ASSOCIATION of FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES

The United States and Canada have conducted the most extensive scientific testing of traps in the world to develop Best Management Practices for Trapping (BMPs), a program that ensures that traps used to capture wildlife are humane, efficient, safe, and selective.

SCIENCE BRIEF

ANIMAL SELECTIVITY

Trapping is strictly regulated in North America. Modern traps are highly selective, which means they capture only species they're designed to catch, thanks to advances in trap engineering and in the skills of those who use them. The United States and Canada have conducted the most extensive scientific testing of traps in the world to develop Best Management Practices for Trapping (BMPs), a program that ensures that traps are humane, efficient, safe, and selective.

Research Results

Data indicates that traps are highly selective

- During this program, various designs of traps were set to capture legal furbearers over a quarter of a million times. No threatened or endangered species were caught during this extensive trap testing. No domestic dogs or cats were captured 99.95% of the time; the few dogs that were captured were released unharmed.

- While conducting research in New Hampshire, beaver traps were visited daily 544 times. Eighty-seven beaver were caught; the only other animals that were caught were 3 muskrats and 1 raccoon. The overall selectivity for legal furbearers was 100%.

- During this research, traps set in the marshes of Louisiana for nutria — an invasive and destructive rodent — were checked 957 times during 1999 and 2004. In total, 425 nutria were caught; other legal furbearers caught included 4 raccoons and 1 opossum. Four rabbits, 3 birds, and 1 domestic dog, which was released unharmed, were also caught. Of the animals captured, 98% were legal furbearers.

- Traps set for American marten were checked 1,093 times in the wilds of Alaska, and 164 marten were captured; other captures included 14 weasels, 12 squirrels, 3 fox, 1 mink, and 1 bird. The overall selectivity for legal furbearers was 99.5%.

- Recent national surveys have shown that 78% of the traps used in the United States today are the same designs that were determined to be the most selective. Trappers have adopted the designs and methods that maximize animal welfare and selectivity.

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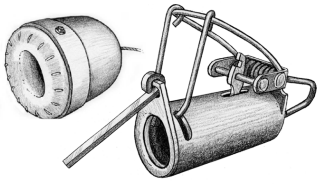
Trapper Education is offered nationally in the United States. Many state fish and wildlife agencies and Canadian provinces offer additional trapper education courses as well.

What Makes Traps Selective?

Tools

Bodygrip trap



Foot encapsulating traps

There are more than 600 commercially available trap designs and configurations that were created to humanely capture wildlife for avocational harvest of wild animals, restoration programs, damage management, and research. Traps are available in a variety of sizes so that animals as small as a weasel or as large as a coyote can be caught and held safely. Many traps have specialized features that prevent unintended animals from being captured. For example, foothold traps may be adjusted so they deploy only when an animal weighing more than a specified weight steps on the trigger; smaller animals are able to step on the trap without being captured. Some trap designs can be triggered only by a particular species, such as foot encapsulating traps for raccoons, because these animals have the dexterity to grab and reach into the trap to pull a lever before they are caught.

Methods

Traps are not set near humans, domestic pets or livestock; these areas are avoided. Much trapping occurs on private land, where trappers and landowners communicate regularly to minimize concerns and prevent conflicts with others who have permission to access the property. Trappers also use attractants designed for the species they are targeting and can use baits and lures that don't appeal to pets and livestock. Body-grip traps are often placed in locations such as an elevated log or under the water, where only the intended species is able or likely to travel. Body-grip traps are typically placed inside of cubbies or boxes to prevent larger animals from entering and being caught.

Skill Sets

Trappers are extremely knowledgeable about animal tracks and droppings, the habitats used by each species, and animal behavior. They use these skills to set traps where a particular species travels and forages while minimizing encounters with other wildlife or domestic animals. For example, beaver trappers are able to identify where beaver regularly swim under the ice and can set traps in those locations with a high degree of selectivity. Public trapper education programs are widely available, free of charge.

Because of how traps are designed and deployed, they do not pose a threat to people and threats to domestic pets are minimized.

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