



Standing Position

Traps, Trapping, and Furbearer Management

Internationally accepted principles of natural resources conservation stipulate that resource management activities must maintain essential ecological processes, preserve genetic diversity, and ensure continued existence of species and ecosystems. Government-regulated trapping in North America is consistent with all three criteria and is a versatile, safe, effective, and ecologically sound method of harvesting and managing furbearers.

Trapping is part of our cultural heritage that provides income, recreation, and an outdoor lifestyle for many citizens through use of a renewable natural resource. Both trapping and hunting provide opportunities for fostering stewardship values and connecting to the outdoors. Trapping is often vital to the subsistence or self-sufficiency of peoples in remote regions who have few other economic alternatives. It is also a primary tool of most wildlife damage management programs and an important technique in wildlife research. Regulated trapping is an important way for biologists to collect information about wildlife, including information about wildlife diseases such as rabies that can also affect people. Threatened and endangered species also benefit from regulated trapping. For example, foxes, coyotes, and nutria are trapped in certain locations in order to protect sea turtles, black-footed ferrets, whooping cranes and other rare species from predation or damage to their habitats.

Despite the values of trapping, portions of the public oppose it, or at least perceive problems with some aspects of it. Some object only to certain trapping methods, particularly foothold traps on land, but others have moral objections to killing animals. Much opposition to trapping is associated with urban-oriented cultures, particularly those dominated by tertiary (service-oriented) employment. Those who approve of, practice, or benefit from trapping are primarily from rural cultures or areas where primary (land-based) employment predominates. This dichotomy of lifestyles and values, combined with a general lack of objective information about trapping, creates barriers to understanding and resolving controversial issues associated with trapping.

The policy of The Wildlife Society in regard to trapping is to:

1. Support the use of regulated trapping for sustained harvest of some species of furbearers as an effective method of managing or studying furbearers.
2. Recognize the economic and recreational benefits of trapping.
3. Recognize that regulated trapping is an important component of the lifestyle of many people, including subsistence users and others, who desire to live close to the land, derive as much of their sustenance from the land as possible, and take personal responsibility for their uses of animals.
4. Recognize that regulated trapping is a safe, efficient, and practical means of capturing individual animals without impairing the survival of furbearer populations or damaging the environment.

5. Recognize that animals can be injured by some traps and trapping systems and that ethical trapping requires using traps that kill animals quickly or capture and restrain animals in systems that reduce or eliminate injuries. This can be accomplished through: (a) regulatory and educational programs, (b) research that evaluates and improves trap performance, and (c) implementing acceptable and effective improvements in trapping technology, further reducing injury to captured animals while maintaining acceptable trapping efficiency and safety to users.
6. Promote development of improved traps, trapping systems, and additional methods of taking furbearing animals. Support the development of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping in the United States, under the auspices of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and encourage state wildlife agencies to promote the use of BMPs in state furbearer management and trapper outreach programs. Support the sustainable use of furbearer resources in carefully regulated management programs.
7. Promote trapper education programs that cover appropriate trapping techniques, proper fur handling, and furbearer management.
8. Recognize that significant opposition to trapping exists, in North America and abroad. Advocate research on furbearers, trappers, trapping methods, and attitudes of publics toward trapping to advance understanding and facilitate resolution of controversial issues and problems associated with furbearer management.
9. Promote programs that inform the public, including trappers, about values and benefits of properly regulated, sustained use of renewable natural resources, including furbearers.
10. Encourage appropriate government regulation of trapping and rigorous enforcement of trapping laws by responsible agencies to assure that optimum furbearer populations are perpetuated and that trapping and furbearer management programs are compatible with or enhance the management of other species, including threatened and endangered wildlife.
11. Encourage international efforts, especially beyond North America, to improve the conservation and management of furbearer species, including the use and adoption of BMPs for capturing wildlife, and the training of trappers and professional biologists on state of the art developments in furbearer management.