

ODFW Trap Check Work Group
Tuesday, September 14th, 2021, 2pm-4pm PT
Zoom Meeting - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4nt6w-DCr0&t=2s>

Participants:

- Mary Anne Cooper, Oregon Farm Bureau
- *Kyle Williams (alternate for Mary Anne Cooper), Oregon Forest & Industry Council*
- Kelly Peterson, Humane Society of the United States
- Jim Soares, Oregon Trappers Association
- *Stan Steele (alternate for Jim Soares), Oregon Trappers Association*
- Tyler Dungannon, Oregon Hunters Association
- *Amy Patrick (alternate for Tyler Dungannon), Oregon Hunters Association*
- Bob Sallinger, Portland Audubon
- Quinn Read, Center for Biological Diversity
- Jill Zarnowitz, ODFW Commission
- Greg Wolley, ODFW Commission
- Derek Broman, ODFW Wildlife Biologist
- Shannon Hurn, ODFW Deputy Director
- *Kevin Blakely (alternate for Shannon Hurn), ODFW Deputy Administrator*
- *Jordan Cole (alternate for Lauren Smith), Association of Oregon Counties*

Absent:

- Michelle Tate, ODFW
- Lauren Smith, Association of Oregon Counties

Guest Presenters:

- Kevin Christensen, APHIS Wildlife Services

Facilitation Team

- Jamie Damon, Kearns & West
- Samantha Meysohn, Kearns & West

Welcome, Agenda Review, and Updates

Jamie Damon, Kearns & West facilitator, opened the meeting, welcomed participants and guest speakers to the ODFW Trap Check Work Group, and provided an agenda overview.

Best Management Practices for Trapping and Trapping Technologies

Jim Soares, Oregon Trappers Association, provided an overview of the Best Management Practices for Trapping and trapping technologies.

A high-level overview of the presentation is below:

- The Best Management Practices for trapping and hunting came out of an international effort to set internal standards for humane trapping practices in 1991. Since the trapping and hunting regulations are not set by the federal government, but rather by states and tribal governments, the BMPs were created to guide humane practices across the states.
- In [White et al. 2020](#), the study evaluates animal welfare, efficiency of the traps, selectivity, and practicality. Two scales were used to evaluate injuries across types of traps and for different species.

- Traps have been modified to reduce injury – laminations, added springs, center swiveling, added reinforced base plate, adding springs, and adding a shock spring.
- In White et al 2020, the traps that were tested were both standard and some modified traps.
- Not all traps were approved. Instead of saying a trap was approved or not, it gave circumstances and qualifications for using those traps and similar traps that had met compliance.
- A lot of trappers are looking at ways to improve traps based on BMPs and to improve animal welfare. Trappers do not want to hurt the animals more than necessary.

Jim showed the trap modifications he made on his own trap:

- The gap in the trap is a requirement for a number three trap. The weld on the edge of the trap prevents the trap from closing all the way and maintains the three sixteenth inch gap.
- Welding the round stock gives a thicker jaw to distribute the pressure on the trapped animal to make it more comfortable and reduce cutting.
- A center swivel prevents the foot from sliding and causing abrasions.
- Adding several swivels prevent the animal from rolling up in the trap.
- A shock spring at the end allows for some give if the animal lunges.
- A thicker base plate prevents bending. The thinner base plate the trap came with would bend.
- Adding four coils to the trap. Jim removed some of the coils because the other modifications were effective at reducing injury.

The work group members asked the following questions:

Question: How common is it to modify traps in this way? Are these modifications standard in newer manufactured traps?

Answer: these features are becoming more standard, and newer traps incorporate these changes, but it makes the traps more expensive.

Question: How long are your trap lines and what percentage of your traps are modified?

Answer: Jim's coyote trap line is 60-80 miles long, and all of his traps are modified in this way. Jim's smaller drowning trap sets are not as modified because the animal is dead in a matter of minutes, so he is not concerned for how long the animal is in the trap.

Question: Regardless of the trap modifications, when an animal is caught in a trap, they are exposed to the elements without access to water and are vulnerable to predation. In 35 other states, BMPs also apply there, and they also chose to reduce the time check intervals for greater animal welfare. How do you think about animal welfare issues related to the times an animal is caught in a trap?

Answer: Jim has concern for the animal population as a whole. In the wild, animals die from disease, predation, and starvation. By controlling the population, it allows for a more humane quality of life for the whole population. For Jim, holding an animal for a day or two, has greater benefits for the overall health of the population.

Question: Furbearer trapping is seen as an economic or recreational opportunity. How does it relate to animal population management?

Answer: Jim shared an example: around 2000, the market for coyote fur went down, and then trapping coyotes was less common. Mange effected the coyote population and was passed around quickly. He had a coyote in his trap that was nearly hairless and emaciated. Jim couldn't recognize it until he was within 10 feet of the animal. Jim also shared that he has dealt with tularemia in muskrat populations.

Question: In the White et al. 2020 study, all traps were checked within a 24-hour time period. How can the study help the Work Group evaluate trap check time intervals when that was not a variable that was studied here? How should the group use the BMPs to help evaluate the question at hand?

Answer: Derek Broman, ODFW, shared that the White et al. 2020 study does not provide insight into the trap check interval question because the study was not designed to evaluate that question in a statistically significant way. BMPs are designed to evaluate traps and types of traps. The study also did not evaluate kill traps and therefore is not conclusive for all trapping practices.

Shannon Hurn, ODFW, the group needs to have more information to evaluate the time intervals question.

Question: Is there information that would be helpful to unpack the change beyond the BMPs?

Answer: The group can look at the history of why the time intervals are what they are that ODFW provided.

Comment: It is important to understand animal injuries between traps because injuries affect the animal's ability to survive in the trap. BMPs seek to minimize injury to the animal in the trap.

Question: Given that the White et al. 2020 and BMPs are based on a daily trap check, how can the group factor in the time interval into the work group discussion?

Answer: This work group can learn from what other states are doing, but we should not just copy other states without scientific based reasoning. Logistic constraints in Oregon are different. It is easier to check traps East of the Mississippi. Analyze where we are at and data that comes from daily trap check analysis.

Jim shared that east of the Missouri is where the daily trap check times. In Eastern Oregon, in a drier climate, there are fewer animals per square mile. Jim travels 60-80 miles per day. Going more frequently doubles his transportation cost. The more times someone checks the trap, all the animals know, and it makes the trap less efficient. Covering more ground, in shorter time, makes checking the traps impossible. Jim shared that he currently breaks even on costs for trapping. Adding costs would mean that he would have to ask the ranchers to pay him to trap: The ranchers have coyote problems and want them thinned out one way or another. This feels like an attempt to put trappers out of business. They have given all they can and cannot give more.

The group further discussed the role of furbearer trapping for wildlife management:

- Jim shared that he always considers compassion when he traps, and considers the well-being of the animal in the trap.
- When muskrats go to a certain population size, they cause major problems for landowners. The landowners will get the muskrats out one way or another, so a trapper can also make use of the fur.

- Populations rise and fall with disease and food availability. That has been going on before people existed.
- People wouldn't trap animals unless it benefitted people because populations will rise and fall on their own without human intervention.
- Wildlife management practices have changed because people have so greatly modified the environment.
- If deer and elk were not managed, diseases would get into populations and potentially spread to cattle, etc. Managing the populations can keep them healthy.
- People do not want to see animals falling dead on their fields or spreading disease to their animals. Trapping is another management tool.

Question: How are these issues the same or different for trapping predatory animals?

Answer: Kevin Christensen, APHIS, shared that there are many parallel issues for trapping predatory animals as with the furbearer trapping. The BMPs are used and help to guide selectivity, efficiency, and limiting injury. For APHIS, they are interested in trapping as efficiently as possible. Shortening the trap check time interval will make the trap less efficient. From a cost perspective, more time adds to costs, and reduces efficiency of the traps. Wildlife Services respond to a request from a landowner, and longer it takes to address that request, the more of a problem it is for the landowner.

Comment: When trap checks were addressed through a commission work group years ago, the main reason that was given for the current trap check times was terrain and geography.

Question: The Work Group needs to tease out the terrain argument to understand how Oregon is the same or different from other states with shorter trap check times. What makes Oregon different? If territories are too large that traps cannot be checked in 24 hours, perhaps smaller territories should be used.

Comment: ODFW does not consider the economics of wildlife rehabilitation centers in their regulations. ODFW works in the best interest of the animals. Wildlife rehabilitation centers are told that if they cannot meet these regulations, then they should not rehabilitate animals. This standard could be applied here: if trapping cannot be done in a humane way, then do not do it.

Question: When APHIS is checking traps, do they go directly to the traps or can they be checked from a distance to prevent disturbance?

APHIS responded that traps do not capture an animal as soon as the trap is set. Often times the animals look fairly fresh when they are removed. Animals may avoid the trap if they smell human disturbance, or the animal has become "trap wise" and will avoid trap sets. It may take multiple attempts to successfully trap that animal, and trappers have to adapt and keep evolving to trap that animal.

Observing a trap from a distance may be possible with certain topography. Other times, getting close to the trap is needed to see if a mouse has exposed the base plate or if a recent rain has exposed the trap and it needs to be re-set. Checking from a distance wouldn't necessarily share that information.

Question: How is APHIS adapting to the 24-hour trap check intervals in the other states? What is the roadblock here that would prevent APHIS from going to a 24-hour trap check?

Answer: When APHIS is trapping for predators, they consider employee safety, the well-being of the targeted animals, as well as the non-target animals. APHIS also considers the humane treatment of the livestock, domestic pets, and people who are affected by wildlife. The BMPS help guide APHIS in considering the equipment, selectivity, and resources available to the professional trapper.

Question: In other states APHIS has had to grapple with the shorter time intervals and trapping for conflict management, as well. How has APHIS addressed it?

Answer: States deal with damage management differently and other states may have better funded APHIS programs to address conflict management. For example, Montana has more restrictive trap times and they are dealing with grizzlies, wolves, and other animal conflicts in expansive landscape, so APHIS has a larger program there to address those complexities.

Comment: when trapping for damage, it would still be helpful for the trap to be able to be checked, at least from a distance to ensure the animal is caught so the trap can be reset.

Response: Often APHIS works with landowners who are on the landscape. The landowners are able to make observations for the traps and can inform APHIS when an animal is captured. That information can help inform APHIS how to set the traps – how they can be monitored from a distance, how long it takes for animals to revisit the traps, and if a landowner will be in the vicinity to check.

Jamie summarized the discussion thus far:

The concerns that trappers navigate include: logistics, transportation, financial costs, human disturbance of the traps, geography, additional costs to land managers to pay trappers to offset, efficiency, and safety for trappers. There is a lot of agreement that no one wants animals languishing in traps.

To get to the question of whether changes need to happen at all, this group wants to understand the following:

- What are the barriers, and can the group provide recommendations to ODFW commission to address those barriers?
- How does APHIS address the shorter trap check time intervals in other states, and how can Oregon learn from that?
- What are resource constraints?
- How does geography impact ability to check traps?
- How can land manager partnerships be used to help check traps greater than the required amount of time?

In comparison to other states, California has similar topography with mountain range and challenging terrain. Work group members suggested using empirical data when making comparisons across states.

A work group member noted that previous legislative efforts to increase support for APHIS services was fought by conservation groups. Increasing funding, resources, and personnel could have been possible through that legislative effort.

In previous trap check work groups, an extensive economic analysis was done to inform decision-making for the current trap check times.

Finalize the Draft Charter and review Draft Work Plan

Jamie shared that KW met to discuss the scope with ODFW Commissioners, Greg Wolley and Jill Zarnowitz, and Shannon Hurn. Through that discussion they landed on taking a phased approach to first address predatory animals and furbearer classified animals at this time; if time permits, could turn focus to game mammals, recognizing that there are additional perspectives that would need to be included in that discussion. Commissioner Wolley added that animal suffering is central to the trapping interval questions regardless of animal trapping classification. ODFW shared that Oregon Statute 298012 Also has different statutory construction around cougar, fox, bear, and bobcat. Since cougars and bears are game mammals, they fall under different regulations. A work group member asked if the ODFW commission has the ability to make changes to the furbearer and predatory regulations, and ODFW confirmed that they can.

The other change made to the charter was around public input. A work group member asked how this process relates to a Rulemaking Advisory Committee. ODFW answered that this process would develop recommendations that would be shared with the ODFW Commission, and a rulemaking process could be initiated. The process would be open for 60 days for public comment as required by the rulemaking process. The work group should allow for public input for transparency, and that is captured in the current language in the charter. Another work group member noted that the fewer meetings the better, since they are not paid to attend. The commissioners supported the opportunity for public input at some point.

Confirm next steps, upcoming meeting topics, and summary

Jamie asked the group if there was a preference for addressing the following topics on October 5th and October 26th. The group confirmed that the October 5th meeting will continue the discussion around animal welfare. The October 26th meeting will examine how other states compare to Oregon. A work group member asked what “humane” means to this group. Work group members will be able to share their definitions and perspectives through a survey after the meeting.

Jamie confirmed the action items with the group:

Action Items from 9/14

- All: Complete a Meeting Feedback Survey by **Tuesday, 9/21**.
- KW: Work with work group members to bring forward guest speakers and resources on animal welfare for the 10/5 Trap Check Meeting.
- KW: Work with Kevin Christensen and others for comparison states to learn about how wildlife control/APHIS operate with different trap check time intervals for the 10/26 Trap Check Meeting
- KW: Develop a meeting summary and send to the work group by **Tuesday, 9/21**
- KW: Circulate the Charter

Jamie thanked everyone for their hard work and focus during the webinar.

Meeting adjourned at 4pm PT.