

The State's Position

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources supports modern, regulated trapping as a safe, efficient, and practical means of taking certain species of furbearers. Wildlife management's goal is to maintain healthy and diverse wildlife populations and trapping is an important tool in achieving that goal. Trapping has been a part of human activity for thousands of years. In Wisconsin, trapping has important historical, social, economic and cultural value for trappers, farmers, landowners and Native Americans.

Trapping is Regulated in Wisconsin

The Department and trappers have been active in creating and implementing legislation and rules designed to closely regulate trapping in the state. The many laws include:

- Mandatory training and certification of first-time trappers
- Licensing of all trappers
- Closely regulated furbearer seasons and issuing special permits for less abundant species
- Tagging and registration of certain species to regulate harvest, which additionally provides important scientific data on these species.
- Requiring permission from landowners
- Restrictions on where traps are set
- Restrictions on sizes and types of traps
- Restrictions designed to reduce non-target captures
- Mandatory identification of traps with user's contact information
- Mandatory daily checking of all dry-land and non-drowning sets

Wildlife biologists monitor populations of furbearers in Wisconsin. Scientific studies assure these species are managed properly. The Department is also involved in studies to identify traps and trapping systems that reduce injuries to animals yet maintain the efficiency needed to meet management goals. Traps are continually improving in quality, efficiency, and humaneness.

Trapping Benefits Society

Recreation: Trapping provides a valuable outdoor experience for thousands of Wisconsinites. It is enriched by family and cultural traditions. Approximately 86% of all Wisconsinites are interested in wildlife-oriented recreation. Trapping is but one of the outdoor opportunities DNR is directed by law to manage and to provide so that all citizens have the freedom to select and pursue satisfying outdoor activities.

Economy: Wisconsin is one of the top three producers of wild furs. Trapping provides a needed supplemental income to families in many parts of the state. It also provides direct economic benefits to fur buyers, the fur processing and fur garment industries, and retail businesses.

Damage and nuisance control: Trappers each year remove thousands of animals causing damage and problems for farmers, highway departments, foresters, homeowners and cranberry growers.

Wildlife Management: Information gathered through tagging and registration ensures furbearer populations are abundant and healthy. Trapping plays a vital role in maintaining Wisconsin's diverse landscapes and wildlife. Foot-hold traps are the only effective and practical tool for capturing certain animals. Foot-hold traps allow the catch and release of individual animals in order to monitor population movements and health status. Trapping allows Wisconsin to cooperate with other government agencies to trap, relocate or reintroduce endangered species, such as fisher, wolves, and American marten, with the goal of restoring biological diversity.



Trapping Education

Trapper education, conducted by trained volunteer instructors, has been offered in the state since the 1970s. Since 1992, all first-time trappers have been required to be trained and certified in:

- Knowledge of conservation laws
- Knowledge of wildlife management principles
- Trapper Ethics
- Pelt and meat preservation
- Respecting landowner rights
- Proper trapping techniques



Visit dnr.wi.gov
keywords "trap" or "trapper ed"
for more information



WM-551 2014

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services, and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. This publication can be made available in alternative formats (large print, Braille, audio tape, etc) upon request. Please call 608-261-6452 for more information.

TRAPS, TRAPPING AND FURBEARER MANAGEMENT IN WISCONSIN



Responses to some commonly heard opposition statements to trapping:

Steel jaw traps inflict tissue damage and pain.

It is incorrect to suggest injuries either never or always occur. Injuries are minimized by proper regulations, proper set techniques and trapper education programs as well as the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Trapping. Visit fishwildlife.org for more information about BMPs.

Many countries and some states have banned foothold traps. Why doesn't Wisconsin follow suit when cage traps are more humane?

Cage traps are used for specific species in specific situations. They are not, however, the tool to use in every situation. Cage traps have limited use and success because many species refuse to enter them, they are expensive, are more difficult to transport, and are visible and prone to thievery. While cage traps have passed humane trap research standards, they are often not the most humane type of trap available, depending on the species in question. Current laws about frequent inspection, type, size and placement of traps help assure appropriate use. Objections to "steel jaw traps" are likely an emotional objection to trapping in general and may reflect a lack of knowledge of regulated trapping in our state today.

Foothold traps are important to furbearer management not just because of fur harvest, but also for research purposes. Without the foothold, we wouldn't be able to collar and track species like bobcats, wolves and badger to better understand their populations and habits. On a national level, the 1.5 coil-spring foothold is the reason river otter were able to be successfully reintroduced into many states, resulting in 49/50 states now having otter populations. Wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park using foothold traps and federally endangered shorebirds such as piping plovers are protected through the use of foothold traps.

Traps kill and maim indiscriminately.

Relatively few non-furbearers are caught in foothold traps set for furbearers. Trigger adjustments, trap size selection, selective set construction and selective baits minimize the catch of other species. There are also laws to minimize non-target capture, such as not allowing sight-exposed bait to avoid capturing raptors.

These figures come from animal activists and are impossible to document and substantiate. No trapping design can be 100% selective. However, a foothold trap set in a submerged muskrat burrow is very selective for muskrats or mink, a bait of aspen is very selective as beaver bait, and an enclosed trigger traps set with sweet bait is selective for raccoons. Regulation and trapper education—already in place in Wisconsin—assure selective trapping. Additionally, the majority of trap types in Wisconsin are restraint devices, designed to hold an animal until it can be released or dispatched. Restraint devices are not designed to injure and when used properly and set selectively often do not. Using restraint devices allow trappers to release non-targets.

Scientific tests are being conducted on an international level through BMPs for trapping research to improve and promote types of traps that do not cause significant, permanent, or life-threatening injuries to any animal caught. Laws have been and will be adjusted to reflect the latest research.

Trappers don't check traps regularly.

Wisconsin has laws requiring daily trap checks, and this is what occurs. Those who violate the law are investigated and ticketed by Wisconsin Conservation wardens.

Animals chew off their limbs in traps.

The majority of animals will not "self-mutilate" to try to get out of a trap, though they may try to chew on the trap itself. These types of statistics come from animal activists and are difficult to verify. Wisconsin requires mandatory daily checking of traps, which minimizes the chance of this type of occurrence.

Why kill animals for their fur when there are synthetic alternatives?

While there are synthetic alternatives to fur, these are made from petro-chemicals which come from petroleum, a non-renewable resource that the procurement of can critically damage habitat. Fur is a renewable resource that when managed correctly is available year after year. Fur is also durable and practical as it is very warm.

The majority of Wisconsin's citizens oppose trapping.

This is actually untrue and a 2001 study by Responsive Management, an independent social science firm, showed 73% of Wisconsin's citizens support regulated trapping (Duda et al. 2001). The key to this support is the fact trapping is highly regulated in Wisconsin, allowing us to adequately manage furbearer populations and allow trapping as a legitimate outdoor activity, while ensuring long-term survival of furbearer populations.

Trapping for disease control simply doesn't work.

All furbearing species have regularly used territories during significant times of the year when they are raising their young. When a population is too dense, these natural territories abut, overlap, and are reduced in size. The resulting close and frequent contact yields opportunities for many diseases to spread rapidly in a chain-like reaction. Properly managed furbearers have adequate territory sizes, and space between territories. This reduces or eliminates the possibility of rapid disease transmissions.

Trapping is not a solution to wildlife disease outbreaks. But trapping can reduce threats to the health of humans, domestic animals, and other wild animals. The best control for rabies is through domestic animal vaccination, avoiding pet contact with wildlife, and ensuring that human activities do not encourage nuisance wildlife.

There are less than 10,000 trappers in the state, too few to pay attention to.

The number of people who engage in an activity is irrelevant. Trapping provides a desired outdoor activity, either part or full-time for a portion of our population. Trapping activity is useful for Wisconsin because it provides a service that the public would otherwise have to pay for and it provides needed supplemental income to many rural families.

Our society does not condone the singling out of a group solely because they are only a small percentage of the population. The DNR strives to provide a range of outdoor opportunities to accommodate all user groups. Trapping has significant cultural value for farmers, trappers, landowners and Native Americans, in particular. The Department respects those values and attempts to accommodate them as it does the values of other groups.

The DNR only cares about allowing people to kill animals while ignoring the needs of the natural ecosystem in which all biological life has a legitimate function.

Harvest is monitored for all species and species with less abundant populations are harvested through a special permitting system to ensure harvest does not negatively impact populations.

The fact that all wildlife have a function in the ecosystem is something the DNR, hunters, trappers, and all citizens can agree on. The DNR is committed to managing wildlife for all of Wisconsin's citizens while allowing the opportunity for outdoor recreation, including trapping, hiking, and wildlife watching, among others. Hunters and trappers are interested in managing wildlife not only for hunting and trapping opportunities, but also for the inherent value of wildlife and wildlands. Hunters and trappers put money behind their convictions for the real, long term benefit of wildlife—both hunted and non-hunted species—through license purchases and excise taxes on firearms and ammunition that provides the core funding for wildlife management.