

Sustainability  
Agriculture &



# TRAPPING



Saskatchewan

Reference Book  
&  
Activity Guide

## 4-H MOTTO

Learn to do by doing.

## 4-H PLEDGE

I pledge

My HEAD to clearer thinking,

My HEART to greater loyalty,

My HANDS to larger service,

My HEALTH to better living,

For my club, my community and my country.



## 4-H GRACE

(Tune of Auld Lang Syne)

We thank thee, Lord, for blessings great

On this, our own fair land.

Teach us to serve thee joyfully,

With head, heart, health and hand.

This project was developed through funds provided by the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP). No portion of this manual may be reproduced without written permission from the Saskatchewan 4-H Council, phone 306-933-7727, email: [info@4-H.sk.ca](mailto:info@4-H.sk.ca). Developed July 2013.

The material was written by *Jean-Michel DeVink and Guy Pulvermacher*



Agriculture and  
Agri-Food Canada

Agriculture et  
Agroalimentaire Canada



AGRICULTURE COUNCIL  
OF SASKATCHEWAN INC.

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
History of Trapping in Canada .....	1
North American Model of Wildlife Management .....	2
Private Stewardship of a Public Resource .....	3
Why Trapping is Valuable Today .....	3
What are the Alternatives to Trapping Nuisance Animals? .....	4
Is Trapping Environmentally and Ethically Responsible? .....	5
What are the Common Furbearers Around the Farm? .....	5
<b>Introduction to Canadian Furbearers</b> .....	6
Common Species that can Cause Problems Around the Farm .....	7
<b>How to Trap Furbearers</b> .....	15
Tools of the Trade .....	15
What is a Prime Pelt? .....	23
What is Involved in Grading Furs? .....	23
How to Catch a Coyote .....	24
How to Catch a Beaver .....	25
How to Catch a Muskrat .....	26
How to Catch a Raccoon .....	27
Avoiding Non-target Species .....	28
Dispatching an Animal Humanely .....	30
Skinning and Preparing a Pelt .....	30
How to Dispose of Carcasses .....	36
How to Dry and Store Your Pelts .....	36
Selling 'Green' Pelts .....	37
<b>Safety on the Trapline</b> .....	38
Wildlife Diseases You can Catch (zoonoses) .....	38
Walking on Thin Ice .....	38
Firearms (if carrying one) .....	39
Trap Safety .....	39

Hypothermia .....	39
Planning Ahead for the Unexpected .....	40
<b>How to Sell Your Fur .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Can they be Eaten? .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Roles and Responsibilities of an Ethical Trapper .....</b>	<b>43</b>
A Trapper’s Code of Conduct .....	44
<b>How to get Started Trapping .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>What Types of Jobs Involve Trapping Furbearers? .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Links to Additional Trapper Resources .....</b>	<b>47</b>
Trapper Association Links .....	47
Other Trapper Links .....	47
<b>Appendix 1 – North American Fur Auctions Technical Manuals .....</b>	<b>49</b>
1A – Coyote .....	50
1B – Raccoon .....	54
1C – Beaver .....	59
1D – Muskrat .....	64
<b>Appendix 2 – Fur Harvester’s Auction Forming Board Dimensions .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Activities</b>	
Activity 1 – True or False? .....	70
Activity 2 – Identify the Furbearers .....	71
Activity 3 – Who did it? .....	73
Activity 4 – What should I use? .....	74
Activity 5 – Step by Step .....	75

# Introduction

---

The purpose of this manual is to provide the student with a brief introduction to trapping and to demonstrate how trapping wild animals can be a great skill to learn for use in dealing with problem wildlife that might be encountered on the land. Wildlife is a truly wonderful part of the Canadian landscape and should be cherished by all who observe the abundant and diverse creatures with which we share our wild spaces. Trapping is a humane way to help control some species of wild animals that may cause problems to landowners, and can also be a very rewarding way to provide an additional source of income to those who work the land.

This manual will review the history of trapping in Canada, provide a brief overview of the species that are most likely to cause problems to landowners, and introduce the reader to the different tools used in the trapping trade and give some information on how to process furbearers into marketable products. We also review the important safety consideration when out on the land trapping and share some additional resources that can be accessed to learn more about trapping. We hope you enjoy reading this manual and develop an interest in trapping, as it is one of the great ways to become more in tune with the creatures with which we share the land. We in Canada are blessed with an abundance of wildlife and must make every effort to ensure that it is treated with respect and that we are good stewards of our wildlife resources and the habitats that they depend on.

## *History of Trapping in Canada*

Did you ever wonder why we have a beaver on our nickel? For more than two hundred years the fur trade has been a very important part of Canadian history and culture. The exploration of Canada by the English and French, and most of our early economy, was driven by the demand for furs in Europe, and especially beaver furs. Trapping and selling furs has been an important occupation of aboriginals and colonists since long before confederation. The fur trade helped early Canadians form the political and economic ties that were a foundation of our society. The beaver was declared our national animal and is featured on our nickel to help us remember that.

Canadian history is full of stories about the fur trade. Much of Canada's culture of "peace, order, and good government" arose from the relatively peaceful partnership of the early fur traders with the aboriginal population. They learned that cooperating to trap and trade in wild furs was mutually beneficial.

The ordered economy and progressive history of the fur trade is an important reason why Canada did not suffer as severely the problems of a "wild west" such as the USA did. When the

first settlers came to our West, there was a fairly smooth shift from a trapping economy to a farming economy. But trapping didn't disappear when farms replaced wilderness.

## **What about today?**

Since the earliest humans started wearing skins to keep them warm, furs have been valued for their warmth and beauty. As modern society gradually developed new and different ways of clothing ourselves in synthetics and imported fibers, furs became a luxury, and were often admired more for their beauty than for their warmth. Today, with so many choices available to us, why should we still wear fur?

For the last generation, the fur industry has been under attack from well-meaning but often misinformed persons. Their opposition to the fur trade is often driven by a belief that all animals are at peace in nature and that a well-managed harvest of any animal is cruel and should not occur. However, consider that we will teach you how to harvest and utilize furs from animals that are already in conflict with agriculture – furs that would otherwise be wasted. Waste is the opposite of conservation, a word that literally means “wise use”.

Furs are a resource that is sustainable and renewable (meaning we can harvest a number of animals every year for a long time without lowering the population, and that they replenish their populations naturally), low input, and can be harvested in a way that is both humane and “least harm” to the environment. Trapping is an important service to farmers who often need some help with nuisance animal control. Trapping teaches important life skills, respect for the environment, and can be a good source of income. The activity of trapping is a very important part of our heritage as Canadians and rural people. We hope you will enjoy learning how to do it.

## ***North American Model of Wildlife Management***

In Canada, our wildlife belongs to all the people, it is a public resource. The situation is very different in Europe and much of the rest of the world, where wildlife is the property of the landowners. The North American Model of wildlife management was developed in the early years of Canada and the United States by some thoughtful people who had emigrated from Europe.

European wildlife was traditionally the property of “the King” and later when the power of Monarchies declined, wildlife became the exclusive property of those people wealthy enough to own land. Public enjoyment of wildlife is very restricted in Europe to this day, with only a small elite group of people who can afford to harvest wildlife on private land.

Canadian wildlife is a public benefit, and may be equally enjoyed by all. Nature enthusiasts, whether “watchers” and photographers, or “consumptive” users like hunters and trappers all have access to our Canadian wildlife. Each province makes its own laws about how citizens can use the wildlife within its borders, and the Federal Government has jurisdiction over migratory

species. Trappers must follow conservation laws set by their province, which set rules about the training and licences required and the seasons, methods and equipment allowed.

Canadian farmers serve as hosts for the animals that live on their private land. This public – private partnership between wild animals and farmers is the source of many challenges and also many benefits. Some farmers enjoy sharing their land with an abundance of wildlife. Sometimes farming operations are harmed by wildlife that may damage crops, livestock, or landscapes. Farmers suffering wildlife damage may sometimes be supported by government programs that compensate them, but often bear the cost themselves. Farmers must follow the laws regulating the control of problem wildlife just like everyone else.

Farmers enjoy private property rights and may allow or deny anyone access to their land. By controlling access to their land, farmers ultimately have the final say in who has access to wildlife in farming areas.

## *Private Stewardship of a Public Resource*

Wildlife enhances our quality of life in numerous ways. What a drab spring it would be if no birds sang! Some wildlife that may be considered pests in one circumstance may also be a benefit in another situation. It is important to know the difference, and seek a balance. For example, coyotes may kill spring lambs, but also control mice year round or help control deer populations that cause damage to crops. The chorus of a pack of coyotes singing to the moon on a winter night is music to many people's ears. Seldom is any "problem" animal without some benefit.

So, farmers are stewards of a public resource, entrusted with providing a home for wildlife on their land, and are expected to share the benefit of wildlife with others but absorb the costs themselves. Most landowners take this trust seriously, and are willing hosts for the benefit of all. But sometimes they need help to maintain that balance!

## *Why Trapping is Valuable Today*

Farmers are often challenged with wild animals that seriously harm the productivity of the farm. Trapping can prevent problem animals from doing more harm, and at the same time provide a source of revenue to the trapper or farmer. Trapping can turn a nuisance animal into an appreciated source of revenue and an unpleasant chore of animal control into an enjoyable sideline.

Careful trapping will target only specific animals and is much less harmful to non-target species than most other methods of "pest control."

Trappers learn to appreciate wildlife and wild spaces. Farmers who benefit from trapping are less likely to "reclaim" wild corners of the farm to "more productive" uses. Nearly all people

who enjoy regular contact with wildlife learn to appreciate the land and its wild plants and animals in a more holistic way.

## *What are the Alternatives to Trapping Nuisance Animals?*

Because farmers own their land but not the wildlife, it is a constant irritation to experience losses because of wildlife living on their land. **Bulldozers, Dredges, Poison, Barrier fencing, Noisemakers, Shooting** or simply accepting major losses are all possible alternatives to trapping nuisance animals. However, all these may have unintended consequences.

Many farmers choose to eliminate their nuisance wildlife problems, or to put the land to more profitable uses by getting rid of the places that are homes to wildlife. So marginal lands and woodlots are cleared, and marshes are drained. In doing so, water tables may be affected, songbirds and wildflowers eliminated, even air quality diminished. The landscape becomes less hospitable to wildlife of all kinds, and more sterile, less interesting, and unproductive of anything but crops and livestock.

**Poison** is simple and effective in eliminating problem animals, but may not only kill the intended target and can be very inhumane. Poisoned animals often die in prolonged agony, and the suffering does not end there. Scavengers of poisoned carcasses and non-target animals and birds can also be killed. For this reason, poison is very strictly regulated and is seldom a good choice for problem animal control in the outdoors.

**Barrier fencing** can be effective at keeping large animals away from certain enclosures. Fencing a lambing pen may keep coyotes away. Barrier fences may even be used to enclose entire pastures. However, large barrier fences will also affect the movement of other species, they are expensive to build and maintain, and will not work to control climbing animals like raccoons or for water animals like beaver. In some cases, nuisance animals like coyotes, can learn to climb over them and continue to cause problems. Individual trees can be wrapped with wire mesh to protect them from beavers. But wrapping each tree in a woodlot with wire mesh and annually maintaining the wrappings is not practical or effective to prevent most beaver damage.

**Noisemakers** can chase away animals that are surprised by the noise the first time or two. But animals soon learn that the noise is harmless. And who wants to live on a farm with a “scare cannon” booming all day and night?

**Shooting** will only remove the specific problem animal, and is low cost, but takes time and expertise. Animals soon learn to avoid humans who are patrolling with a gun, and shooting may not always be safe in areas with numerous buildings and livestock. Many nuisance animals are also most active at night when shooting them is not very practical and can be quite dangerous.

The reality with most furbearers is that they are nocturnal (active at night) and that is one reason trapping is so effective at catching them because a trap ready all day and night.

## *Is Trapping Environmentally and Ethically Responsible?*

Mindfully embracing our role as stewards of the environment can help us understand that there is a beneficial role for trapping in our society.

Sustainable, renewable, organic, and “least harm” are some terms that can apply to thoughtful trapping, carried out with the right training, skills and approach. Modern traps and methods help ensure that animals are caught and killed humanely.

Conservation laws also ensure that other mistakes and abuses of the past are not repeated. A trapper can harvest a harmful animal that would otherwise be simply eliminated or wasted and make it valuable. The result is an enhanced environment and the creation of garments and decorative items that improve the function and beauty of our clothing and lives.

Trappers can perform a valuable social function by reducing or eliminating costly wildlife damage on private farms, and in so doing help preserve the environment as a home to a diversity of wildlife, ensuring that farmers keep wild habitats on their farms instead of eliminating them or converting them to monoculture crops.

## *What are the Common Furbearers Around the Farm?*

This section will provide a brief overview of the distribution and identifying characteristics of furbearers in Canada. This will be important for youth to be able to identify and distinguish their target species from other species that might occur in their areas. For instance, being able to tell the difference between a domestic dog track and a coyote track, or a swift fox from a coyote. It will also provide more detailed biology of the target species that will be discussed in more detail in this manual (beavers, muskrat, coyote, raccoon and badgers). It will also discuss the common issues that the target species cause around people’s properties and the reason that they are often destroyed.

# Introduction to Canadian Furbearers

---

When Europeans first came to Canada, there were 29 furbearer species found in different parts of the country that were trapped or hunted for their fur. These include: polar bear, grizzly bear, wolverine, river otter, sea otter, sea mink, American mink, American marten, fisher, timber or gray wolf, red wolf, coyote, red fox, gray fox, swift fox, arctic fox, badger, skunk, long-tailed weasel, short-tailed weasel or ermine, least weasel, red squirrel, beaver, muskrat, black-footed ferret, mountain lion, bobcat and Canada lynx.

Since then, a few species are no longer trapped because they have either gone extinct, their populations have been reduced to a point that there are too few of them to be able to harvest, or because laws have made it illegal to sell the fur of some of them. The only species of furbearer in Canada that has gone extinct in the time Europeans settled here is the sea mink. It was found on the Atlantic coast in the Maritime Provinces and parts of the United States. It was trapped too heavily in the 1700 and 1800s to the point that the species went extinct because at that time there were no laws telling us how to hunt, fish and trap to make sure we didn't harvest too many individuals of a species, like there are now. The sea otter is another example of a species that was overharvested before wildlife management laws were created. It was found all along the Pacific Coast of North America, but is now found only in a few parts of its previous range. It is now a protected species that can't be harvested, to allow its populations to recover.

The main thing that caused some species to be protected from trapping or hunting was the change in habitat on the landscape. Two good examples of this are the swift fox and black-footed ferret that lived in the prairies. Before European settlers began farming the grasslands of the prairies, these species were plentiful. Changes to their habitat and the things they needed to survive, caused their populations to drop to levels that couldn't support being harvested. Other activities that caused problems for some species in parts of their range was the use of poisons to try and kill predators, like wolves, but that also resulted in large numbers of swift foxes being killed unintentionally. Poisoning and eradication of ground squirrels and other rodents, which are important food sources for these species, affected their ability to survive and raise young. Research and conservation efforts have been going on for some time to try and reintroduce or improve the conditions for these species and their populations are starting to rebound in parts of Canada and the United States.

Other species of furbearers have taken advantage of changes that occurred after Europeans settled in Canada to move northward. The raccoon and the Virginia opossum moved northward in the last half century or more taking advantage of changes on the land and the food made available to them because of agriculture and farming. The other beneficial change on the landscape brought on by European settlers was that many of the predators that would kill and eat these species, like the wolf, were virtually eliminated from agricultural areas and pushed back into the forests of the north. While in Canada the Virginia Opossum is only found in southern Ontario and expanding its range northward slowly, the raccoon is now found all across southern Canada and often with the highest numbers living in the largest cities of our country.

## Common Species that can Cause Problems around the Farm

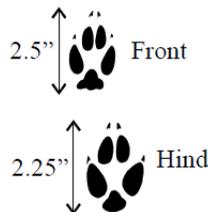
In this course, we'll focus on four species (coyote, raccoon, beaver and muskrat) that are commonly found around the farm and that have adapted to living around humans. Because of their close association with humans or lack of fear of humans, they also commonly cause problems that can cost farmers money.

### Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

Coyotes are a mid-sized member of the canid (dog) family between their smaller cousins the foxes and their larger cousins wolves. They are often confused with dogs when seen by individuals that don't consider the fact that they are so widespread. There have been rare cases of coyotes breeding with eastern wolves and dogs, which can make their identification a bit confusing. They are also known by the names brush wolf and prairie wolf. While they are often seen, coyotes are very wary animals and are most easily detected by observing for tracks and scat. In situations where there has been livestock loss or an unwanted visitor to a farm, identifying tracks is the best way to determine who the culprit is. Coyote tracks show the two outer toes of the hind feet being longer than the inner toes. The two inner toes on the front imprint slant toward each other. Toenail marks may show but are not as pronounced as those in dog tracks. Individual tracks are longer at about 6-7 cm long (2.25-2.5") than they are wide (5 cm or 2"). When trotting, coyotes often place their hind foot directly where their front paws were placed. The distance between print sets is about 30-35 cm (12-14").



Coyotes are primarily carnivorous, but are very adaptable and will eat vegetation and insects when required for survival. The most



Trotting



interesting aspect of coyotes is their adaptability to humans and that their populations are nearly impossible to successfully control through actions like hunting, trapping or even poisoning, which was attempted decades ago. That said, specific problem animals can be trapped and removed to prevent damage to property and livestock. Humans have changed the landscape in North America quite dramatically and changed the distribution of some of their natural competitors, like wolves, which has opened the door to this species moving into new territories where they previously didn't occur. At the time of European settlement in North America, coyotes were found throughout the prairies of the US and Canada. Since then they have expanded across the entire United States and all of southern Canada. As recently as the 1980s, they found their way onto the island of Newfoundland and have exploded in abundance there. What is most interesting about the adaptability of this species is that they are regularly found in cities across the continent. Researchers have tracked coyotes living in downtown Toronto and denning in the city's parks regularly feeding on garbage, pets, and other wild animals.

Coyotes can be active at any time during both day and night, but are usually most active at dawn and dusk (the crepuscular period). They are most commonly seen alone, but may be in groups of two, three and occasionally more. Larger groups are most often seen during the summer when pups accompany the adults. The home range of coyotes can vary from as small as 4 or 5 square kilometers to as large as 100 square kilometers or more depending on how much food is found in an area and how many other coyotes are nearby and whether the animal is solitary or part of a pack where packs generally have larger ranges. Coyotes inhabit all habitat types from mountain valleys, grasslands and boreal forest in the west, to deciduous forest and mixed agricultural and forested landscapes in the east, and of course in urban centers.

Coyotes form mated pairs that last for several years and they typically return to the same dens to have pups. Dens are generally burrows dug into the ground on a hillside, but can be found in other shelters, like small caves or dug under large boulders. Coyotes breed in mid-winter (late January-March) and whelp their litters of 2 to as many as 14 pups two months later in April or May but average about 4 or 5 pups. Adult pairs may have litters of pups every year, and both adults help to raise the young. Other non-breeding adults or subadults may help to raise the litter of pups and those helpers are typically the pups from previous year's litters of the adults. Coyotes, like foxes, can adjust the number of pups they have depending on the conditions on the landscape. If there is an abundance of food and few other competitors, then coyotes will have larger litters and the population will increase faster. In years of high competition and less food, they will have fewer pups because if they had big litters it would be hard to provide for all the young and many would not survive. This is called compensatory reproduction. It also means that by trapping, hunting, or otherwise harvesting more coyotes across the landscape it opens up more territories and the remaining coyotes can produce larger litters of pups to replace those that were harvested. That is why it is extremely difficult to control coyote populations through hunting, trapping and even when poisoning was tried decades ago. It is also why there

is little concern about over-trapping coyotes because they will respond to high trapping pressure by having larger litters.

As coyotes expanded east through the forests of Ontario, they bred with eastern wolves, which added wolf features of larger size, coarser fur, and pack hunting behaviour. This led to the two different types of coyotes in North America, the eastern coyote and the western coyote. Eastern coyotes are generally larger (35-40 lbs on average) and their fur is longer and coarser, which makes it generally less valuable at market. The eastern coyote is generally less fearful of humans and sometimes hunts in packs for larger prey like moose and deer. Western coyotes are typically a little smaller (30-35 lbs average) with paler, softer fur that is more desirable for markets. Coyotes don't have any natural predators, but wolves will kill coyotes in their territories and push them off of killed prey.

Coyotes are known to cause dramatic losses to livestock and poultry across Canada. They generally do not pose much risk to foals or calves over 6 months age or adult cows and horses, but can kill young calves and foals. They are particularly problematic to farms raising sheep and animals that are the size of a coyote's natural prey. Livestock losses to coyotes are the biggest challenge to the Canadian sheep industry. Coyotes are also known to kill pet animals like cats and dogs as well, which can cause problems for agricultural and residential areas alike. Coyotes generally do not pose any risk to humans and normally run away when encountered. There have been recent incidences in eastern Canada where people have been attacked by eastern coyotes. Most threatening encounters occur in places, like parks and cities, where coyotes are not hunted or trapped by humans and lose their fear and respect of people.

### **Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)**



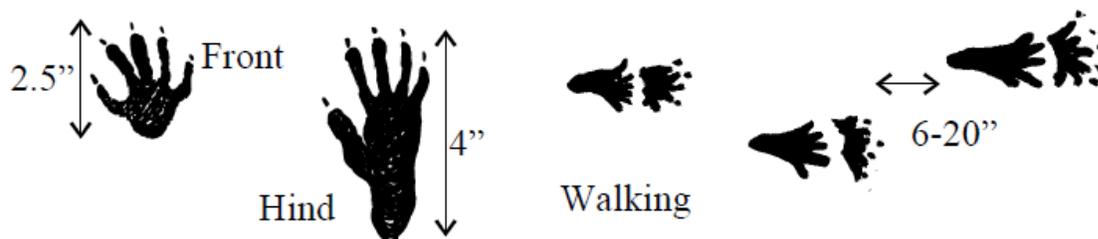
Raccoons are easily identified by their characteristic mask and ringed-tail. They are a medium sized mammal averaging about 10 to 20 pounds weight. During the time of European settlement in North America, raccoons were found rarely in Canada, and only in southern, warmer climates like southern Ontario. Like the coyote, they are an incredibly adaptable species that thrives around human

settlements and with European colonization across the country, raccoons soon began to expand their range. Raccoons are now found in all provinces of Canada, except Newfoundland and Labrador, though they do occasionally make their way there by catching a ride on ferries and trucks. Compared to the 1930s, biologists believe we have between 15 and 20 times more raccoons today. Certainly, in the prairie provinces, raccoons have increased in numbers dramatically. Before about the 1960s, there were no raccoons in the prairies of Canada, but since then they have expanded westward through Manitoba, Saskatchewan and into Alberta.

The highest densities of raccoons in Canada are actually in cities because of their ability to adapt to environments that humans create and they can feed on a variety of things. Raccoons are omnivorous species, which means they will eat fruits, nuts, berries, but also clams, crayfish, fish, birds, and small mammals. Raccoons have long toes (fingers), which allow them to handle objects with their hands better than most wild animals. They have very sensitive front paws that they use to feel for their food, especially in the mud of streams and marshes where they collect molluscs (snails and clams), crustaceans (shrimp and crayfish), fish and frogs.

Raccoons are mainly active at night and spend their days resting while hidden from predators. Raccoons are often solitary animals, but groups may be seen, especially during the late spring and summer when females are followed by her kits. Raccoons may roam up to a kilometer or more each night in search of food. Home ranges of raccoons can be as small as one-half square kilometer, especially in urban areas, to as high as 10 square kilometers in the prairies. Raccoon are one of the few furbearers that become inactive through the winter, through it is not a true hibernation. Generally, once temperatures fall below about -5C for a daytime high temperature, raccoons fall into a deep sleep until temperatures warm again. Unlike true hibernation where an animal requires a long period of time to awake, like bears, raccoon can awake from their deep sleep in a matter of hours and take advantage of warmer weather, even in the middle of the winter, to search for food. Raccoons overwinter in dens, often under old buildings, or in the attics of barns and buildings or in tree hollows. They share communal dens and huddle together to preserve body heat and help survive the winter.

In Canada, it is from February to March, while in dens, that adults will breed and is occasionally why raccoons are sometimes caught in traps in the middle of winter as the males will wander in search of mates. Average litters of 3 or 4 kits, though as few as one and as many as six, are born about two months later. The female cares for the young until the fall or early winter when the young disperse from their mothers range.



Because they are most active at night (they are nocturnal), the presence of raccoons in an area is best determined by looking for tracks in soft soil, particularly along the shores of streams and marshes. Probably the easiest tracks to identify are those of a raccoon. The front footprints show the long finger-like toes that resemble a miniature human handprint. Because the raccoon walks flat-footed, the large sole on its hind feet often shows clearly and is almost twice as long (10 cm) as their front paws (6 cm). The biggest differences between muskrat and raccoon tracks

are the size with raccoon tracks being longer, and the presence of the clear thumb on the side of the hind foot. Raccoon tracks also don't have the tail drag marks found with muskrat tracks.

Raccoons can cause problems around farms by eating crops like fruits, grains, vegetables and can cause big losses to poultry farms because of their ability to climb into buildings and find small openings to enter coops where they can kill entire flocks. They can also cause problems from digging under buildings and into buildings. Because raccoons will gladly eat garbage, they often cause problems in urban areas by opening garbage bins and scattering litter everywhere.

### **Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)**

Beavers are the largest rodent in North America and are easily identified by their medium size, round shape, brown colour and unique large flat tail. They are one of Canada's most iconic symbols and played an important role in our country's history as the driver of the early fur trade. They are found throughout Canada wherever there is water and a food source. Beavers along with their small cousins the muskrat are the true aquatic furbearers of Canada. Beavers live in small ponds, large lakes, rivers and even small streams where they can use their



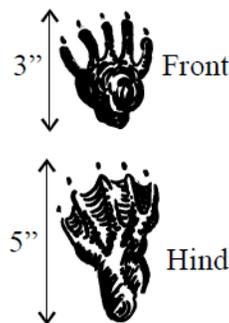
engineering skills to build dams and create ponds deep enough to store enough food to allow all the beavers in the hut to survive. Once there is several inches of ice on the pond they live in, they generally do not emerge from the ponds until the next spring when the ice thaws. In rare cases where beavers run short on food during the winter, they can chew through ice to find more food. Beavers are vegetarians eating grasses, leaves and the bark of leafy tree species like poplar, birch, willow, and maple. They survive through the winter by cutting many trees in the fall and storing them under water where they remain preserved through the winter where it is accessible to beavers throughout the winter. Adult beavers over two-years-old weigh on average 20-25 kg (45-53 lbs) with some large individuals occasionally weighing as much as 35 kg (80 lbs) or more. Two year old beavers weight 15 to 18 kg (35 to 40 lbs) with kits weighing 7-8 kg (15-18 lbs).

Beavers are mainly active at night, especially on land where they gather food, when many of their predators are not. They are observed during the day, but it is usually in the water where they are safe from predators. They frequently make patrolling swims near their huts to see if other beavers have wandered into their territories or to see if there are any repairs needed for their huts or dams. Their territories are usually limited to the pond, lake or small section of river near their hut. As beavers cut down all the trees around their hut that they feed on, they may abandon their hut and pond and move to a nearby pond or further upstream or upriver to where there is more food and where no other beaver already have a territory.

Beavers form long-term couples unless one of the pair dies then the other will try to find a new partner. Females are bred between January and March and have young their first time when they are two years old. They have their litters of three to four kits on average just over three months later in the spring. Young beavers stay in the pond where they were born for one year and move to find their own territories in their second summer. They can move several kilometers away to new territories, which is why beavers can appear almost out of nowhere. Beavers are killed and eaten by several predators. Large birds of prey (like red-tailed hawks and eagles) might take young kits, but the only predators of adult beavers are bears, wolves, coyotes and sometimes bobcats.

Because beavers have very small territories and are easily found, they are also easy to trap and to trap out all the individuals in a hut. This is beneficial in situations where beavers are causing damage to property. Beavers can cause several kinds of problems for landowners. They regularly cause problems of cutting down ornamental trees in yards, cutting trees and blocking trails and roads, and flooding land and roads when they make their dams. Beavers also sometimes burrow into banks of ponds, lakes and rivers to make bank huts, and these tunnels and burrows can collapse and cause problems for roads and machinery operating near the water.

Beaver tracks show a large, webbed hind foot that usually covers the smaller front footprint. Tracks are commonly found near the water edge especially along



Beaver-chewed stump



dams. Marks from the tail being dragged are also common. Telltale signs of active beavers are freshly cut trees with the usual pointed stump, or intact dams along streams and beaver houses that are well covered in mud and show signs of activity. Old beaver dams normally don't hold back much water, and old huts have had most of the mud washed away and are a big pile of sticks. Look also for beaver slides and paths running into the water where beavers come up on land to cut trees. Slides that are wetter than the soil nearby indicate that beaver may be actively using the runs.

### Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)

Muskrats, also referred to as musquash, are the smaller cousin to the beaver, weighing on average 1-1.5 kg (2-3 lbs) as adults and are also in the rodent family. Their name is two parts musk-rat that refers to the musky odour of the oil produced from their anal glands and to their rat-like appearance with their long leathery tail. Muskrats are found everywhere in Canada

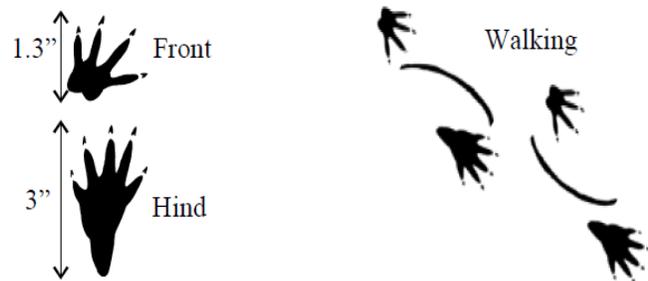
south of the arctic tundra wherever there is water and vegetation they can eat. Like beavers, muskrats live in ponds, marshes, rivers, streams and lakes that don't freeze solid. They overwinter in small huts built in shallow water areas from wetland vegetation (cattails, sedges, and mosses). They also



burrow into the banks of ponds or streams, including into roadsides to make underground burrows. Their tunnels can be seen on the edges of wetlands and ponds running into the banks. They feed on a variety of vegetation including the roots of cattails, sedges, the bark of some shrubs and young trees, grasses and some cultivated crops as well as other things like frogs, snails, worms, clams, crayfish and other animal matter.

Muskrats are the furbearer that has the highest number of young each year. Adults breed as soon as ponds streams and lakes become ice-free in the spring, and their young are born one month later. Adults can then breed again and have a second litter of young the same summer with litters having between 3 and 9 young each time. This can mean that in a wetland with just a pair of muskrats, by the end of the fall there could be as many as twenty. This means that muskrats can be trapped very heavily and the population will rebound back the following year. It can also mean that with a population increasing so fast, that they can run out of food in a hurry and can cause population crashes due to a lack of food if they aren't controlled at a healthy population level.

Muskrat tracks show long, slender toes on front and hind feet. Five toes appear on the hind imprint but generally only four on the front. The fifth toe is present but is generally too small to show, which is the easiest way to tell them apart from raccoons, aside from their tracks being a bit smaller. The muskrat often drags its tail, leaving a mark. Being an aquatic species, their tracks are most often seen in soft mud along the shores of wetlands and lakes. Other telltale signs of muskrats are the huts they build in the fall and that they spend their winters in. They are smaller versions of beaver huts, but instead of being made with sticks they are made with cattails, sedges and other aquatic plants and mosses. They usually stand roughly one meter (2-4 feet) out of the water in marshes.



Muskrats are active throughout the day and can be commonly seen swimming or sitting and feeding on floating mats of vegetation. They have small territories and usually stay within their wetland or pond, and even within a small area of it where they find enough food, but in the spring or if their wetland becomes too crowded, some will venture out to find new wetlands to colonize. Occasionally, during periods of drought, some wetlands dry up to the point that muskrats will try to find new territories. Muskrats are most vulnerable when on land as they don't run fast and are relatively small. Even though they will defend themselves aggressively, they are easy prey for raptors like hawks and large owls, and are easily killed by foxes, coyotes, and other predators. One of the most skilled muskrat predators is the American mink, which will crawl into bank burrows and into huts to hunt them. When muskrat populations increase across the prairies, it is usually followed by an increase in the mink populations a few years later.

# How to Trap Furbearers

---

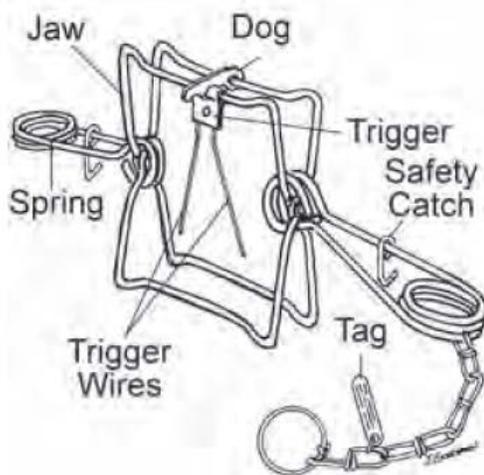
This section will provide the students with an introduction to trapping. It will give an overview of the tools used for trapping (e.g., traps, knives, fur handling tools, etc.), and which traps are legal and illegal to use in Canada for the target species. It will also describe for each species what to look for and how to set traps with examples of the most common trap sets for each species. It will by no means be able to describe in detail all the kinds of trap sets used for these species as there are many variations and possibilities, but will provide some of the most commonly used sets. It will provide important tips about the do's and don'ts of trapping each species. It will discuss how to humanely dispatch and handle animals, how to prepare and store pelts and how to dispose of the carcasses of animals in a proper manner.

## *Tools of the Trade*

There are a large number of tools used by trappers to both catch and prepare the pelts of furbearers. Like most things, a person doesn't need to have all the different tools to trap; simply having a few of the essentials can be enough to trap, but very often different traps and tools are required to trap different species because of their unique behaviour, their difference in their size and shape, and because we want to make sure that we use the most humane tool to catch an animal. Below we describe the different tools and briefly explain their use.

### Traps

There are three main categories of traps used to catch furbearers. Body-gripping traps and foot-hold traps are the traps most commonly used by fur trappers, while box traps are mainly used in situations where an animal needs to be caught and later released.



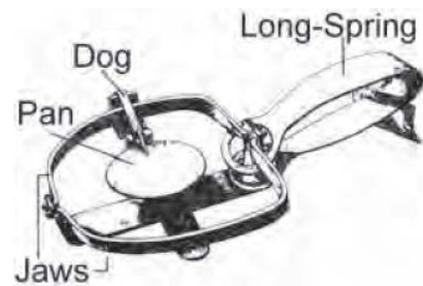
**Body-gripping Traps:** these traps are square shaped traps with two rotating jaws and springs on one or both sides of the jaws. They are also known by the name of conibear traps because they were first designed by the well-known trapper Fred Conibear from the Northwest Territories in the 1960s. They are designed as killing traps as they strike the animal across the head and body with such force that they result in a quick death, but are not as effective as kill traps when used on larger canines like coyotes

and wolves. Different models of body-gripping traps are made by nearly every major trap manufacturer, and come in different size models for different uses. The common models are described by a number system that is not very intuitive, but is used by most manufacturers and follow the same general size and features described in the table below.

Model	Jaw Spread (Inches)	Number of Springs	Examples of target species
110	5	1	Muskrat, mink, weasel
120	5	2	Muskrat, mink, weasel, marten, fisher
160	6	2	Muskrat, mink, marten, fisher, raccoon
220	7	2	Otter, marten, raccoon, fisher, badger
280	8	2	Beaver, otter, badger, bobcat, lynx
330	10	2	Beaver, otter, bobcat, lynx

The different parts of the body-gripping trap include the jaws, the spring, the dog (latch that holds the trap in the set position), the trigger, the safety catches and the chain or cable that is attached to a stake or other device to keep the trap in place.

**Foot-hold Traps:** Foot-hold traps are the oldest design of metal traps used to catch furbearers. They were designed early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and revolutionized the trapping industry because they allowed a trapper to carry a lot of traps and quickly set many traps in a day. They were also very useful compared to old techniques because they cause very little damage to the fur of the animal and ensured that the trapper had an undamaged product to bring to market. As their name suggests, foot-hold traps are used to catch an animal by the foot and hold it until the trapper returns.



Live-restraining long-spring with plain jaws

They normally have two clamping jaws that are closed tight by springs, either coil springs or leaf springs. Early designs sometimes had teeth on the jaws that would help to keep the animal from pulling their foot out of the trap, but toothed jaws were made illegal decades ago because they caused a lot of pain to the animal and were inhumane. Modern foot-hold traps have come a long way and new models are much more humane than old ones to make sure that the animals aren't in pain when caught and held. Some models have rubber padding on the jaws, while others have much wider jaws (laminated jaws) where they hold the foot so that the pressure from the jaws is spread on a larger area of the foot to reduce the pressure. Other models are modified so that they can't close

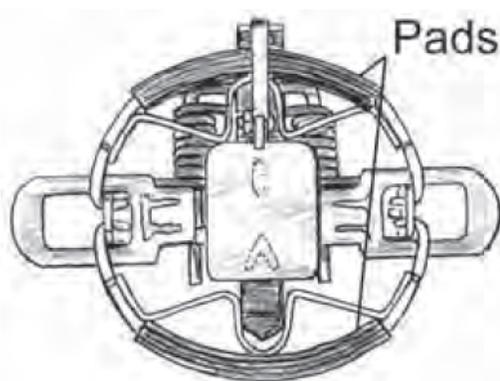


Spring-activated Cable Device

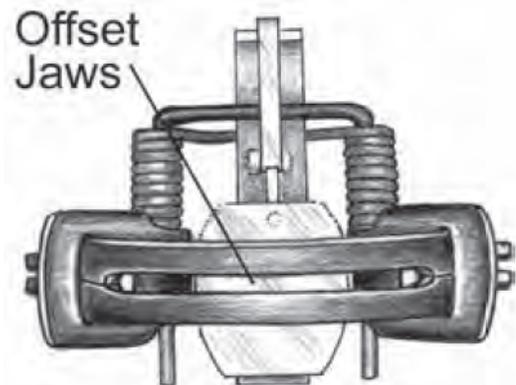
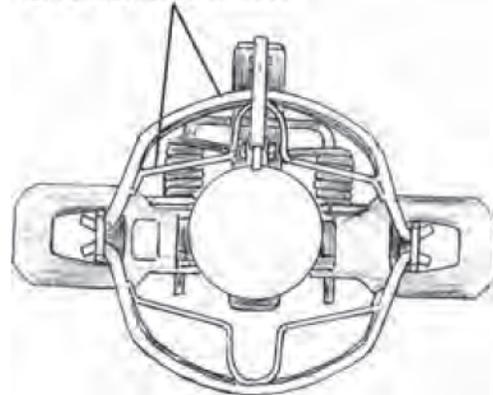
completely (offset jaws), and that also helps to reduce the pressure on the foot of the animal caught. A final model of modern foothold trap is the Belisle foot-snare. It is a powered trap that uses a short snare instead of the jaws of the trap to hold the foot.

Many wildlife biologists and researchers use modern foot-hold traps to catch animals that they want to study because the animals are not overly harmed and can be released from the trap to study them. Below are examples of modern coil-spring traps that have been modified to reduce the harm they cause to the animal, that is to say they are more humane. Foot-

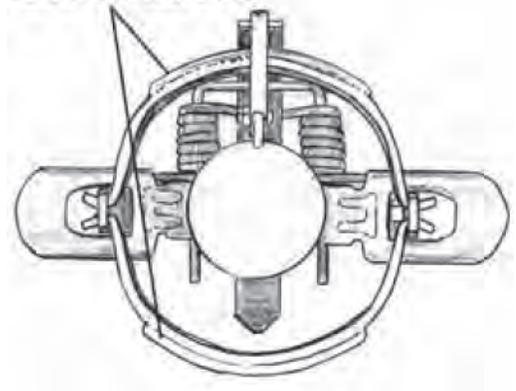
hold traps range in size from as small as 3 inches (7.5 cm) to as large as 8 inches (20 cm) or more and are used to catch animals from as small as weasels and muskrats to as big as wolves. The parts of a foot-hold trap include the jaws, the trigger pan, the dog (trigger latch), the springs, the spring levers (for coil springs), and the anchor chain. Most foot-hold traps also have swivels on the anchor chain to allow the trap to spin with the animal so that it doesn't bind and twist on the foot.

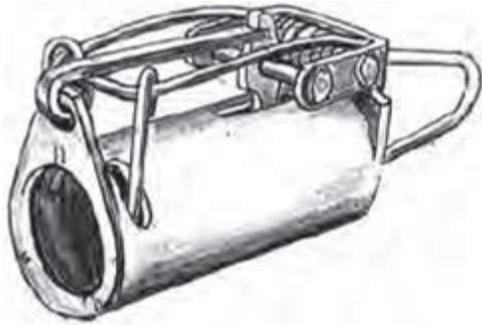


Double Jaws



Laminations





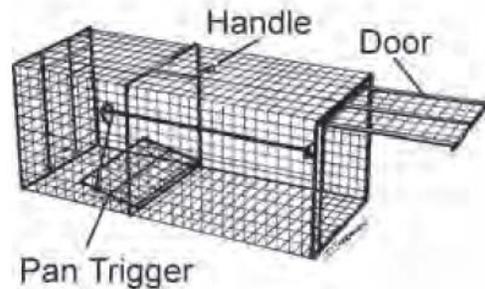
Lil' Griz™ Trap

There is a new kind of foot-hold trap on the market today that is designed specifically to catch raccoons. They are called foot-encapsulating traps because the front paw of the raccoon is caught inside a little box or tube when it reaches in to grab the bait. This is specific to raccoons because they are the only furbearer that can grab things with their front paws, like humans can with their hands. These traps are excellent choices when trying to trap a nuisance raccoon around a yard that has

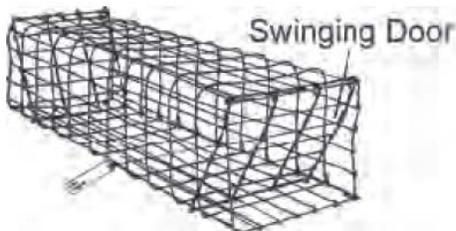
other animals or people wandering and is very humane for the raccoon. Examples of these are the egg-trap, the Lil Griz and the Duffer's Coon Cuffs.

Foot-hold traps are commonly used to catch animals on land, but they can also be used to catch aquatic animals, like beavers and muskrats, in a way that will hold the animal under water to drown the animal. Drowning sets are a humane way to catch and kill only aquatic animals (e.g., beavers, muskrat), and should not be used for other animals like raccoons. This is because aquatic animals are used to holding their breath under water and don't actually drown by letting water into their lungs. Instead, they hold their breath until they fall asleep, which is not painful to the animal.

**Box traps:** The most common kind of box trap used to catch furbearers is a rectangular wire mesh trap with one door that closes behind the animal when it enters. These traps are often used in places where there is a good chance of catching non-target animals, like farmyard cats, and where the intention is to catch the animal and release it away from where it is caught. Box traps are most commonly used for land animals like raccoons and skunks, but some are large enough to capture animals as big and strong as beavers.



Live-restraining cage trap



Kill-type submarine or colony trap

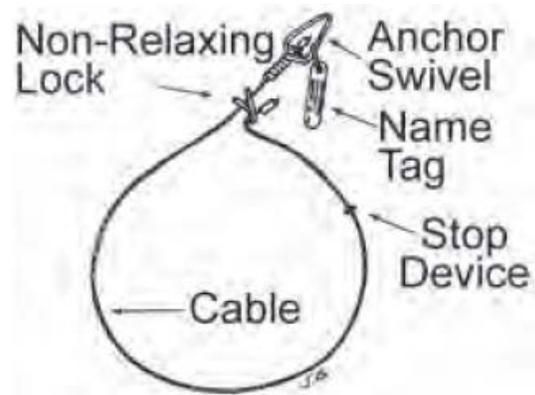
While many believe that capturing and relocating animals is the most humane and kind way to deal with problem wildlife species, this isn't always the case. Most species of wildlife are territorial and have their own home ranges that they live in and defend from intruders. Catching and relocating wild animals means that when you release the critter you are most likely releasing it into the territory of another animal of the

same species. Often this results in competition between the released animals and the one that already lived in the territory. This competition can result in fights between the two animals and that usually leads to one of the animals dying from their injuries. Some studies have found that the chance of a released raccoon surviving in a new territory is only about 20%, or 2 out of 10 animals released will survive. So, it is often best to euthanize the animal that is caught in a humane way to actually prevent harm to the captured animal and the ones living in the area that you would release them in. Moving animals around by capture and release can also cause problems because moving animals around can help to spread diseases into areas where the disease might not be found.

There is also a modified kind of box trap that is regularly used to catch muskrats. These are either square or cylindrical funnel traps that are placed in the water below the water level where the animal swims into the trap, but cannot swim out and drowns in the trap. These traps are very effective at catching large numbers of animals as they can catch more than one animal at a time. They are especially useful when trapping large wetlands where there are several muskrat colonies.

## Snare

One of the most effective ways of catching coyotes is by far the neck snare. These snares are usually made of thin cable with a locking device that prevents the snare noose from opening when the animal is caught, an anchor swivel and occasionally a stop device or breakaway hook to allow some non-target animals to escape. Snare cable comes in different diameters and with different numbers of individual strands of wire, which affects how stiff the cable is and how strong it is as well. Smaller cable is good because it is less visible, but it isn't as strong and the trapper should always make sure to use cable strong enough to catch the animal they are targeting. Snare traps are relatively inexpensive and can be made by the trapper with some simple equipment. One of the biggest benefits is that they are light and many can be carried and set relatively easily.



Joe Goodman

Cable Device



## Safety Gripper

One essential tool when using body-gripping traps is the safety gripper. This is a small tool with two hooks that is placed on the jaws of the trap once it is set. If the trap should accidentally fire when

handling it, the safety gripper will keep the trap from closing and possibly catching the trapper's hand or other body parts.

## Lures

Trappers may use different lures to attract furbearers to the areas where their traps are set. Because many furbearers are territorial, some lures smell like the animal you are trying to catch because the animal you are trying to catch will come to investigate and defend its territory. Others smell like food, which is always good for attracting animals that are carnivores since they are always on the search for their next meal. Finally, some lures simply smell different and the curiosity of the furbearers will come to investigate what the smell is and it gets them in the area of the trap. Many lures are available commercially, but some trappers prefer to make their own lures from the glands of the animals they have caught or from different products they can purchase to make their favourite lure recipe.

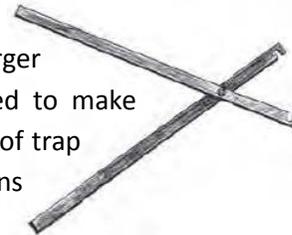


Ohio DOW Photo

## Urine and lures

## Trap Setters

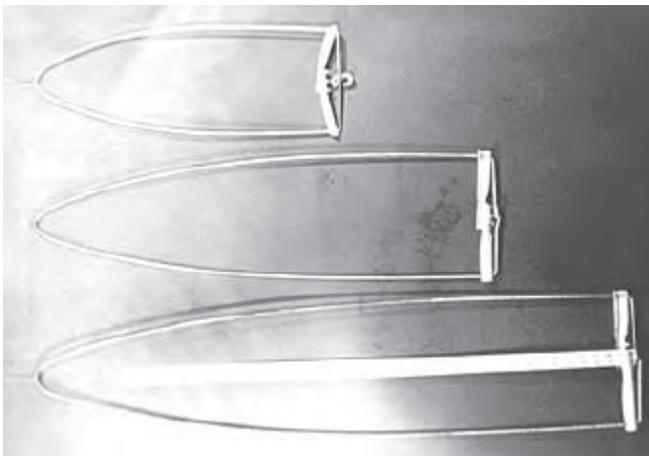
It is possible for some people to set smaller and even some larger body-gripping traps by hand, but some tools have been invented to make setting the springs on these traps easier. There are several designs of trap setters, but the most common type are setting tongs. Other designs are modified caulking guns, or simply a piece of rope.



Joe Goodman

## Setting tongs

## Forming Boards



Forming boards are used to stretch and dry the pelt after it has been cleaned and fleshed. These are most commonly thin, wide wood boards, but for muskrat and raccoons wire stretchers are common and will do a good job. Wire stretchers have been used for other species like fox and bobcat, but they often damage the pelt and are not recommended. Push pins are used to fasten the pelt to the board and small

wood sticks (pieces of wood doweling) are used as belly boards to keep the pelt from shrinking too tightly against the board, which makes it hard to take them off. Beavers are the only furbearer that is skinned completely open and stretched flat on a large sheet of plywood. Each species has a specific shape and size of forming board that is recommended to get the most value from your furs and those can be found in Appendix 1E.

## Knives

A good knife is a very important tool for a trapper because it makes the process of skinning much easier and generally does a much better job. The best knife is the one that a trapper feels most comfortable using and does not need to be expensive. Most trappers have several different knives that they use for different skinning jobs to speed up their skinning work when they have lots of animals to process, but just about



Knife Sharpeners

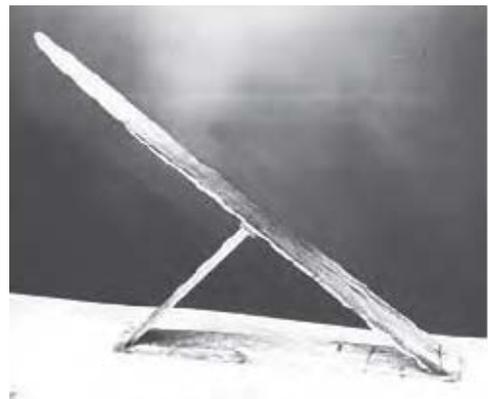
any good knife can be used to do any kind of skinning. Certainly, special skinning knives are available and in the right hands are expert tools. Making sure to keep a good sharp edge on your skinning knife is very important so that it cuts the same way all the time and being able to keep them sharp with honing steels and sharpening stones is a good skill to develop.



There are also some specialty knives that are used for removing the fat and meat from the pelt after skinning and these are called fleshing knives. They are often in different shapes and sizes for the specific kind of fleshing that is needed.

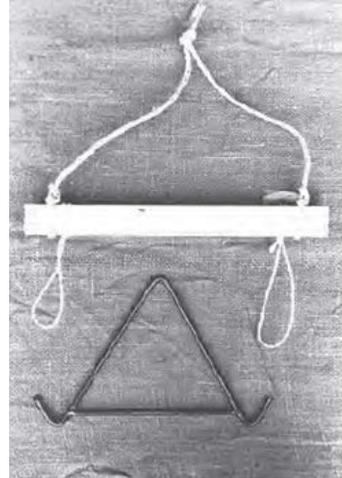
## Fleshing Beams

Fleshing a pelt is the process of removing all the meat and fat from the skin after the pelt has been removed from the animal. Fleshing the animal can sometimes take more time than skinning and must be done properly. Most trappers use a smooth beam to remove the flesh from the pelt, and they are made in different sizes for different animals. Some pelts can be fleshed directly on the forming board, but others need more work and that is when fleshing beams can be real time savers.



## Gambrels

Some furbearers can be skinned laying flat on a board but it's much easier to skin most furbearers if hung up from a gambrel. There are different designs of gambrels. Some are simple pieces of rope strung from the ceiling or solid overhead beam, others designs can be purchased from stores that are made of welded metal rods or use looped chains to hold the feet of the animal. Different size gambrels are suited for different size animals. You certainly wouldn't hang a wolf from a gambrel designed for a muskrat or mink.



Ohio DOW Photos

## Combs and Brushes

Combs and brushes are a necessity for proper pelt preparation because they remove dirt, burrs and other stuff caught in the fur of the animal. There are many different kinds of combs and brushes and having several kinds makes the work of preparing pelts much easier. Most brushes and combs are the same ones that can be found in pet and farm supply stores.



Ohio DOW Photos

## Other Miscellaneous Equipment

There are a number of other tools that trappers will regularly use for all sorts of purposes. Stove pipe wire is simple flexible wire that comes in different thicknesses (gauges), and is used to attach traps to anchors, as general tie-wire or for other purposes. Basic pliers are always useful to cutting wire or adjusting triggers. Buckets, bags and packs are handy for carrying bait, animals and equipment. Hatchets and hammers are useful for making sets, cutting trails and securing anchors. Finally, gloves are always essential for handling animals, working with equipment to prevent your smell from being spread to traps and sets, and for keeping your hands dry when making water sets. Dirt sifters are used for making dirt-hole sets to gently cover the trap with light sand and soil so that they aren't obvious to the animals you want to catch. Trappers are generally very ingenious and often find a way to use almost any equipment or piece of material to make a set or help prepare a pelt.



Ohio DOW Photos



## *What is a Prime Pelt?*

When talking about the condition of furbearers and the quality of their furs, trappers often mention the term “prime” furs. The pelt of a furbearer is prime during a certain time of year and that time of year can be different for different species. A prime pelt is one where the winter fur has finished growing, and the skin or leather is a creamy white colour. If caught before the ideal time, the fur of an animal won’t be as long or as dense, and the skin will have a blue look to it because the ends of the hairs in the skin are still swollen because the hairs aren’t done growing. If caught too late, the pelt is past prime and the hairs will start to get rubbed and broken, and the skin or leather will start to lose its ideal creamy appearance.

What drives the cycle of when a pelt becomes prime is the cycle of day length called photoperiod. As the days start to get shorter in the fall, it triggers animals to grow thicker winter fur to keep them warm, and as the days get longer in the spring, they typically shed some of their fur, or switch completely to a summer fur, which is shorter and less dense. So, regardless of how cold a particular fall might be or how early or late winter comes, furs are usually prime at the same time each year. This is important because for many species pelts that are not yet prime are worth a lot less than the same pelt that is in its prime condition.

There are other things that influence the quality of a pelt, though. How healthy an animal is also affects the quality of the fur that the animal will grow. A sick or old animal won’t grow fur that is as nice as an animal in good health and well fed. So, trapping some animals to keep populations at healthier levels also helps to produce animals that are healthy and fur that is of better quality compared to situations when animals are too crowded, don’t get enough to eat and are impacted by diseases. So, two animals caught at the same time of year might have very different quality grades of their fur. Grading is how furs of a species can be categorized by their colour, quality of the hair and quality of the leather.

North American Fur Auctions has excellent technical documents describing the cycle of when pelts are prime and what to look for when figuring out whether a pelt is prime or not. These documents for beavers, coyotes, muskrats and raccoons are found in Appendix 1 at the end of the manual.

## *What is Involved in Grading Furs?*

When furs are sent to the auction houses to sell, they are individually tagged and linked to your identification number so that as they are sorted and placed in lots of many pelts from different individuals they can track for how much each of your pelts sell for. Once tagged, pelts are sorted by species. The pelts of each species are first sorted into the different size categories, then grouped into different colour groups, and finally sorted by grade based on how prime the pelts are and how much damage is noticed. Fur graders are experts that have looked at thousands of pelts and know what to look for to spot when there is damage that’s been repaired.

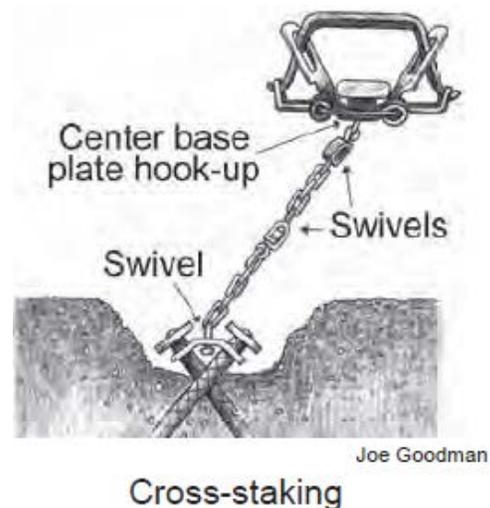
Depending on the species, there could be a large number of different grades, colours and sizes. That means that if you sent in 10 coyotes, they could easily end up all with different grades and values. The grading for each species can be a bit different and learning the grades for each pelt is a good way to understand the quality of the animals and preparation that you put into getting the pelt ready for market. Each auction house also has a different grading system, which can make things confusing when using both auction houses.

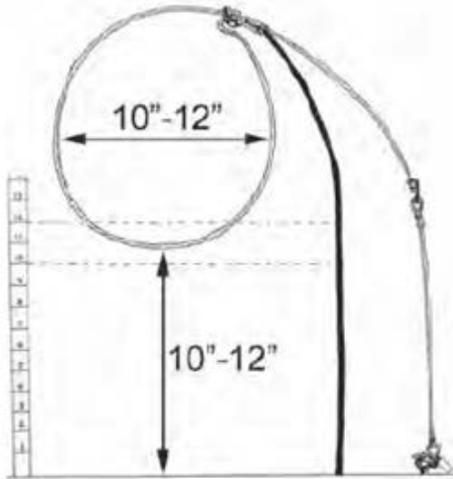
The technical documents produced by NAFA and found in Appendix 1 also describe the different grades used to evaluate pelts of the four species we're looking at in this course.

## How to Catch a Coyote

There are several ways to catch any furbearer, coyotes included, but the two most popular ways to catch the wily coyote are with the dirthole set and using neck snares.

A dirthole set is basically as the name suggests, digging a hole where you place a foothold trap in a place likely to have a coyote pass by, and lightly covering over the set with fine dirt so that the trap is hidden, but not prevented from firing. With the dirthole set, most trappers will dig a small hole in front of the trap and place bait or scent to try and lure the animal onto the trap. Others are placed along trails where the animal will likely walk. Dirthole sets are a little less commonly used in Canada during the regular trapping season because freezing conditions that we run into makes this set a challenge to keep working properly. There are techniques that trappers can use to prevent the traps from freezing and some have even developed ways to use foothold sets in snow and ice in the winter. Properly preparing your traps with dye and wax also helps to make sure the trap works properly and will fire even when frosted. This type of set is a good option for trapping nuisance coyotes in the summer when conditions are better (no freezing), and when coyotes are more dispersed on the landscape. An important part of dirthole sets is properly anchoring the trap in the ground. The last thing you want is for an animal to pull the trap and walk away with a trap caught on its foot – you would lose your trap and it is always a bad day when an animal is seen by the public running wild caught in a trap. The best way to anchor the sets is using two rebar stakes, or a disposable cable anchor. Having lots of swivels on the chain and trap is also important because as the animal is caught it will try to twist itself to get free and without swivels, this could damage the foot of the animal and let it get free.





Wisconsin DNR

**Coyote Cable Device**

the animal will struggle for a few seconds before expiring, it is very important to anchor the snare to something solid or by a ground stake. It's also recommended to have a swivel between the snare and the anchor line to keep the wire from twisting and breaking. Because the snare is flexible, a piece of wire or stick is used to hold the snare up at the right height and keep it open properly so that the animal passes through it with its head and not a leg. With both snares and foothold traps, it's important to not place the trap anywhere near something that the animal can become entangled in. This area is called the catch circle, and it keeps the animal from injuring itself or from breaking the snare or anchor line.

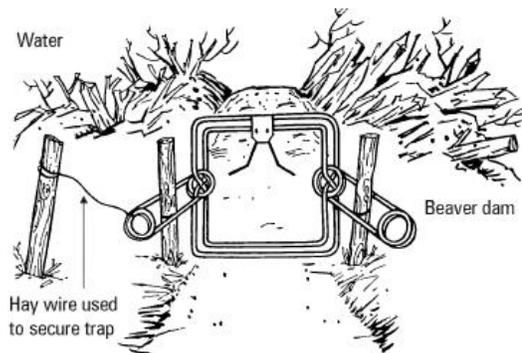


Natalene Cummings

**Restraint Circle - Should be free from entanglement**

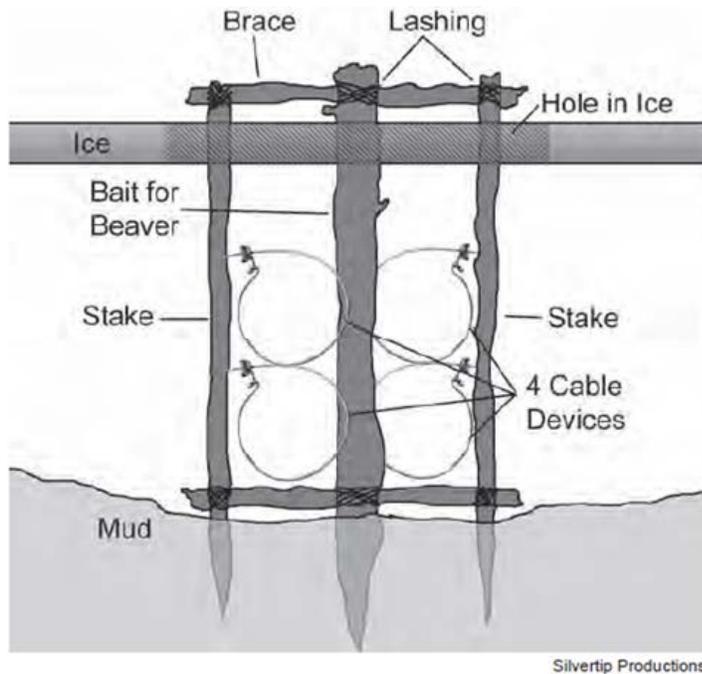
## How to Catch a Beaver

Compared to land animals, beavers are restricted in their range because they generally live in the same pond or water system their whole adult life, unless they run out of food. Beavers are easily trapped because they often have recognizable trails leading out of the water to where they go to feed, called 'runs'. These runs are usually the best place to set traps to catch beavers, and a 330 size body-gripping trap is the best tool for the job. To attract the beaver to the



set, some trappers will use lures, like castor scent from the glands of the beavers. Because beavers are very territorial, using the smell of another beaver will make the ones there want to come and investigate to drive out the intruders.

When trapping beavers for fur, most trappers try to catch them in late winter and early spring when their pelts are in the best condition and worth the most money. This often means trapping through the ice, which can be challenging. Fortunately, beavers don't travel very far from their huts in the winter and usually only leave the hut to go to their feed pile in the water near the hut. Placing traps underwater around the huts and feed piles is a good way to catch beavers. Snares are often used under water because many of them can be placed on a pole to cover lots



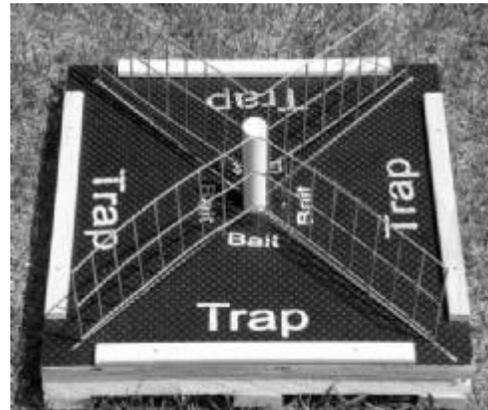
of area. When the beaver gets caught in the snare underwater, they will hold their breath until they pass out from lack of oxygen, which is very humane. Beavers have a special muscle in the back of their mouth that automatically closes so they don't breathe in water when they are opening their mouth to chew branches. Because beavers can be quite big animals, it's important to secure the snares to poles and keep them from pulling the poles underwater through the ice. Knowing your knots is important for this type of set, and for trapping in general.

## How to Catch a Muskrat

Like beavers, muskrats are almost always trapped in the wetlands that they live in. Muskrats are often the first furbearer that a new trapper will target because they are easy to catch and when markets are good, provides good value for the effort. Their runs are like those of a beaver, but generally smaller. Muskrats live in small huts, but also in burrows they make in the banks of wetlands or in the edges of roads that run through wetlands, where they can cause problems to the roads when they cave in. Setting small body-gripping traps (110 or 120s) along the runs that they travel regularly or at the entrance to their burrows works well to catch these critters. However, these sets will only catch one muskrat at a time and in productive wetlands, there can

be lots of them. Cage traps set just under the water along the runs also works very well to catch several muskrats at the same time and they are quick and easy to set.

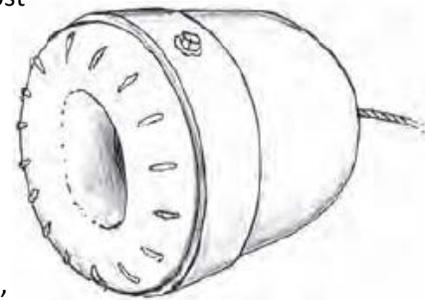
Muskrats are easily baited with fresh vegetables, like carrots, apples and potatoes and parsnip. Putting a piece of bait on the trigger of the body-gripper and setting the trap so that the bait is right at the water's surface will almost always catch a muskrat if they are in the area. Another kind of set is called a float set. These are floating platforms where several traps, usually foothold traps are placed around and attached to the float with some bait in the middle. As muskrats climb onto the float they get caught in the trap and fall in the water where they drown by holding their breath like a beaver does.



In the winter, some trappers will chop a hole in the muskrat huts and place a trap inside the hut for when the muskrat returns to the house. Like a float set, the muskrat will drop into the water with the trap attached and drown.

## *How to Catch a Raccoon*

Unlike coyotes, beavers and muskrats, sets for raccoons are rarely made along trails because raccoons like to wander and rarely have well established trails. Sometimes, along streams or marsh edges there are places where footholds or body-gripping traps can be placed to catch a raccoon, but it is usually a less productive way to target this species. The weakness of a raccoon is certainly its stomach and need to eat regularly. Raccoons are not picky eaters and anything sweet or smelly will usually attract these critters. The most popular set for a raccoon is by far the bucket set. This set uses a medium-sized body-gripping (160 or 220) trap set in a bucket on or close to the ground with some bait in the back of the bucket. Using a trap that fits well in the bucket is best, but they will usually find their way into the trap as they try to get to the bait. The best baits for raccoons are things like sweet corn, canned fish (sardines), marshmallows with jam, and even dog food. Placing the bucket where regular raccoon sign occurs will greatly increase your chances of catching one, but also places where they are likely to visit (barns, marsh edges) is a good bet. Like the bucket set, live traps set the same way will easily catch an animal that is causing problems around a house or farm yard.



EGG™ Trap

Some traps are designed specifically for raccoons. Foot-encapsulating traps baited with marshmallow, fish or corn and put in the same places will catch your fur on a regular basis too. Don't be fooled by their size as raccoons are very strong, so using a good anchor and putting the trap out of the reach of trees or other things is important.

## Avoiding Non-target Species

When trapping near farms or areas where people and domestic animals like pets and livestock visit, a trapper must be very aware of where they set traps and how they set traps. Using specific sets to avoid certain animals is a must. Setting in ways that if a non-target animal (an animal you don't want to catch) is caught it can free itself or will not be seriously harmed by the trap. We will discuss specific sets later when going over some set types, but will discuss the animals that you should be aware of and avoid when trapping.

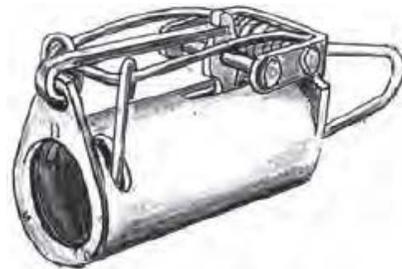


Bucket with lid

Trapping land animals generally runs the highest risk of catching domestic pets and livestock because there are fewer non-target animals that might be caught compared to aquatic furbearers. Because coyotes are very similar in size to domestic dogs and because they are both very curious and will often behave the same way, trapping coyotes usually has the greatest risk of catching non-target animals. Traps used for coyotes must also be quite strong to properly restrain the animal or kill it humanely, so they pose the greatest hazard to domestic animals. When using restraining traps, like footholds, be sure to use padded or laminated

models to avoid harming non-target animals. Dogs caught in these models of foothold traps can normally be released unharmed. When using snares, particularly where you may catch deer or livestock, breakaway devices like S-hooks that are designed to hold a coyote, but will break open for bigger animals is always wise. Breakaway devices are especially important when trapping nuisance coyotes that are causing problems for livestock.

Body-gripping traps of the 220 size (7 inches) are ideal for trapping raccoons, but can also catch and kill small and medium size dogs quite easily. Setting them in dog-proof buckets will greatly reduce the chances of catching a dog or other animal larger than a raccoon. Some traps are also designed specifically for catching raccoons. New models of foothold traps called foot-encapsulating traps will only work on raccoons because they are the only furbearer that has



Lil' Griz™ Trap

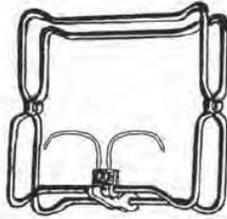
paws like the hands of humans. They can reach in and grip things, so these traps are designed so that a raccoon can reach in the trap to grab the bait and will trigger the trap to catch their foot.

Some baits also help to attract only raccoons. These animals like sweet baits, like corn, marshmallows, jams and fruit, which are not as attractive to animals like dogs and cats.

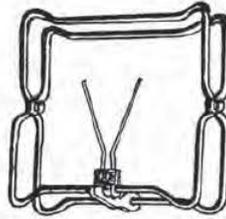
Another way to avoid trapping non-target animals with body-gripping traps is to adjust the trigger of the trap to allow some animals to pass through, but still catch the target animal. One good example of this is setting a trap to catch a beaver, while trying to avoid otters.

### Trigger Adjustments

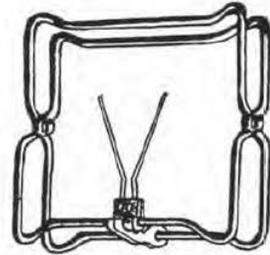
Note: Trappers often set body-gripping traps with triggers on the bottom to reduce pelt damage to the upper part of the pelt



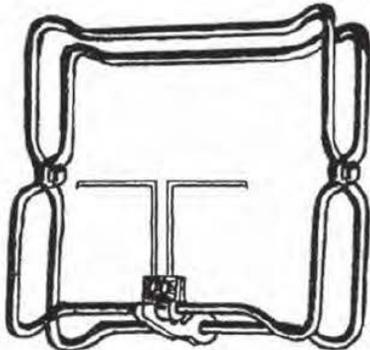
Small - for Mink



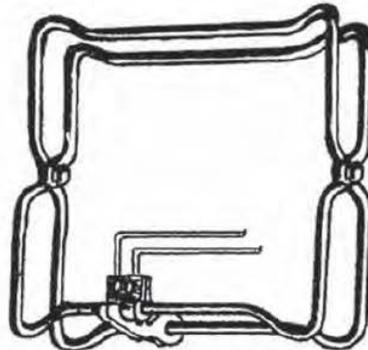
Small - for Muskrats



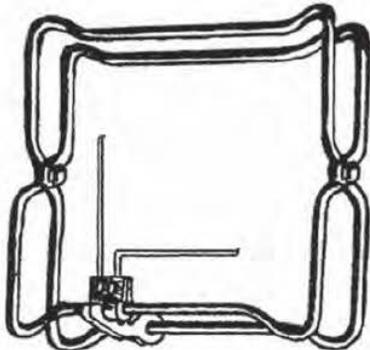
Medium - for Raccoon and Fisher



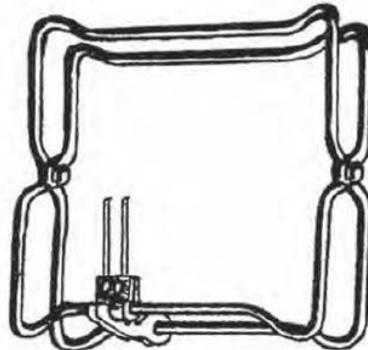
Large - Beaver and Otter



Large - Beaver, not Otter



Large - Beaver, not Otter



Large - Beaver, Not Otter  
Note: triggers are cut short

In some areas, trappers might have some endangered species roaming the area. In parts of the prairies, swift foxes have been reintroduced and are protected from trapping. A good steward of the land should always try to protect these species from getting caught in traps. Foothold traps for coyotes can be adjusted so that they will spring only when a larger animal steps on the trigger, but not a smaller animal like a fox. This is done through adjusting the tension of the trigger. Neck snares can also be set in a way that will avoid foxes because they are shorter and carry their heads lower than a coyote. Foxes will pass under a snare set for coyotes if set high enough, but will still catch most coyotes. Be sure to know whether there are species of concern in the areas you are trapping.

The most important advice to someone trapping for avoiding non-target animals, especially when trapping an area for the first time is to talk to the landowners and find out what animals might be roaming on the land. Take the time to scout the land properly and look for sign of other animals that might encounter the trap by looking for sign such as tracks, scat and obvious trails. A trapper should always be sure to avoid areas where people and pets might wander by setting traps a safe distance away from trails. That is also a smart way to keep curious people from discovering your trap, tampering with it or even possibly stealing your trap or catch.

## *Dispatching an Animal Humanely*

With some traps, the purpose is to catch the animal alive and hold it until the trapper can return, such as with foothold traps and cage traps. It is, of course, very important to remember to check your traps on a regular basis if using live-capture traps because you don't want the animal waiting in the trap longer than needed. Most provinces have laws about how long you can go without checking live-capture traps to prevent wildlife caught from being left too long without being tended to. Once you catch an animal alive, you have the choice of releasing the animal, or dispatching it in a humane and safe way. Specific methods of dispatching animals are covered in formal trapper education courses and we refer students interested in becoming trappers to learn the most appropriate techniques through these courses.

## *Skinning and Preparing a Pelt*

We caught some! Now that you've caught your furbearers it's important to have a plan about how you're going to process them so that the animals aren't wasted. Most trappers process their own animals and prepare pelts for market, which can take a fair bit of time to do depending on how many critters a trapper catches, while some choose to sell them to fur buyers in the round (meaning the whole animal). There is a lot of satisfaction in processing a furbearer and sending your prepared pelts to market. Knowing how to deal with each species is important as most of them have important details that must be followed to get the most return for your hard work.

Skinning and preparing a pelt takes several steps. Every step is important to making sure the finished product is in the best condition possible. You can't control the quality of the animal that is caught, but you can do a lot to make sure you don't make mistakes and decrease the value of it. An old saying amongst trappers is: "You can't turn a \$10 animal into a \$100 pelt, but you can quickly turn a \$100 pelt into one worth \$10". The following process showing how to skin and flesh a raccoon applies to most species, with the exception of the beaver, which is skinned open (like a blanket). Some pelts are dried with the fur out, while other are dried with the fur inside. Directions to the handling of different animals can be obtained from the document found in this link: <http://www.furharvesters.com/pdf/pelthandling.pdf>



Beaver on Board



Ohio DOW Photos

1. Brush and comb the fur.



2. Lines show where to cut.



3. Cut both legs from ankle to vent, then around the ankles.



4. Cut bottom side of tail. Start about 1/4 of the tail length down. Wear latex gloves when skinning. Keep your knife sharp.



5. Pull the pelt off the legs, down to the crotch. Work it loose with your fingers, then cut it away at the crotch.



6. Pull the pelt off the hips then pull it away from the back and part way down the tail.



7. Remove tail bone with puller.



8. Once the tail is free, you can use the tail splitter, or the tip of a sharp knife to split open the tail.



9. Pull the pelt down to the animal's shoulders. Use a rag to get a good grip.



10. Work your fingers through the pelt at the armpit and pull the skin off the leg.



11. Pull the skin down to the ankle.



12. Pull the pelt down over the neck. Cut through the ear cartilage at the skull without cutting the fur.



13. Pull the pelt down to the eyes. Work your knife around the eyelids without cutting the fur.



14. Cut the pelt free at the jaw hinge, and then follow the lips without hitting the teeth. The teeth will dull your knife.



15. Cut through the bottom of the lip and free the pelt. You don't need to skin all the lower jaw. Cut lip half way up.



16. Raccoons have a lot of fat. Work the pelt over the fleshing beam. Put a rag over the nose of the pelt and press your stomach against the beam to hold the pelt. Start scraping just behind the ears, working down the pelt and away from your body using a pushing motion.



17. Pull the pelt up on the beam as you work further down the skin. This picture shows the fleshing knife working the raccoon's stomach area.



18. When you finish fleshing the body, do each leg and the tail. Be careful around the tail so you don't tear it off.



19. Slip the pelt over the wire stretcher and adjust it.



20. Hook the tail in place.



21. Hook the back legs.



22. Pull down on the edges of the pelt to stretch it to length. Do not pull hard on the hooks, or they may tear the pelt. Hang the stretched pelt up to dry. Under good conditions this will take four to seven days.



23. Tacking pelt - If using a wood stretcher.



24. Wedge - When using wooden stretchers use tacks to hold the tail and feet in place. Use a wedge between the belly and the board so that you will be able to remove the pelt when it dries and shrinks.

## *How to Dispose of Carcasses*

The skinning job is done, now what? Disposal of carcasses can be a challenge. Care must be taken to dispose of carcasses so they do not cause a problem of flies and odour, do not cause an “eyesore” or possible health concerns.

Returning a carcass to its original environment is the best solution in remote or wild areas. The carcass will nourish the cycle of life. If you are in a remote location and where legal, individual carcasses may be left out of sight near where they were trapped, and scavengers will naturally take care of them. Do not dump a large number of carcasses in a pile, the amount will overwhelm the scavenger’s ability to eat them and it will soon become a mess.

Burying carcasses is also an acceptable method of disposal, but is not always practical if the ground is frozen or if a suitable location is not available.

On most livestock farms, the farmer must have a burial pit or compost facility for dead stock. Others may use a commercial disposal service. Using the farm’s own dead stock disposal facilities to dispose of your furbearer carcasses would be ideal.

Carcasses can also be another resource for the trapper. Beaver and Muskrat make excellent bait for predator sets, and can also be used for dog food. When trapping predators in the winter, nearly any carcass can be used as bait because animals in winter conditions become much less picky about their diet and coyotes will even eat the carcasses of other coyotes in the dead of winter.

## *How to Dry and Store Your Pelts*

Once you have your pelts on forming boards or stretchers, making sure they dry properly is an important step to produce a product that will be worth more at the auction. A pelt properly placed on a stretching board or wire frame should be hung up and dried slowly in a room with a temperature of about 12- 16°C (55-60°F). Use a fan to circulate air throughout the room to decrease drying time. Pelts of coyotes should be turned fur side out. You must check the pelts as they dry fur side in. Once the skin is dry to the touch, remove the fur from the stretcher and turn it fur side out. Place the pelt back on the stretcher fur side out and pin it in place to finish drying. The skin of a coyote may be dry to the touch in as little as four hours to as long as 10 hours depending on the drying conditions and whether the fur was wet when placed on the board. Complete drying of a pelt may take anywhere from just a few days to a week or more depending upon the temperature and air flow. Regardless of how long it takes, a pelt should be completely dry before removing it from the stretching board or wire frame. If not, the pelt could rot, and all the effort you put into catching, skinning, fleshing, and drying the fur will be lost.

## *Selling 'Green' Pelts*

Some trappers that do not have the equipment or time to process their furbearers and prepare the skins for market themselves will prefer to sell the green pelts (a pelt not fleshed, stretched and dried) or whole animals. In the case of green pelts, care must be taken if you choose this method or the pelts could be ruined. Always freeze the pelt flat, fur-side out, with no exposed flesh. Do not roll furs, and never freeze or thaw your fur in plastic. Animals with heavy flesh such as coyote, raccoon, and beaver should be thawed out for five to six hours in a cool room before selling. Never allow frozen green pelts to thaw for so long that the grease melts, or the skin gets slimy. Muskrat pelts should be frozen flat and not thawed at all before selling.

Small furbearers such as mink and muskrat can be frozen whole, without skinning. Allow whole frozen animals to partially thaw before selling. In the case of selling whole frozen muskrats, only the feet need to be thawed when presenting to the buyer. Individual fur buyers may have different instructions for freezing pelts or whole animals. If you know where you intend to sell your fur, check with the buyer for more specific directions on freezing fur.

# Safety on the Trapline

---

The first thing on any trapper's mind should always be safety, above all else. Like any activity that takes place outdoors there are a number of things that pose a risk to the health and safety of trappers, and below we look at the most important things to keep in mind.

## Wildlife Diseases You Can Catch (zoonoses)



Silvertip Productions

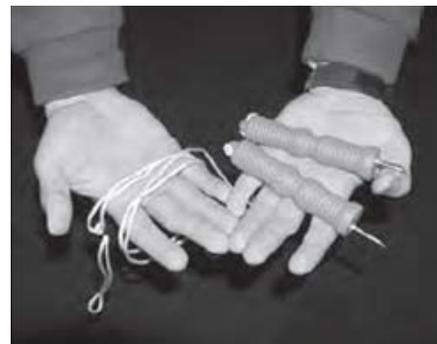
**Raccoons can carry several diseases**

Just like people that can get sick and pass on viruses and diseases like the common cold or the flu to other people, animals carry diseases that can be transmitted to people. Diseases that can be passed from animals to humans are called zoonoses. While some zoonoses can be pretty insignificant, others can be very serious and even deadly. The chances of catching a wildlife disease are pretty low, but they should not be ignored. Wildlife diseases can be transmitted (passed from animals to humans) through contact with saliva, urine, feces, eating inadequately cooked meat or from being bitten by

fleas and ticks that the animals can carry. In the old days, trappers took few precautions against catching diseases from animals as there was little information about zoonoses and how they are transmitted. While some trappers continue to handle animals without taking proper precautions, it is always strongly suggested to follow basic steps to minimize the risk of catching any disease from the animals. These simple steps include: always wear gloves when handling animals, wash your hands as soon as you're finished handling animals, have a set of clothes or coveralls that you only use for handling furbearers or wash your clothes often, don't eat meat from wild animals that isn't properly cooked, and keep a clean work space.

## Walking on Thin Ice

Trapping often takes place in the late fall winter and early spring when pelts are in the best condition, but it often means that trappers have to cross ice or trap through the ice. Before you walk or drive onto ice, make sure that it is safe. This is especially important to consider when trapping near beaver huts and dams because the ice in those places is usually thinner than



Silvertip Productions

**Ice safety picks**

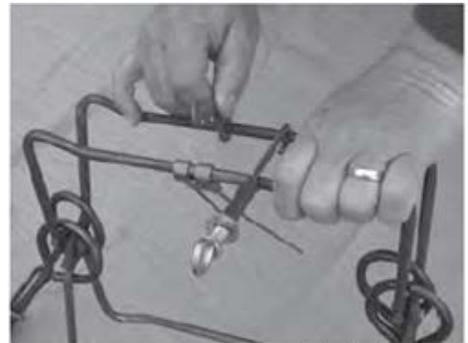
the rest of the pond or lake. The general guide is that ice should be at least 10 cm thick to support a person, 20 cm thick for a snowmobile and 30 cm thick for a car or small truck. Never walk or drive on ice that you aren't sure of the depth. The depth of ice is not always the same throughout the pond or lake, so always continue to check the thickness as you move about on the ice. It is always best if working on ice to be with a partner who can help in the case of an emergency. If you work regularly on ice, it is wise to carry with you a set of ice picks with which you can use to pull yourself out of the water.

## Firearms (if carrying one)

Trappers often carry a firearm when trapping to use when dispatching trapped animals or to harvest furbearers. Be sure to follow safe handling rules with firearms and when others are carrying firearms. Canadian laws require all firearm users to be trained in the safe handling of firearms.

## Trap Safety

The most common cause of injury when trapping happens when a person tries to work too quickly and becomes too comfortable with their equipment. Some traps can cause serious injury to a trapper, and taking proper safety precautions when trapping, such as always using safety grippers when setting body-gripping traps and power snares, or always being mindful of your trap when it's set. This is especially true when setting near water as even a trap that doesn't cause an injury can make you lose your balance and trap your hands so that you can't swim if you fall in the water. One rule of thumb when setting body-gripping traps is to have the last step be to anchor your trap. That way, if you do get caught, you aren't struggling to detach the trap from the anchor if you need to get help to take it off your hands.



Silvertip Productions

**Always use a safety gripper  
when setting large body-  
gripping traps**

## Hypothermia



Hypothermia is when a person's core body temperature drops below 35°C. It is the leading cause of death among people who participate in outdoor activities. When trapping in cooler temperatures and not being dressed for the conditions, this can be a real threat, especially if you get wet working near water or simply from sweating

from hard work. Dressing properly, staying well hydrated, eating regularly and carrying emergency equipment like a thermal blanket and matches can help prevent the risk of hypothermia in the outdoors.

## *Planning Ahead for the Unexpected*

A general rule of thumb when going out to check traps is to tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return, just in case something should happen, so that they know where to look for you if you don't return on time. Always make sure to check that you have all your safety and emergency equipment before going out so that you're not caught unprepared. Make sure you dress for what weather might hit when you're outside. A warm sunny morning can turn into a cold blizzard in very little time and being caught outdoors unprepared is a recipe for problems.

# How to Sell Your Fur

---

Once you have your pelts properly stretched and dried, how do you go about selling them? Obviously, we don't see raw pelts for sale in stores or at local markets. In Canada, the vast majority of pelts are sold through a few auction houses. The North American Fur Auctions (formerly the Hudson Bay Company) based in Toronto and the Fur Harvesters Auction in North Bay, Ontario, are the two main companies that buy furs from trappers and auction them to buyers. They have agents in most parts of the country that will meet trappers in different places throughout the provinces to pick up furs several times each year and arrange to have them shipped to the auction houses where they are graded, and sold to buyers from all over the world. Each bag of fur dropped off with a pickup agent is tagged with the trapper's information so that the auction companies know who owns the pelts and they are tracked electronically with barcodes that are attached to each pelt at the warehouse when they receive the bag. Each auction house has several auctions throughout the year, generally starting in January and ending in September. When your pelts are sold, the auction company then sends you a cheque for the pelts that were sold after taking a small amount for the service of cleaning and selling your pelts. Once you know where to meet with a pickup agent, they can provide you with a receipt and account number so the auction house knows you sent pelts and can send you money from the sales. For more information on how to contact the auction houses, the pickup agents, and pickup schedules visit the auction



house websites provided in the Additional Resources section of the end of this manual.

# Can They be Eaten?

---

When most people think of eating wild meat, they think of the usual game species such as grouse, deer, moose, elk, ducks and other game animals. Any meat can be eaten if cooked properly, and in some places the meat from furbearers is still an important source of protein, and can even be quite delicious if properly cooked. Probably the most commonly eaten furbearers in Canada are beavers and muskrats, which can be considered aquatic versions of rabbits since they eat essentially the same diet. In other parts of North America, raccoon is regularly eaten and trappers sometimes sell the fresh carcasses of their catch to locals; this is more common in the southern United States. As is the case with most wild meat, the flavour is likely quite different from domestic meat people purchase at the market, and learning to cook wild meat properly is key to enjoying this source of food. Recipes for different furbearers can be found in some websites and a simple search online can find you ways to try the animals you catch. Being able to maximize the use of the animals trapped is also a way to be responsible as a trapper and to respect the life of the animals that have been trapped.

Certainly, like all meat, furbearers should be properly cooked to make sure that any potential parasites and bacteria are killed.

# Roles and Responsibilities of an Ethical Trapper

---

All life on earth depends on other lives, and taking a life is a big responsibility! Most modern humans are far removed from the daily struggle for life that animals experience every day while living on the farm or in the wild. Urban and rural people often have very different views on our relationship with animals. It is easy to become confused about right and wrong. Here are a few thoughts to guide you as an ethical trapper.

We all know that some animals are always displaced or killed when farming operations replace wilderness. How do we know what is right when we wish to protect crops and livestock from wildlife damage? Or to kill an abundant animal that is not in direct conflict with farmers and use its fur to enhance our lives? When is it okay to take a life and feel good about it? We must use reasoned judgment in such matters, but reason is not always enough.

Laws form the minimum guide for behaviour in society. Of course an ethical trapper will follow the law. But something more is required from us as responsible members of society. The most important concept that helps guide us through the uncertainties is respect. Respect for the animals, respect for the environment, and respect for other people. An ethical trapper strives to do the least harm while respectfully carrying out successful trapping operations.

Trapping and wearing furs is not supported by all members of society. Some people are anti-trapping and anti-fur. It is important to respect other people even while disagreeing with their point of view. The best way to oppose “anti” arguments is with your exemplary conduct and well-reasoned explanations.

By being mindful, respectful and grateful for the lives of the wild animals and their furs, we can participate in continuing Canada’s fur trade heritage and feel good about it!

## *A Trapper's Code of Conduct*

- 1. Trap in the most humane way possible. Use the best available approved trap in the proper size.*
- 2. Check traps regularly. Check live holding land sets at least once a day, preferably in the early morning. Set only as many traps as you can effectively manage.*
- 3. Assist landowners who are having problems with predators and other furbearers that have become a nuisance.*
- 4. Obtain landowners' permission and advice before trapping on private property, and set traps only in appropriate locations. Use trapping methods that will reduce the possibility of catching non-target animals, and do not set traps where livestock, cats and dogs or other unwanted animals may get caught.*
- 5. Carefully record the location of trap sets.*
- 6. Know and use proper releasing and killing methods.*
- 7. Handle furs with care to avoid waste.*
- 8. Dispose of animal carcasses properly.*
- 9. Support and help train new trappers about trapping ethics, methods and means, conservation, fur handling and marketing.*
- 10. Obey all trapping regulations.*
- 11. Report any outbreaks of disease or other abnormal occurrence promptly to wildlife authorities.*
- 12. Observe, read, and learn, to broaden your knowledge of the resource and its conservation. Support and promote sound furbearer management by staying informed and informing others. Join your local trappers association.*

# How to Get Started Trapping

---

As you've probably gathered so far, trapping is a pretty complex activity that someone doesn't just decide one day to start doing. But, the challenge and different aspects of trapping, like the different trap types, trap sets, fur primeness, pelt preparation, etc. are what makes trapping so interesting and fun. We hope that the idea of trapping has appealed to some of you and that you are interested in learning how you might get into trapping. The first step on your journey to becoming trappers is to contact your provincial departments of natural resources or trapping associations to find out how to get registered in a trapper education course. We've provided the links to several provincial associations at the end of this document and contact information for your provincial wildlife agencies can be found in the phone book or online. All provinces and territories require new trappers to take a trapper education course, which go into the different topics covered in this manual, but in more detail and also review all the specific provincial laws that regulate trapping, because they are different in every province.

If you're interested in trapping, but want to learn more or experience what trapping involves before you decide to register in a course, contacting your trapper's associations would be a good way to find out who in your area is a trapper and who might be able to take you out on their trap line to experience trapping first hand. Most trappers are keen to share their knowledge and to teach young trappers how to get started. Trappers and trapper associations are also great contacts to find out where you can purchase trapping equipment locally to get yourself started once you've decided that trapping is something you'd like to do.

Even if you decide that trapping isn't something you'd like to do, remember that trapping is a responsible and humane activity that is useful for helping to manage wildlife and to deal with animals that might cause problems to landowners.

# What Types of Jobs Involve Trapping Furbearers?

---

While there are certainly fewer people today that make a living from just trapping, it can provide an important source of revenue for some people. On top of revenue from selling furs, trapping furbearers can be an important skill to develop in order to pursue some careers in the wildlife field. Because furbearers can cause problems to roads, railroads, livestock, pets and even public safety, some trappers have businesses as nuisance wildlife control operators and are hired by individuals, cities, and private organizations like railroad companies. These nuisance control operators are paid to remove animals that could cause problems or that are causing problems. In urban areas, trapping is often preferred to shooting a problem animal because of the safety concerns with using firearms. It also allows the animal to be removed and relocated to its natural habitat where it won't cause more problems.

Furbearer trapping is also an important skill for wildlife management and research. Biologists often use traps to catch and study animals to learn more about them and to figure out how many animals are on the landscape to be able to manage their numbers. With fewer and fewer trappers in Canada, the need to have professional trappers to be able to deal with abundant wildlife populations is important and in constant demand.

# Additional Trapper Resources

---

This section will provide links and contact information to various organizations or websites where additional information on trapping and furbearers can be obtained.

## *Trapper Association Links*

Every province has an organized trapping association or federation, and most have websites that can be found below. For those provincial associations without websites, contact your provincial wildlife agencies to find out who to contact about your local association.

Nova Scotia Trappers Association:

<http://www.trappersassociationofnovascotia.ca/links/default.asp>

New Brunswick Trappers Association: [www.nbtrappers.ca](http://www.nbtrappers.ca)

Fédération des trappeurs gestionnaires du Québec/Quebec Manager Trapper's Federation:

<http://www.ftgq.qc.ca/fr/frame4.html>

Ontario Fur Managers Federation: <http://www.furmanagers.com/>

Manitoba Trappers Association: <http://www.manitobatrappers.com/>

Saskatchewan Trappers Association: <http://www.sktrap.sasktelwebsite.net/>

Alberta Trappers Association: <http://www.albertatrappers.com/>

British Columbia Trappers Association: <http://bctrappers.bc.ca/>

Yukon Trappers Association: <http://www.yukonfga.ca/support/yukon-trappers-association/>

## *Other Trapper Links*

Below are links to other fur and trapping related associations or organizations that can provide you with additional information on trapping, traps and the fur industry.

Fur Institute of Canada is an organization that includes government, trappers and the trapping industry. It serves to promote fur harvesting and sustainable use of fur, while also doing all the trap testing for traps to be certified under the International Agreement on Humane Trapping Standards: [www.fur.ca](http://www.fur.ca)

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies is an organization that does work primarily in the US on behalf of state and federal wildlife agencies. They do the trap testing and setting of best management practices in the US. They have great resources on how to trap specific animals and also provide other resources to trappers:

[http://www.fishwildlife.org/index.php?section=furbearer\\_management&activator=27](http://www.fishwildlife.org/index.php?section=furbearer_management&activator=27)

Mammalian Species Accounts found on this website provide some scientific information about the biology of most mammal species in the world. Understanding the biology of the species you're pursuing is important to being a successful trapper:

<http://www.science.smith.edu/msi/msiaccounts.html>

Canadian National Trapper's Association is an organization in Canada that promotes the interests of trappers in Canada. They have a great forum where you can get all sorts of useful tips on trapping and ask experienced trappers questions: [www.trapper.ca](http://www.trapper.ca)

North American Fur Auctions is North America's largest fur auction house and one of the largest in the world. It is the old Hudson Bay Company that established the fur trade in Canada and one of the two main places to sell your wild fur on the market. You can find out who is the pickup agent in your area to contact and start selling your furs. They also provide good information on pelt preparation. Some of those documents are found in the appendices at the end of this document: [www.nafa.ca](http://www.nafa.ca)

Fur Harvester's Auction is based out of Thunder Bay, Ontario, and is formerly the Ontario Trapper's Association auction house. They are the second largest auction house in Canada and a good option for selling wild furs. You can also find information on fur preparation and who to contact locally to pick up your furs: [www.furharvesters.com](http://www.furharvesters.com)

There are many places to buy traps, including some mail-order stores and local shops. For more information about where to buy traps, talk to local trappers in your area or search online to see who sells what brand of traps. There are many brands, with different price ranges, and some places sell good starter packages to get you going.

For more information on trapping, the fur industry and wildlife harvesting and conservation, try reading these books:

*Second Nature – The Animal Rights Controversy* by Alan Herscovici

1985 CBC Enterprises ISBN 0-88794-149-4

*A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold

1949 Oxford University Press ISBN 0-19-500777-8

# Appendix 1 – North American Fur Auctions Technical Manuals

---

---

# Appendix 1A – Coyote

## COYOTE

### SECTIONS

The texture (silkeness) of the fur and length of the grotzen are characteristics of coyote fur that vary geographically. Coyote pelts are often simply sorted into Eastern and Western sections.

**Eastern:** Include Coyotes from Eastern Canada and the Eastern United States. The sizes are large, texture is coarse and colour is dark. Heavy and Semi weights separate the Heavier Canadian Coyote from the Flatter United States Coyotes in this section.

**Western:** Softer in texture, paler in colour and somewhat smaller than the Easterns. Three weights are used to separate the Western Coyotes: Heavy, Semi & Flat.

### SIZE

XL-L	Over 91 cm	Over 36"
M-SM	Under 91 cm	Under 36"

### COLOUR

Coyote pelts are first sorted into categories based on the belly colour (clarity). Four categories are recognized.

**Clear:** These pelts have fur on the belly that is almost white. The underfur and guard hairs are clear and bright with no yellowish or brownish tint. Most pelts in this category are Western pelts; Clear pelts are very rare in Eastern sections.

**Slight Off:** The fur on the belly of these pelts is slightly grayish at the base of the underfur and has a slight yellowish cast to the tips of the underfur and guard hairs.

**Off:** These pelts have a distinct yellowish cast to the tips of the underfur and guard hairs of the belly, and the base of the underfur is gray.

**Badly Off:** These pelts have a strong yellowish orange cast in the underfur and guard hairs of the belly.

Coyotes are sorted secondarily by back colour based on the degree of brownish tinting in the tips of the underfur and in the midband of the guard hairs. Up to six categories are usually recognized.

**Good Colour (GC):** This is similar to the pale colour with a slight yellow tone.

**Tawny (TNY):** This colour is more yellow or sandy than the good colour.

**Medium (MED):** This colour has an orange to light-brownish tone to the guard hair and underfur.

**Dark Brown (DBR):** This colour has a darker brown tone to the guard hair and underfur.

**Dark:** Very dark brown or red tones to the guard hair. Usually a coarser textured pelt.



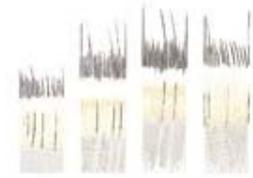
(a) good (b) medium (c) dark brown (d) dark  
COLOUR CATEGORIES OF COYOTE BACKS



(a) clear (b) slight off (c) off (d) badly off  
COLOUR CATEGORIES OF COYOTE BELLIES  
TOP: WHOLE PELTS | BOTTOM: CROSS SECTIONS OF FUR

**GRADING SECTIONS**

CODE	SECTIONS	DEFINITION
HVY	HEAVY	Pelts from Western Canada and the Northwestern U.S. Large in size. Dense, deep underfur. Longer guard hairs.
EAST	EASTERN	Pelts from Eastern Canada and the Northeastern U.S. Fur length similar to HVY. They are larger in size. Have darker coloured fur. Generally coarser.
SH	SEMI-HEAVY	Pelts from the Central part of Western U.S. Smaller in size. Good underfur. Shorter guard hairs.
FL	FLAT	Pelts from South Central regions of the U.S. Smaller in size. Short underfur and guard hairs.



(a) very early (b) early (c) prime (d) late  
 PRIMING SEQUENCE OF THE COYOTE  
 TOP: WHOLE PELTS  
 BOTTOM: CROSS-SECTIONS OF FUR

CATALOGUE SECTION I

CODE	GRADE
SEL	SELECT

DEFINITION

Best possible quality.  
 Full bodied, fully prime, fully covered skins.  
 Top coloured backs and bellies (pale and gray clear).  
 Fur and leather free of imperfections.

I	FIRST
---	-------

Very good quality.  
 Fully prime, fully covered skins except for very slight weakness on the flanks (guard hair weakness).  
 Full, dense underwool and full belly.  
 May have very minor imperfections.

I-II	FIRST AND SECOND
------	------------------

I-II (Gd.): Prime or slightly overprime.  
 Slightly open showing weakness.  
 Neck, flanks or grotzen not fully covered.  
 I-II (Av): Overprime.  
 Pronounced weakness in the neck.  
 Broken and wiry appearance on the neck or flanks.  
 I-II (Pr): Underprime.  
 Less dense and undeveloped.  
 Dull and musty appearance.  
 Minor slight damage.  
 I-II (Early): Underprime.  
 Well-furred with reasonably dense underwool, fully covered.  
 Neck, flanks and backs open.  
 Underdeveloped in middle of back, colours tend to be dull and unfinished.  
 Blue to light blue leather.  
 I-II (Extra Early): Very early pelts.  
 Guard hair has developed but not the underwool.  
 Very dull appearance.  
 Leather blue to black colour.

II	SECOND	<p>II (Gd.): Overprime. Very weak, open coverage. Rough, ragged appearance. Minor slight damage.</p> <p>II (Av.): Overprime. Very open pelt. Pronounced weakness. Minimal slight damage.</p> <p>Early: Underprime. Less dense and more underdeveloped. Dull and mushy appearance. Back colours tend to be dull and unfinished. Blue to light blue leather. Minor slight damage.</p> <p>Extra Early: Very underdeveloped. Little underwool development, mainly guard hair. Very dull in appearance. Blue to dark blue leather.</p> <p>II (Pr.): Same as I-II (Pr.) but with more pronounced weakness.</p>
SDG or SLT	SLIGHT DAMAGED	<p>SDG (Gd.): I-II (Gd.) or I quality skins with limited damage to leather or fur by way of holes, scars, tears, matts or patches of missing fur. Example: two 4" sew jobs allowed.</p> <p>SDG (Av.): I-II (Gd.), I-II (Av.) or II (Gd.) quality skins with limited damage to leather or fur by way of holes, scars, tears, matts or patches of missing fur.</p>

**CATALOGUE SECTION III**

CODE	GRADE	DEFINITION
DGD	DAMAGED	<p>DGD (Gd.): SEL or I quality skins that are up to 25% damaged.</p> <p>DGD (Av.): SEL or I quality skins that are more severely damaged.</p> <p>I-II (Gd.) or II (Gd.) quality skins that are up to 25% damaged.</p> <p>DGD (Pr.): I-II quality skins that are more severely damaged.</p> <p>II (Av.) quality skins that are up to 25% damaged.</p>
DGD III	DAMAGED III	<p>II (Pr.) quality skins that are up to 25% damaged.</p> <p>Better quality skins that are more than 50% damaged.</p>
IV	FOURTH	<p>Summer skins, badly damaged, pieces.</p> <p>No commercial value.</p>

**Blemishes**

Cosmetic irregularities which result in no fur loss.

**Imperfections**

These must all result in fur loss that would require repair after dressing.

Leather: holes, sew jobs, false cuts or poor handling, excess fat, taints and snare marks.

Fur: rubs, clips, mange and matts.

# Appendix 1B – Raccoon

## RACCOON

The sections recognized for Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) reflect the length and density of the fur and the thickness of the leather.

### GRADING SECTIONS

**Canadian:** Ontario, Quebec, Maritimes, Northern Maine. Pelts have very deep underfur, a woollier texture with a medium to long nap. The colour is average and the size is 20.32 cm–22.86 cm (8"–9") wide.

**Western Northern (W/NOR):** Minnesota, Wisconsin, Dakota, Northern Iowa, Northern Nebraska. Pelts are very heavy furred, with a deep underfur, a medium texture and a longer nap. The colour is average colour and the size is 20.32 cm–22.86 cm (8"–9") wide.

**Western North Central (W/NC):** North-Central Iowa, Nebraska, North Central Illinois. Pelts have an intermediate to medium underfur with a silky texture and longer nap. The colour is average to good and the size is 17.78 cm–20.32 cm (7"–8") wide.

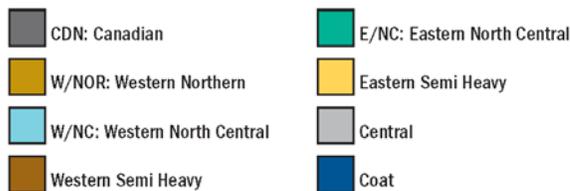
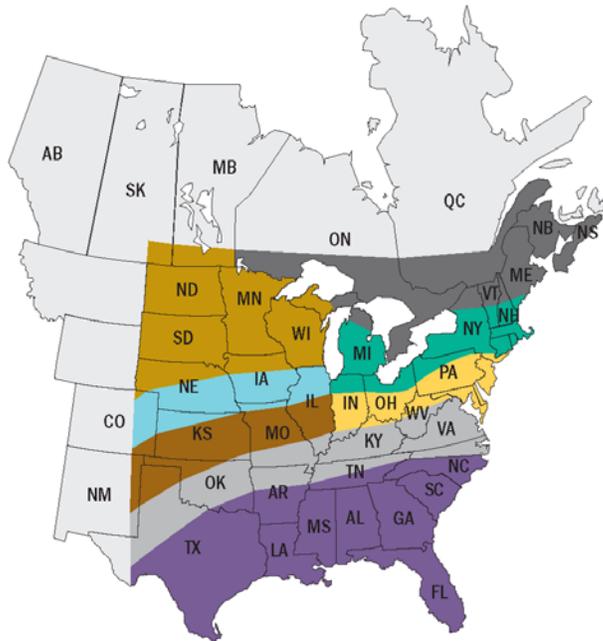
**Western Semi Heavy:** Central Illinois, Central Missouri, Kansas. Pelts have a medium underfur with a silky texture and a medium nap. The colour is average to good and the size is 16.51 cm–19.05 cm (6.5"–7.5") wide.

**Eastern North Central (E/NC):** Southern Michigan, Northern Indiana, Northern Ohio, Northern Pennsylvania, New York. Pelts have a medium to heavy underfur with a woollier texture and a medium nap. The colour is average, with a darker fur and the size is 16.51 cm–19.05 cm (6.5"–7.5") wide.

**Eastern Semi Heavy:** Central Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania. Pelts have a medium underfur and nap with a silky texture. The colour is average, with a darker fur and the size is 16.51 cm–17.78 cm (6.5"–7") wide.

**Central:** Southern Missouri, Southern Illinois, Kentucky, Oklahoma. Pelts have intermediate semi-heavy, light underfur with a silky texture and a medium to short nap. The colour is average and the size is 16.51 cm–17.78 cm (6.5"–7") wide.

**Coat:** Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia. Pelts are flat, and have a silky texture with a short nap. The colour is average to good and the size is 13.97 cm–16.61 cm (5.5"–6.5") wide.



#### SIZE

Raccoon pelts are sized for length on standard boards. The pelt is placed on the board belly-down with the head towards the technician. Length of the pelt is measured from the tip of the snout to the base of the tail.

5XL	Over 97 cm	Over 38"
4XL	89-97 cm	35"-38"
3XL	81-89 cm	32"-35"
2XL	74-81 cm	29"-32"
XL	69-74 cm	27"-29"
LGE	61-69 cm	24"-27"
LM	56-61 cm	22"-24"
MED	51-56 cm	20"-22"
SML	Under 51 cm	Under 20"

#### CLARITY

CODE	CLARITY	DEFINITION
1	EXTRA CLEAR	Very bright silver guard hair and blue underfur.
2	CLEAR	Bright silver guard hair and bluish underfur.
3	SLIGHT OFF	A slight yellow tone to the guard hair. Underfur is slightly off colour.
4	OFF	A predominant yellow-to-orange cast to the guard hair and underfur.
5	BADLY OFF	A very yellow or orange-to-red cast to the guard hair and underfur.

#### CATALOGUE SECTION I

CODE	GRADE	DEFINITION
SEL	SELECT	Early Winter/Winter Prime skins. Maximum to good density, with tight underwool. Full coverage of guard hair. Leather is cream coloured and may have up to 3 well-spaced holes or imperfections.
I	FIRST	Slightly under prime skins. Good density, fully covered. Leather is slightly blue and may have up to 3 well-spaced holes or imperfections.
I-II	FIRST AND SECOND	Early skins. Average density. Slightly open coverage with a slightly wooly appearance. Slightly underdeveloped guard hair coverage. Leather is slatey and may be cream coloured or blue and may have up to 3 well-spaced holes or imperfections.
II	SECOND	Very Early Fall or Overprime skins. Open coverage with a wooly appearance. Very dull or wooly guard hair coverage. Leather mostly blue and may have up to 3 well-spaced holes or imperfections.
SDG-GD	SLIGHT DGD (Good)	SEL or I quality skins with 4 to 6 bullet holes or the equivalent in: Rubs, Snare Marks or severe Tick bites.
SDG-AVG	SLIGHT DGD (Average)	I-II quality skins with 4 to 6 bullet holes or the equivalent in: Rubs, Snare Marks or severe Tick bites.



(a) very early (b) early (c) coming on to prime



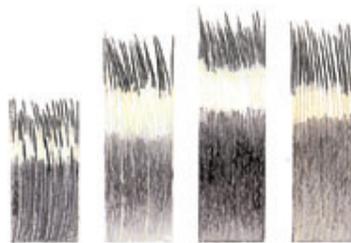
(d) prime (e) late

LEATHER-OUT PRIMING SEQUENCE OF THE RACCOON  
BACK ON THE LEFT, BELLY ON THE RIGHT FOR EACH PAIR



(a) very early (b) early (c) prime (d) late

FUR-OUT PRIMING SEQUENCE OF THE RACCOON  
TOP: WHOLE PELTS | BOTTOM: CROSS SECTIONS OF FUR



CATALOGUE SECTION II

CODE	GRADE	DEFINITION
DGD	DAMAGED	DGD (Gd.): SEL or I quality skins with up to 25% damage. DGD (Av): I-II quality skins with up to 25% damage. SEL or I quality skins severely damaged. DGD (Pr): II quality skins with up to 25% damage. I-II quality skins severely damaged.
III	THIRD	Very Early. Underdeveloped fur. Dark blue to black leathered skins.
IV	FOURTH	Limited commercial value.



(a) very early (b) early (c) coming on to prime



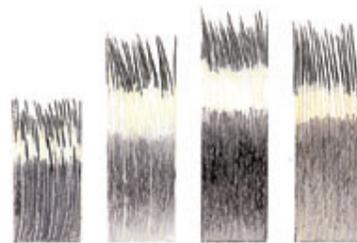
(d) prime (e) late

LEATHER-OUT PRIMING SEQUENCE OF THE RACCOON  
BACK ON THE LEFT, BELLY ON THE RIGHT FOR EACH PAIR



(a) very early (b) early (c) prime (d) late

FUR-OUT PRIMING SEQUENCE OF THE RACCOON  
TOP: WHOLE PELTS | BOTTOM: CROSS SECTIONS OF FUR



#### CATALOGUE SECTION II

CODE	GRADE	DEFINITION
DGD	DAMAGED	DGD (Gd.): SEL or I quality skins with up to 25% damage. DGD (Av): I-II quality skins with up to 25% damage. SEL or I quality skins severely damaged. DGD (Pr): II quality skins with up to 25% damage. I-II quality skins severely damaged.
III	THIRD	Very Early. Underdeveloped fur. Dark blue to black leathered skins.
IV	FOURTH	Limited commercial value.

CATALOGUE SECTION III

CODE	GRADE	DEFINITION
DGDDAMAGED		<p>DGD (Gd.): SEL or I quality skins with up to 25% damage.</p> <p>DGD (Av.): I-II quality skins with up to 25% damage, or SEL or I quality skins severely damaged.</p> <p>DGD (Pr.): II quality skins with up to 50% damage, or I-II quality skins severely damaged.</p>
III	THIRD	<p>Very Early. Underdeveloped fur. Dark blue to black leather.</p>
IV	FOURTH	Limited commercial value.



COLOUR CATEGORIES OF THE RACCOON  
TOP: WHOLE PELTS | BOTTOM: CROSS-SECTIONS OF FUR

## Appendix 1C – Beaver

### BEAVER

The North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) is the sole representative of the Family Castoridae (Order Rodentia) in North America.

Today, after almost four centuries of commercial exploitation, the Beaver is a thriving species, and in many places it is abundant enough to be considered a nuisance. The word Beaver comes from the Old English "beofor".

#### DESCRIPTION

On land the Beaver is a large, clumsy, hump-backed animal, rarely venturing far from water. Many adaptations enable it to successfully exploit the freshwater environment. In water it is sleek and torpedo-shaped, propelling itself with its powerful, webbed hindfeet and tail. It maneuvers with its large, dorsally flattened, scale-covered tail.

The Beaver's fur provides insulation in its den and in the water. The underfur is thin, soft, wavy, and extremely dense. The colour ranges from black to gray, and the underfur of western Beavers is reddish-tipped.

Fully prime underfur is 2–3 cm (0.8"–1.2") long in the kidney region. In comparison, the guard hairs are stiff, thick, and long, gradually widening at the distal end and tapering at the tip. The guard hairs are 5–6 cm (2.0"–2.4") long when fully grown, and range in colour from black to reddish. The guard hairs keep water and dirt away from the underfur.

Peak primeness occurs between December and March, depending on latitude. Although most Beavers appear reddish dark brown, they can range from jet black to pale silvery or blond. There can be considerable colour variation among Beavers in any one region.

The use of a large number of sections for Beavers is less common today than it was in the past. In Canada, which produces well over half the beavers taken annually in North America, pelts are normally sorted into Eastern and Western groups.

#### GRADING SECTIONS

**Eastern:** Pelts from Eastern Canada—east of the Ontario-Manitoba border. Also included are pelts from the eastern United States with Minnesota as the dividing line. Pelts from the Eastern Section are generally darker and finer in texture than those from other sections. There are two weights found in Eastern pelts, Heavy and Semi. The Heavy weight pelts tend to be Canadian in origin and will include some pelts from the North Eastern United States. The underfur is deep and heavy. The Semi weight pelts are mostly of United States origin. The underfur is not as heavy.

**Western:** Pelts from Western Canada—west of the Ontario-Manitoba border. Pelts from the Western United States—west of Minnesota—are also included. Pelts from this section are larger than most Eastern Beavers, and are also paler in colour and coarser in texture.



(a) Extra Dark

(b) Dark



(c) Brown

COLOUR CATEGORIES OF EASTERN BEAVER PELTS



(a) Dark

(b) Brown

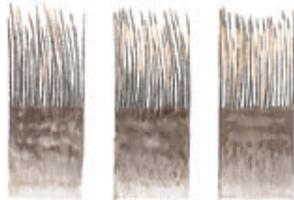


(c) Pale



(d) Extra Pale

COLOUR CATEGORIES OF WESTERN BEAVER PELTS



(a) Extra Dark

(b) Dark

(c) Brown

CROSS SECTION OF FUR — EASTERN BEAVER PELTS



(a) Dark

(b) Brown

(c) Pale

(d) Extra Pale

CROSS SECTION OF FUR — WESTERN BEAVER PELTS

**SIZE**

The size of beaver pelts is determined by summing the length and width of the pelt.

2XL	Over 165 cm	Over 65"
XL	152-165 cm	60"-65"
L	140-152 cm	55"-60"
LM	130-140 cm	51"-55"
MED	119-130 cm	47"-51"
SM	107-119 cm	42"-47"
X-SM	Under 107 cm	Under 42"

**COLOUR**

XDARK	DARK	BROWN
PALE	XPALÉ	



(a) Canada Eastern

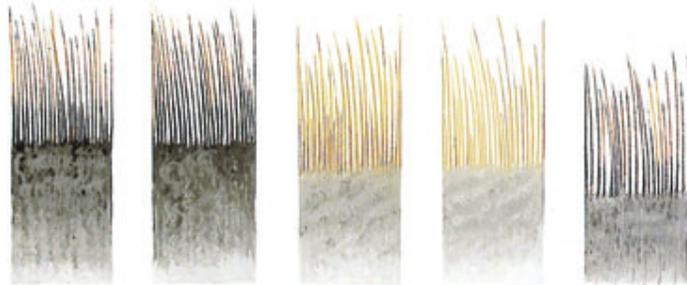
(b) USEastern



(c) Canada Western or U.S. Western

(d) Canada Western or U.S. Western

(e) U.S. Southern



(f) Canada Eastern

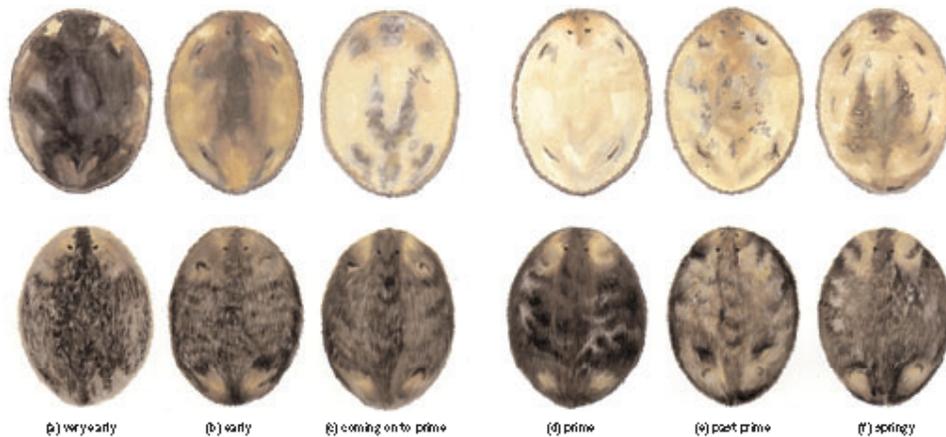
(g) US Eastern

(h) Western

(i) Western

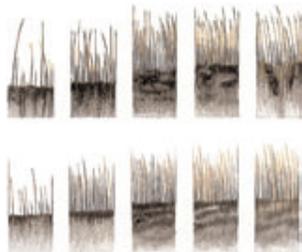
(j) Southern

BEAVER PELTS FROM REPRESENTATIVE SECTIONS IN NORTH AMERICA SHOWING VARIATION IN COLOUR AND FUR LENGTH  
TOP TWO ROWS: WHOLE PELTS | BOTTOM: CROSS-SECTIONS OF FUR



(a) very early (b) early (c) coming on to prime (d) prime (e) past prime (f) spring

PRIMING SEQUENCE OF BE AVER PELT  
TOP: LEATHER SIDE | BOTTOM: FURSIDE



(a) very early (b) early (c) coming on to prime (d) prime (e) late early  
PRIMING SEQUENCE OF THE BEAVER  
TOP: CROSS-SECTIONS OF FUR FROM NECK  
BOTTOM: CROSS-SECTIONS OF FUR FROM RUMP

CATALOGUE SECTION I

CODE	GRADE	DEFINITION
SEL	SELECT	The best possible quality. Fur is of strong density, fully covered. Winter-Prime leather that is of a clear, golden colour. Leather and fur are free of imperfections.
I	FIRST	Good to Average quality. Fur is of less density than SEL, also fully covered. Leather may be Prime or of a slight blue colour and may have minor blemishes.
I-II	FIRST AND SECOND	I-II SILKY: Flat quality. Fur is of weak or loose density, fully covered. Leather colour may range from clear to blue. May have more blemishes or imperfections than I.  I-II COARSE: Similar to above but lacks coverage and/or has "fallen timber" appearance. May have up to 3 small imperfections.

II	SECOND	Very Flat quality. Fur has very weak/loose density, may be open (i.e. not covered). May have more blemishes or imperfections than I. Usually late Spring skins or Early skins.
VSL	VERY SLIGHT	SEL or I quality with no more than 3 small imperfections resulting in minimal fur loss.
SDG	SLIGHT DAMAGED	SDG (Gd.): SEL or I quality with 4 to 6 small imperfections, or up to 3 larger imperfections.  SDG (Avg.): I-II SILKY quality with 4 to 6 small imperfections, or up to 3 larger imperfections.

**CATALOGUE SECTION III**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
DGD	DAMAGED	DGD (Gd.): SEL or I quality with up to 10% damage  DGD (Avg.): SEL or I quality with up to 25% damage or I-II quality with up to 15% damage.  DGD (Pr.): I-II quality with up to 50% damage, II quality with up to 25% damage.
III	THIRD	Much flatter than II with minimal leather damage. Blue to black leather. Very early fall skins.
IV	FOURTH	Badly damaged skins (over 50% damage), burnt skins with very-limited-to-no commercial value.

**Blemishes**

Cosmetic irregularities which result in no fur loss.

**Imperfections**

These must all result in fur loss that would require repair after dressing.

Leather: bites, scars, holes, false cuts, taints, trapper snare marks and very dark hard spots.

Fur: rubs, clips, mats.

## Appendix 1D – Musquash (Muskrat)

### MUSQUASH (MUSKRAT)

#### SECTIONS

**Eastern:** Pelts included in the Eastern section originating in Eastern Canada—east of the Manitoba-Ontario border and in the Eastern United States—east of Minnesota.

The Muskrats are large in size, have long guard hairs, bluish underfur and are silky in texture. Because the pelts differ from North to South, there are three sections within the Easterns.

**Northern:** Includes Eastern Canada, New York State, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont. Good colour and size with silky texture and blue underfur.

**North Central:** Includes Michigan and Wisconsin. Heavier leather, with good to average size, good to average colour and silky texture.

**Central:** Includes Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. Heavy leather with browner colour, coarser texture and good size.

**Western:** Originate in Western Canada—west of the Manitoba-Ontario border and the Western United States. The pelts are generally smaller in size, browner in colour and have less dense underfur. Two sections differentiate the Canadian & United States Muskrats in the West.

**Northern:** Includes Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta. Smaller sizes with average colour, weight and leather.

**North Central:** Includes North & South Dakota, Montana. Smaller sizes, and light weight leather. Brown to reddish colour.

#### SIZE

Muskrat pelts are sized by eye rather than by a board, although boards are available.

Properly boarded Muskrats from eastern sections will be 16 cm (6.25") wide at the butt, whereas the smaller pelts from western sections will be 14.5 cm (5.75") wide at the butt.

XXXL	Over 42 cm	Over 17"
XXL	42 cm	15.5"-17"
XL	39 cm	14"-15.5"
LGE	34 cm	12.5"-14"
MED	27 cm	11"-12.5"
SML	23 cm	9.5"-11"
XS	Under 23 cm	Under 9.5"

#### COLOUR

Muskrats are not sorted by colour, although there is natural variation in fur colour from black to pale silver or even white. Bellies vary in colour from whitish or silvery to light brown in all back colours.

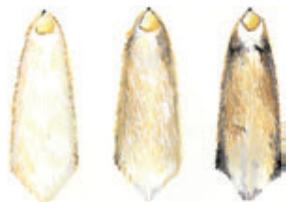
Pelts from western sections tend to have coarser fur.

Black Muskrats have black guard hairs with clear, dark blue underfur.

Other shades have brownish tips in the underfur.



VARIATION IN COLOUR OF THE BACKS OF MUSKRAT PELTS



(a) silver      (b) pale      (c) light brown  
VARIATION IN COLOUR OF BELLIES OF MUSKRAT PELTS

SEASONS

SEASONS CODE	SEASONS	DEFINITION
FAL	FALL	Early caught skins. Flat, sparse fur. Leather is blue to dark blue colour and dry. Blotchy leather in adults and very blue to light blue in juveniles.
WTR	WINTER	Dense fur. Slightly blue to clear leather (white or golden coloured) that is supple. 2 thin blue stripes running down back.
SPR	SPRING	FULLY PRIME: Dense fur Clear leather. SLIGHTLY OVERPRIME: Slightly weaker fur. Reddish, veiny, boardy leather. OVERPRIME: Loose, weak fur. Reddish, veiny, dry, thin, papery leather which may have well-defined kidney marks on the back.



(a) Fall adult (b) early Winter (c) late Winter (d) early Spring (e) good shedder (f) poor shedder  
LEATHER-OUT PRIMING SEQUENCE OF MUSKRAT PELTS



(a) Fall (b) early Winter (c) late Winter (d) early Spring (e) shedder  
FUR-OUT PRIMING SEQUENCE OF THE MUSKRAT  
TOP: FUR-OUT PELTS | MIDDLE: CROSS-SECTIONS OF THE FUR AT THE NECK | BOTTOM: CROSS SECTION OF THE FUR AT THE RUMP

**WEIGHTS**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>WEIGHTS</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
GD	GOOD	Well furred. Solid, heavy, supple feel.
AVG	AVERAGE	Well furred but not as heavy as GD.

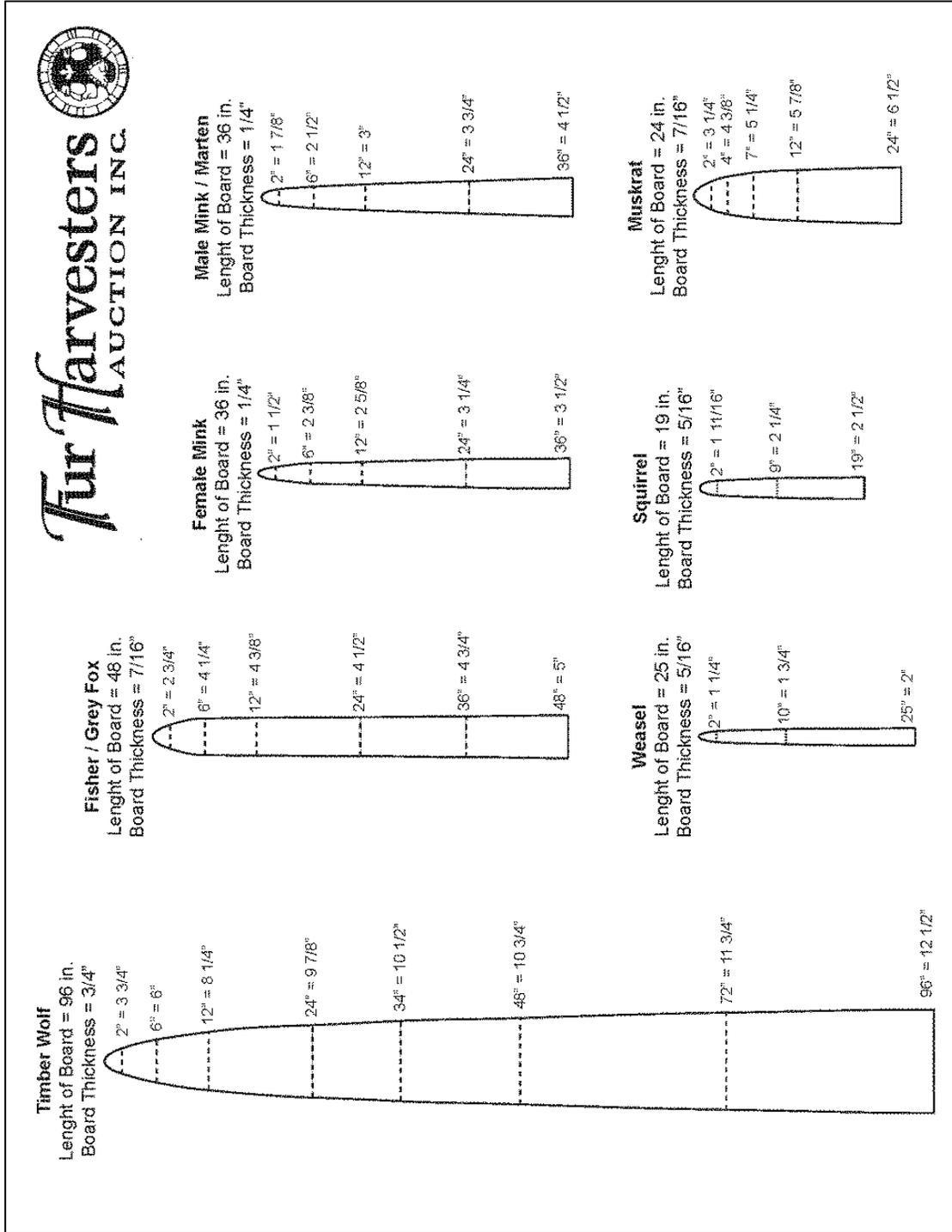
**CATALOGUE SECTION I**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
SEL	SELECT	Winter or Early Spring skins with Good Weight. Clean leather. No blemishes or imperfections.
I	FIRST	Winter or Spring skins with average weight. Clean leather. No blemishes.
I-II	FIRST AND SECOND	Fall or Poor Spring skins.
II	SECOND	Very Early Fall skins.
SDG	SLIGHT DAMAGED	Fall, Winter or Spring skins that have 1 to 2 small holes or a limited combination of scars.

**CATALOGUE SECTION III**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
DGD	DAMAGED	Skins with 3 or more holes.
IV	FOURTH	Badly damaged skins (over 50% damage), burnt skins. Limited commercial value.

# Appendix 2 – Fur Harvesters Auction Forming Board Dimensions

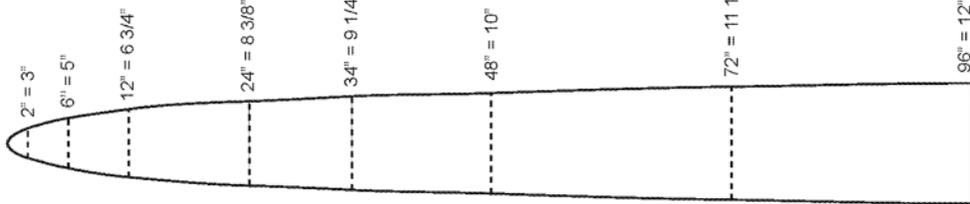




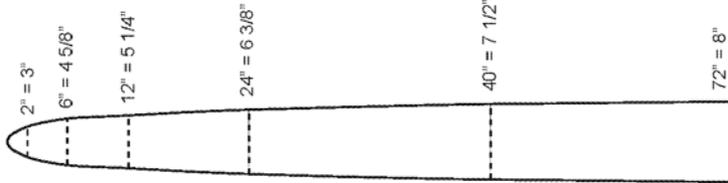
# Fur Harvesters

AUCTION INC.

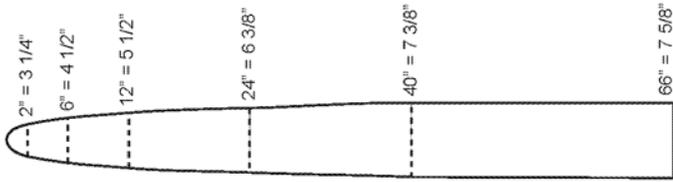
**Wolverine & Coyote**  
Length of Board = 96"  
Board Thickness = 3/4"



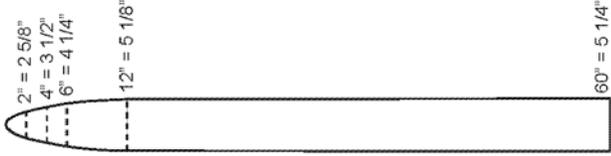
**Lynx & Bobcat**  
Length of Board = 72"  
Board Thickness = 1/2"



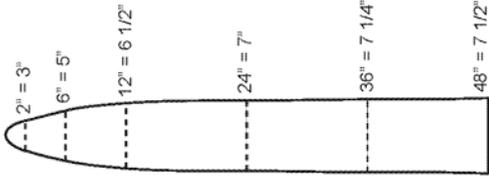
**Otter**  
Length of Board = 66"  
Board Thickness = 1/2"



**Fox**  
Length of Board = 60"  
Board Thickness = 1/2"



**Raccoon**  
Length of Board = 48"  
Board Thickness = 1/2"



# Activities

---

## *Activity 1 – True or False?*

People started trapping for fur in the 1970s when they realized it was a fashionable product? T / F

Modern trap designs are much improved and more humane than traps used decades ago. T / F

Alternatives to trapping nuisance animals include poisoning, shooting, and destroying habitat to eliminate the animals. T / F

Furbearers found on private land belong to the landowner. T / F

The North American Model of Wildlife Management has is one of the best systems of managing wildlife in the world. T / F

When trapping nuisance animals, it is possible to make sets that will target only the species that are causing problems. T / F

Furbearers are a non- renewable resource that can only be harvested for a few years before populations will crash. T / F

Wildlife on the farm has no value and should be eliminated whenever possible and by any method necessary. T / F

Farmers are important caretakers of the land that wildlife depend on to survive. T / F

## Activity 2 – Identify the Furbearer

Get to know the furbearers of Canada. The purpose of this activity is to be able to identify the furbearers of Canada. This activity will involve doing a little reading and research at home as not all the furbearers are described in the manual. Beside each furbearer listed below. Indicate which picture corresponds to the animal's name and choose whether the animal is found in your province.

Furbearer	Picture Number	Found in your province (circle correct answer)
Mink	_____	Y / N
Badger	_____	Y / N
Polar Bear	_____	Y / N
Muskrat	_____	Y / N
Raccoon	_____	Y / N
Lynx	_____	Y / N
Short-tailed Weasel	_____	Y / N
Beaver	_____	Y / N
Fisher	_____	Y / N
Coyote	_____	Y / N
River Otter	_____	Y / N
Striped Skunk	_____	Y / N
Red Fox	_____	Y / N
American Marten	_____	Y / N



### Activity 3 – Who did it?

You've got company! Based on the description of the sign you notice around the farm, what animal do you suspect is causing the damage.

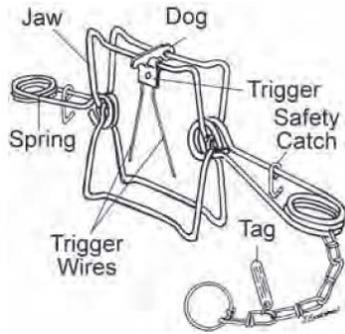
1. In the pasture where you keep a small flock of sheep, something has killed a lamb and dragged it off into the field where it has been almost completely eaten.
2. In the small wetland along the road, you notice small mounds of vegetation and moss. There are little trails in the vegetation and along the road, an animal has burrowed into the bank of the road causing big holes to collapse in the road. You sometimes see a small animal swimming in the wetland and sitting on the shore eating.
3. Something has been climbing up into the attic of the barn and making a raucous. You're losing vegetables in the garden and have also lost some chickens from the coop where it tore a hole in the wire. You never see the critter, so it must be coming out only at night.
4. In the big slough near the house, a big pile of sticks and mud has built up on the bank and there is another one out a ways in the water. There are trails leading up to the trees behind the house where something has cut one down. You never see much, but sometimes see a bigger animal swimming in the slough and you sometimes hear a big splash when you're near the slough.

Answers:

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 4 – What should I use?

Describe what each of these traps would be used to catch and whether it would catch the animal alive or whether it is a kill-type trap:



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

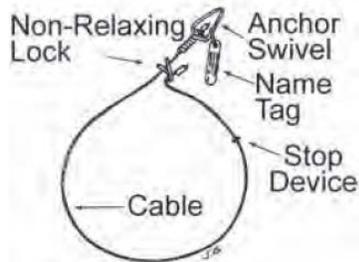
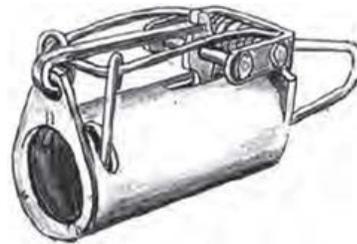
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

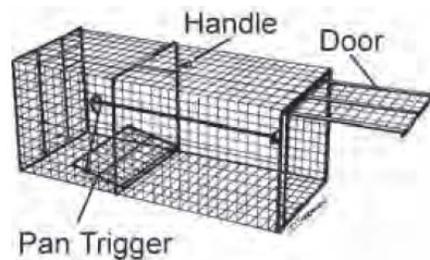
---

---

---

---

---



## *Activity 5 – Step by Step*

Trapping; step by step. Put these trapping activities in chronological order from 1 to 9 of which you would do first to last.

Checking traps \_\_\_\_\_

Skinning \_\_\_\_\_

Scouting for set locations \_\_\_\_\_

Shipping your fur \_\_\_\_\_

Fleshing the pelt \_\_\_\_\_

Setting the trap \_\_\_\_\_

Preparing equipment for the trapping season \_\_\_\_\_

Storing pelts for shipment \_\_\_\_\_

Boarding pelts to dry \_\_\_\_\_









Saskatchewan

3830 Thatcher Avenue  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7R 1A5  
306-933-7727 • 306-933-7730 (fax)  
[www.4-h.sk.ca](http://www.4-h.sk.ca) • [info@4-h.sk.ca](mailto:info@4-h.sk.ca)