Sometimes a coat or canvas tarp can be thrown over the animal to quiet it. Or you can use a forked stick or noose to hold its head

away while releasing the trap spring with your feet. If you feel unsure of your ability to release the animal, get help. Do not take chances.

Preventing Non-target Catches

Much can be done at the set in the areas of site selection, trap placement, and the use of proper lures to prevent, or at least minimize, unwanted catches. The following guidelines will help you choose the proper site selection.

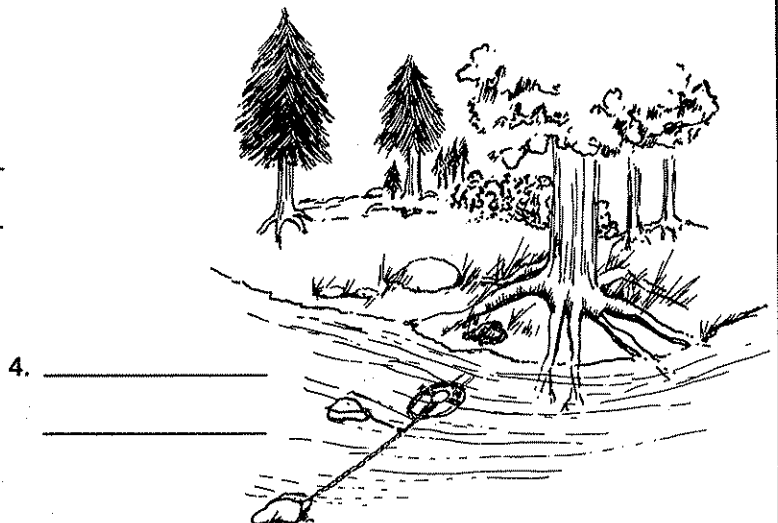
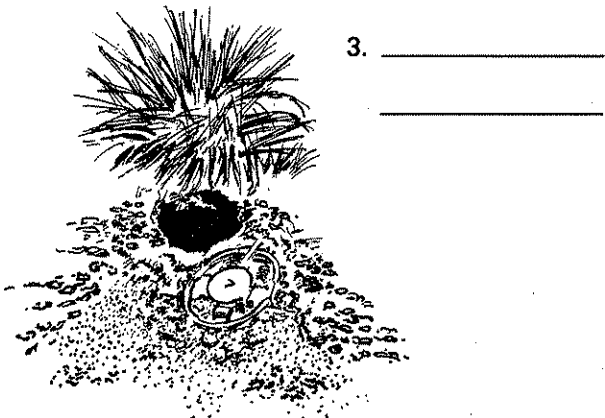
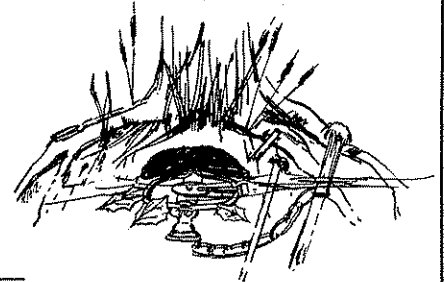
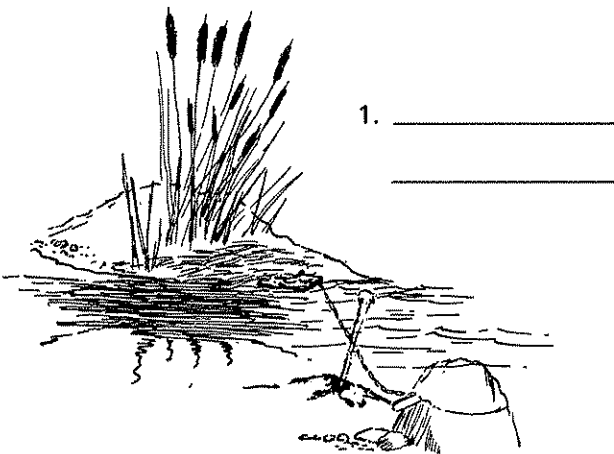
1. Set traps in an area not normally frequented by non-target animals or pets.
2. Stay away from houses and farm buildings.
3. Do not trap near town.
4. Set fox traps in open fields or pasture land. Hunting dogs will be in or near the fence rows and brush.



Noose and Forked Stick

SKILL BUILDER

Identify the following sets and indicate which furbearers they are set for. Review Chapter 6 if you have difficulty.



7

Handling the Catch

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Summarize the three basic steps in preparing pelts.
- Describe the difference between the "open and round" and the "cased" way of preparation.
- Sell your furs to a buyer.

Preparing Pelts

To get full value for furs, proper handling is as important as catching. The fur should be clean before the animal is skinned. Dirty furs should be washed and dried, and any burrs or foreign materials in the fur carefully removed.

Skinning

Except for the beaver, all fur pelts are stretched "cased." This means the skin is cut along the inside of the hind legs, from heel to heel, rather than along the midline. After skinning is completed the pelt is pulled over a stretcher to give it the desired shape.

After the initial cut, the pelt is worked loose from the body and pulled over the head. Most furbearers will skin easily, after the hind legs and tail are skinned out, by just pulling. The knife should be used only when the skin sticks. Larger animals can be skinned more readily if they are hung on a *gambrel* or hook after the hind feet are skinned out; this makes it easier to pull down on the skin. Muskrats and mink can be skinned best on a table or bench, although some muskrat trappers prefer to hang the muskrat by its tail when skinning. The skin will come off clean, with the fat left on the carcass.

When skinning on a table, the animal is held down with one hand and the skin pulled with the other. Using pieces of light cloth will help to hold the slippery skin and carcass. Care should be used not to pull the skin hard enough to tear it. The thin membrane between the skin and the carcass needs only to be stroked lightly with a sharp knife when any sticking occurs. The knife should be kept very sharp.

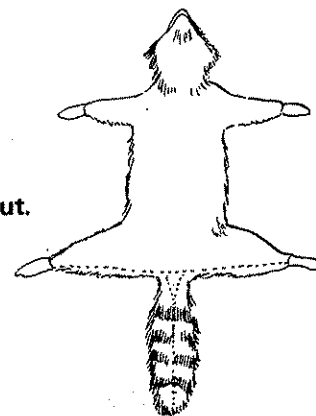
Animals with scent glands—mink, weasel, skunk, and badger—should be skinned carefully to prevent cutting into the glands. The skin is cut around the tail of smooth-tailed furbearers such as the muskrat, and

Skinning Procedure for the Cased Pelt Furbearer

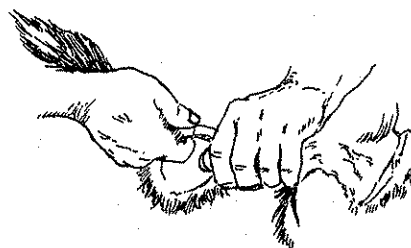
EXAMPLE: Raccoon

1. Make the initial cut.

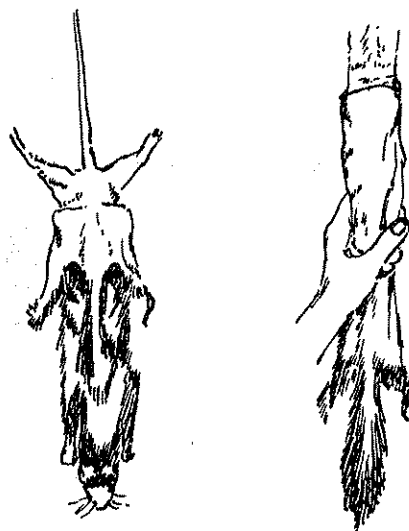
Split the tail of furred animals



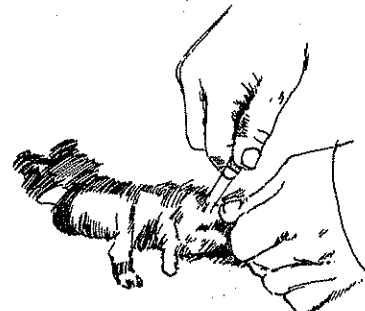
2. Skin the tail.

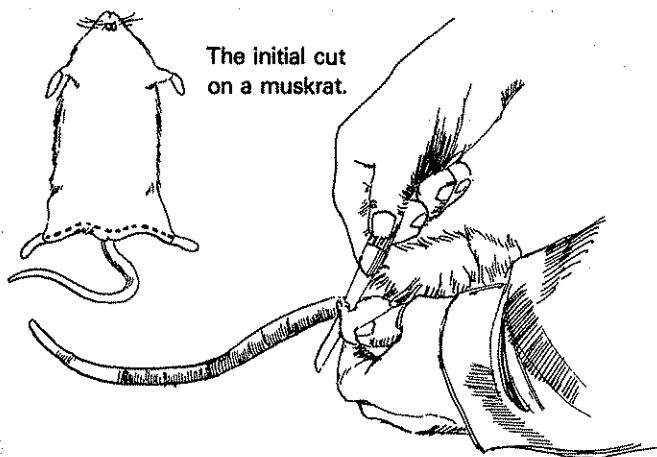


3. Pull the skin from the carcass.



4. Skin out the head. Be very careful around the ears, eyes, mouth and nose.





The initial cut on a muskrat.

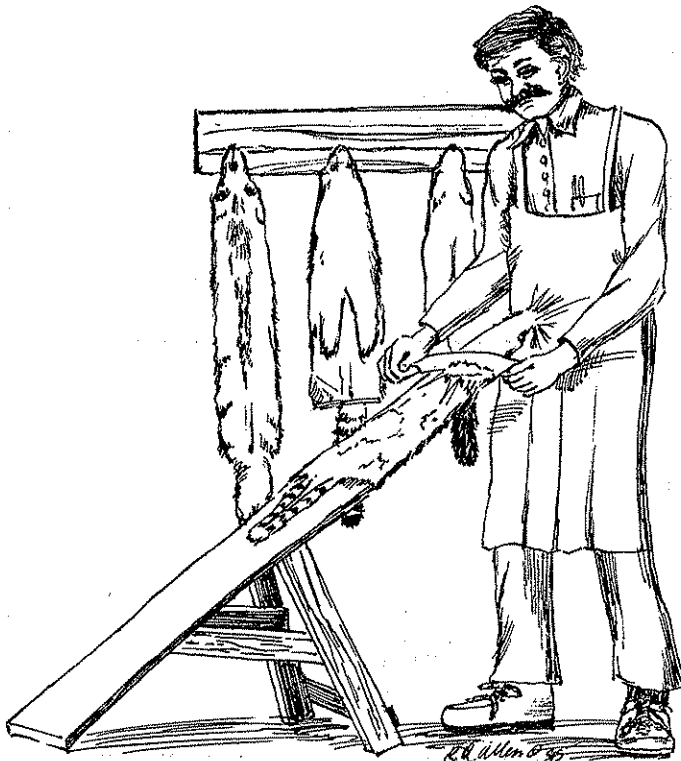
On smooth-tailed furbearers, cut the skin off around the base of the tail.

then the tail is cut off. The tail of furred furbearers is split, skinned out, and left on the pelt. It is important that the tail be split all the way to the end, to avoid forming a pocket that can collect moisture and spoil the tail.

Beginners often have trouble skinning out the head. It is important to skin the ears and eyes carefully. The ears should be cut off as close to the skull as possible. The membrane attached to the eyelids should be cut through carefully, without cutting the eyelids themselves.

Fleshing

Before a pelt is completely stretched and ready to dry, all excess flesh and fat must be removed. (Most buyers want the thin skin muscle layer left on muskrats.) The process of removing excess flesh and fat is called fleshing. If all of the fat is not removed, the fur



will become grease burned, causing the fur to slip or pull out. Fatty pelts will not dry properly and will quickly spoil. The quickest and easiest method of fleshing is to build a fleshing beam. However you choose to do it, be careful not to cut the hide or scrape so hard that the hair roots become exposed. This will cause the hair to fall out after tanning. A dull knife usually works best for scraping away fat. Be sure to remove all of the fat from around the front legs. A sharp knife or scissors can be used to trim around lips and ears.

Stretching

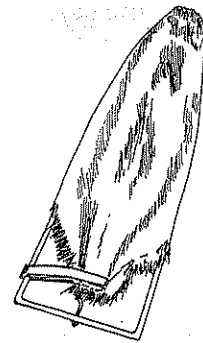
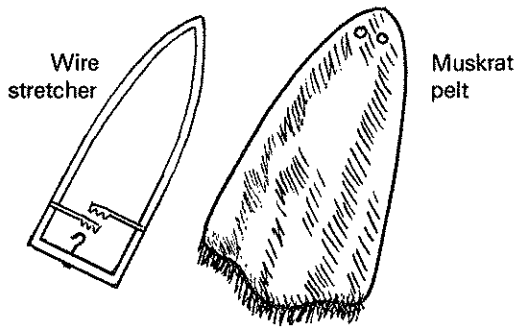
After a pelt has been thoroughly cleaned so that it is nothing but fur on one side and skin on the other, place it on a stretcher to dry. Wire stretchers are most commonly used today and are relatively inexpensive. Some trappers prefer to make their own wooden stretchers, and many commercial trapping books tell how this is done. Stretchers come in several sizes and shapes. Choose one that fits the size and shape of your pelt. Never try to overstretch a pelt. Do not try to stretch a small into a medium, or a medium into a large. This thins the fur and stretches the pelt out of shape. If you try to pull a muskrat too far down over the stretcher the belly will tear and destroy the value of the pelt. Be sure it is pulled taut, however.

After a pelt has been properly fleshed and stretched it must be hung up to dry. Select a place that is well ventilated and cool. Never place pelts in a hot room or near a furnace. This will cause them to shrivel and spoil. Each pelt should be kept separate from the others with about an inch of air space between each one. Pelts should never be hung against a wall. Stretch a length of wire between two beams and hang your fur on that. Keep your pelts out of reach of mice and dogs. Leave your pelts on the stretcher until the hide is completely dry and hard.

After removing them from the stretchers, leave all pelts, except foxes and coyotes, with fur side in. Foxes are placed on a stretcher fur side in for a couple days, then turned fur side out and put back on a stretcher.

Stretching a Cased Pelt

EXAMPLE: Muskrat



1. Turn the pelt inside out.

2. Pull the skin over the stretcher.

3. Fasten the skin down.

Safety

Extreme care should be exercised while dressing furs. Skinning knives must be razor sharp to be effective, and they have a nasty way of slicing fingers and hands. Never allow someone to stand close to you when skinning.

Disposing of Animal Carcasses

Take particular care when disposing of carcasses. If carelessly done, it may offend others and project a bad image of trapping to the general public. Whenever possible animal carcasses should be used for food. Some animals such as raccoon, muskrat and beaver are suitable for human consumption and when properly prepared are very tasty. Other carcasses can be used by some rendering plants as fertilizer or pet foods.

If the carcasses are not to be used for these purposes they should be buried in an out-of-the-way place, where dogs or wild animals will not dig them up.

Preparing Beaver Pelts

Beaver skins are prepared "open and round," rather than being skinned "cased" like other furbearers. (You should check to see if your prospective buyer wants the pelt prepared "open and round" or "cased.") The skin is cut straight down the underside from the lower lip to the base of the tail, then fleshed, stretched, and dried in a circular shape. On the beaver, the feet and tail are cut off first. The next step is to slit the pelt in a straight line from the tail to the lip, on the belly side. The fur is then cut away from the belly, one side at a time, toward the back. When the legs are reached, do not slit them open but pull them through, pulling the hide off the way you would invert a sock. Be careful with the knife when skinning around the legs because the skin is easily cut here. Skin carefully at the head. Cut the ears off close to the skull and skin around the eyes and nose.

Then flesh and stretch the pelt on a large flat board such as a four foot by four foot piece of plywood. Tack it on the board in a circular shape.

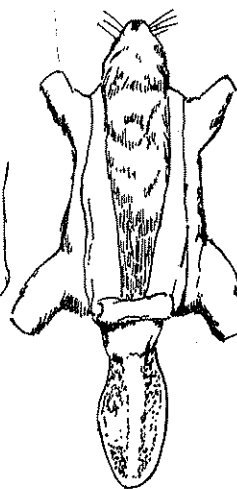
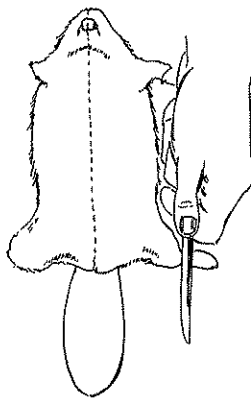
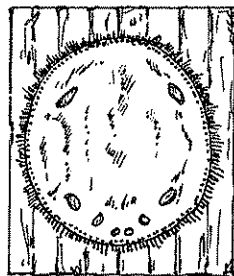
SKILL BUILDER

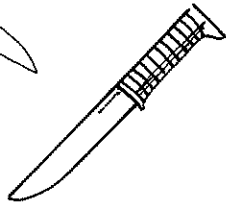
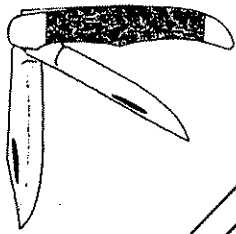
Skinning and Stretching an Open and Round Pelt

EXAMPLE: Beaver

Match the pictures with the correct captions.

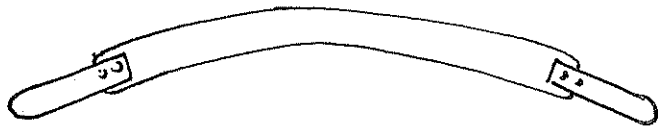
- Cut off the feet and make the initial cut from the base of the tail to the lower lip.
- Cut the skin away from the belly toward the back.
- Pull the legs through and peel the skin away from the body.
- Flesh the pelt and then stretch it and tack it in a flat, circular shape on a board.



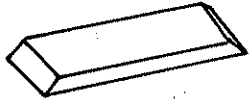
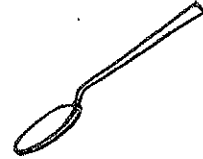
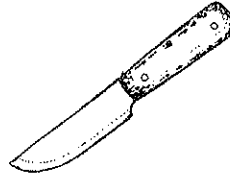
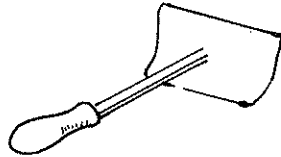


Sharp skinning knives

Draw knife fleshing tool



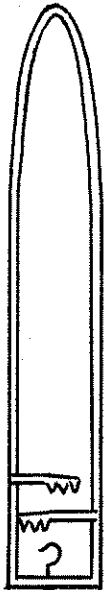
Fleshing tools



Sharpening stone

Equipment Needed for Preparing Furs

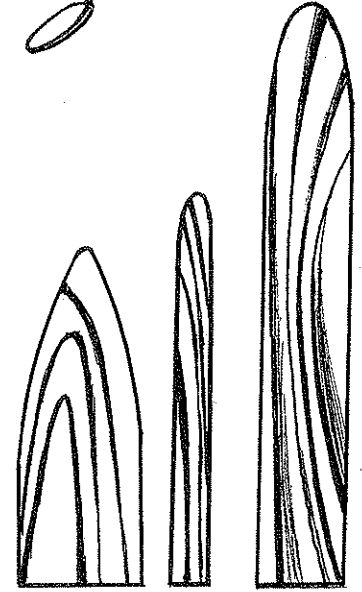
- Sharp skinning knives—these can be either a pocket knife or a small sheath knife.
- Sharpening stone.
- Fleshing tools—a dull knife, a specially made fleshing tool (available at trapping suppliers) or a table spoon.
- Fleshing board—can be made from a 2" x 4" or 2" x 6" that is rounded on one end.
- Stretchers—either wire or wood.
- Tail splitter (optional)—available at trapping suppliers.
- Tail skinner (optional)—this tool helps in skinning out the tails of raccoons and foxes. Two 16 penny nails held tightly against the tail base will help in pulling the bone free from the tail.
- Fur comb—to clean furs of burrs and dirt.



Fox, Raccoon



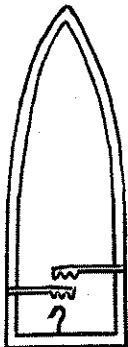
Mink



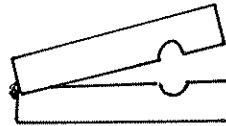
Muskrat Mink Fox, Raccoon

Wood stretchers

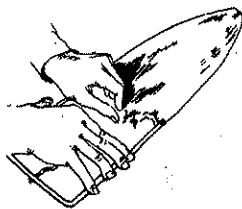
Wire stretchers



Muskrat



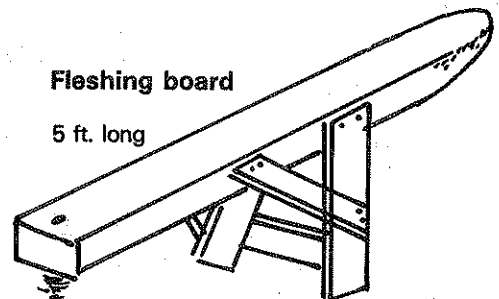
Tail skinner



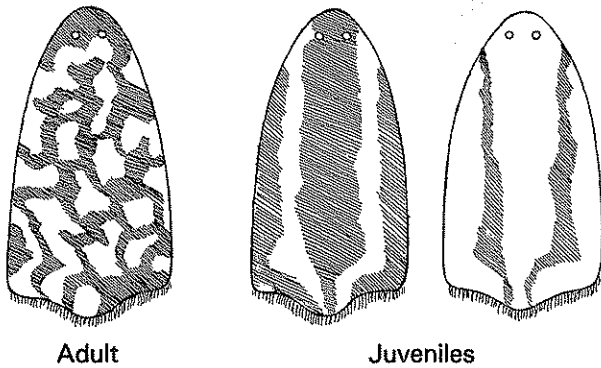
Comb

Fleshing board

5 ft. long



Pigment patterns in unprime muskrat pelts.



Primeness

"Prime" skins bring the highest prices. Primeness refers to the condition of the pelt. A skin is prime—at its highest quality—when the fur is at its maximum length, density, and texture. Fur buyers usually examine the flesh side of a pelt to determine its primeness, looking for dark areas of blood and pigment cells that are present at the base of new growing hair. Pelts with these dark blotches are called "blue hides." In prime skins the hair is full grown, the blood and pigment have disappeared, and the flesh side is a pale creamy or parchment color—the so-called "white" skins.

Foxes prime earliest of the furbearers; raccoon and mink prime in November and December. Muskrats begin to prime in late November, but they retain some of their dark blotching for about the first two months of the trapping season. In adults the dark areas are scattered and irregular in shape, while in immature animals they tend to be nearly symmetrical and arranged more or less in lengthwise rows. In January all muskrat pelts become increasingly white and prime as hair growth ceases. But by February the incidence of "cutting" increases, a result of fighting and biting at the onset of the breeding season.

Following is a list of fur damage that fur dealers look for:

1. Fur falling out or coming loose because of rot starting in the carcass before skinning was done.
2. Loose top hair coming out from skins caught early in the season that are not prime or were scraped too deeply.
3. Bitten fur caused by furbearers fighting among themselves.
4. Scored fur, damaged by the path of a bullet or trapping hook leaving long, blood-stained marks.
5. Badly shot-up fur from improper killing of the furbearer with a firearm.
6. A poor job of sewing leghole cuts, such as those on beaver pelts.
7. Burnt fur that has cracked from drying too fast in hot sun, wind, or artificial heat. It can also be

caused by grease or fat left on the pelt by poor scraping.

8. Hair lying flat on a pelt due to lack of underfur. Usually this is due to the pelt not being prime.

9. Low fur indicates that the pelt is immature or does not have fully developed underfur, again due to early trapping.

10. Rough pelts are those with rub marks that develop late in the winter season.

11. Overgrown or springy refers to late-harvested skins when underfur has begun to shed or fall out.

12. Coarse applies to pelts that are hard to the touch because they are caught late in the season.

13. Overstretch applies to pelts stretched beyond normal size. This tends to thin the leather and causes a weak, flat appearance to the skin.

14. Understretch is the opposite problem in skins. It can result in wrinkles which tend to wear off fur in shipping and handling.

15. Singed fur is downgraded because hair is bent from warm weather and too much sunshine. Unnecessary handling of the pelt or drying with heat can cause this. It's most common in mink pelts.

Selling Furs

When and to whom to sell furs is of primary importance to every trapper. In the end the choice will remain yours, but there are some points the beginner should be aware of. When to sell furs is important and this decision involves some speculation on the fur market two or three months ahead. As a general rule more dollars can be obtained for a pelt by waiting until the season is somewhat advanced. Early pelts generally bring less for a number of reasons. For one, the fur may not be fully prime. These furs never will bring top dollar. The other reason is that the fur market itself is not stable until later in the season.

On the other hand if the trapper waits too long to sell his furs the market may drop and he stands to lose money. The period between Christmas and New Year is when furs of all species are bringing a good dollar and is about the safest time to sell.

Some young trappers run to the fur buyer each time they catch a muskrat or two. If they do this the dealer will grade each and every piece they bring him. However, if they hold their furs until they have a "lot," they will often get a better price. The dealer may offer them a bulk price or he may still grade them individually. But the more furs a trapper has, the more he has to dicker with a dealer about.

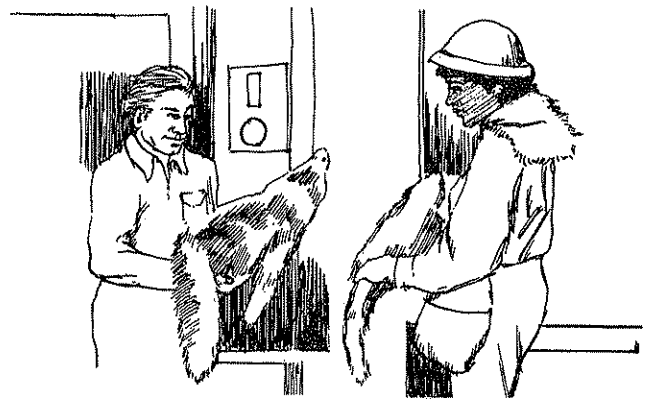
It is a good idea to check with several buyers in your area to see what they are paying for pelts. Not all fur dealers offer the same, so shop around. Check with other trappers to see what they are getting for their fur. Often a chat with an experienced trapper will help you decide on when and to whom to sell your furs. You are not committed to sell your fur to a dealer just because you take them to his fur house. If you are not satisfied with the price, take the furs home and try another dealer.

The Fur Industry

After you sell your furs to a dealer each pelt is cleaned by trimming away excess fat, etc. that you may have missed. The dealer then sells the fur to a broker who separates the pelts into large lots according to species, size and condition. The broker in turn sells these lots to a manufacturing company who makes them into garments for the fashion trade.

The chain of dealers and brokers may be longer or shorter, but every time your furs are resold someone must make a profit on them. If a pelt has been handled poorly by the trapper it will command a very poor price all the way through.

No trapper can sell directly to a manufacturer and escape this chain of middlemen altogether. If you expect top dollar down on your level, your fur will have to be handled correctly right from the trapline.



Home Use of Furs

Some trappers keep the furs they catch to make hats, muffs, or other articles of clothing. Before pelts can be used for this purpose they must be tanned. Unless it is preserved and cared for properly, the hide or skin of an animal will decay quickly. A professional tanner or taxidermist can be hired to do the job. Or for those who prefer to do the work themselves, the project can be handled at home.

Tanning converts animal skin into leather. (Animal skins can be tanned with or without removing the

fur.) During the process, a tanning agent is applied to the skin which replaces the water in the hide, blends into the fibers, and fuses them together. Home tanning techniques vary, but the basic steps involve the following: 1.) Removing all the surplus tissue, flesh, and fat; 2.) Degreasing the skin; 3.) Soaking it in a tanning solution; and 4.) Drying, oiling, and finishing the skin.

There is some risk involved in tanning pelts, especially for the beginner. Every pelt has properties which may cause it to react differently from others in the same lot. It is suggested that beginners practice on a few low-value furs to familiarize themselves with the tanning process. And since some of the materials and solutions used in tanning are dangerous, an adult should supervise any youngster who is tanning.

PELTING GUIDE					
Furbearer	Skinning Method	Skinning		Stretching Method	Trade Classification
		Feet	Tail		
Coyote	Cased	Cut off	Skinned and left on pelt	Cased	Long-haired
Muskrat	Cased	Cut off	Cut off	Cased	Short-haired
Raccoon	Cased	Cut off	Split, skinned, and left on pelt*	Cased	Long-haired
Mink, Weasel	Cased	Cut off, or skinned and left on pelt	Split, skinned, and left on pelt*	Cased	Short-haired
Skunk	Cased	Cut off	Split, skinned, and left on pelt*	Cased	Long-haired
Opossum	Cased	Cut off	Cut off	Cased	Long-haired
Red fox, Gray fox	Cased	Cut off, or skinned and left on pelt	Split, skinned, and left on pelt*	Cased, partially dried leather side out, then turned fur side out	Long-haired
Beaver	Open and round	Cut off	Cut off	Leather side out	Short-haired
Bobcat	Cased	Cut off	Skinned and left on pelt	Cased	Long-haired

*Tail should be split all the way to the end.

8

The Future of Trapping

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Name three reasons why habitat is disappearing.
- List three ways furbearer land can be preserved.

What does tomorrow hold for the sport of trapping? The answer depends on the future supply of furbearer habitat and on continued public acceptance of trapping as a legitimate activity.

Furbearer habitat depends on land use. Wetland areas are in constant jeopardy. North America as a whole has lost much of its wetlands through conversions into other uses. Agriculture, housing, industry, highways, and river straightening are all subtracting each year from our remaining wetlands. As the habitat goes, so does the furbearer population it supports—and so does trapping.

Landowners, with the support of government agencies, hold the key to furbearer abundance. They can preserve or restore swamps and marshes, keep stream banks and woodlands wild and undisturbed, and let fencerows have enough vegetation to provide cover and den sites for furbearers and other wildlife. Then the future will be bright for furbearers and for the trappers who seek them.

Continued public acceptance of sport trapping will be greatly influenced by the trapper's conduct. For a variety of reasons, trapping is not only a biologically good form of recreation, but also an effective way to manage wild furbearer populations. Experienced trappers know this as well as anyone. They must carry the message to those who have never used the privilege of trapping.



How trappers practice their sport will probably weigh more heavily in the public mind than any other factor. A single trapper who fails to get landowner permission can close a productive trapline to everyone. All the words written about the virtues of trapping may be wasted on the person who observes just one irresponsibly trapped animal.

Most people willingly pay insurance premiums to protect their own health and to provide for the future of their loved ones. Trappers must also pay "premiums" to ensure the health and longevity of their sport. They can do this by learning the facts of scientific wildlife management, speaking up for wildlife in land use decisions, educating others on the merits of trapping, and following the laws and the code of responsible trapping. They must also insist that all trappers do the same.

NOTES

TRAPPING REGULATIONS

Trapping laws have several purposes:

- To ensure that the furbearer resource will not be over-harvested.
- To permit reasonable use of this resource.
- To allow everyone an opportunity to harvest a fair share of the surplus crop.
- To minimize waste.
- To ensure that animals are taken in a humane manner.
- To minimize chances of catching nontarget animals.
- To protect people from property damage and diseases caused by too many furbearers.
- To control furbearer populations within desirable limits.

Trapping regulations are published annually and can be obtained from any hunting license agent. All trappers should become thoroughly familiar with laws that govern their sport.

