



## SCIENCE BRIEF

# SUSTAINABLE USE OF WILDLIFE

As members of the natural system, humans have always relied on the land for food, clothing, and shelter. When well-regulated, the use of abundant wildlife is sustainable and ecologically sound. Using wildlife sustainably not only ensures that future generations will continue to benefit from these resources, but also that wildlife populations will remain in balance with the environment.

## What is sustainability?

Living populations naturally fluctuate. Many wildlife populations experience peaks right after birthing and hatching seasons and seasonally low populations at the end of winter. Sustainable use of wildlife refers to the long-term stability or persistence of a population, often on a scale of years, decades, or longer. Sustainability occurs when natural systems are diverse, productive, and capable of supporting healthy wildlife. And because humans are a major part of natural systems, we play an active role in responsibly managing them using techniques based on the best available science. Unlike some other human activities, the sustainable harvest of wild fur, food and fiber results in little pollution and development or degradation of habitat.

## Use of wildlife

People from diverse cultures who use wildlife often feel a deeper connection to the land and develop a strong conservation ethic. People who value wildlife work to maintain and conserve those resources for future generations. Unfortunately, when wildlife (such as beavers or muskrats) becomes overabundant, they are considered pests by some members of the public. At this point, society has little tolerance for these species and people become indifferent to their treatment, intrinsic value, and whether the wildlife population will even persist.

For example, bobcats, like many carnivores, were once viewed as a "varmint" with little to no legal protection in much of the United States. In the 1970s, bobcat pelts experienced a resurgence in wild fur markets and started to be viewed as a valuable resource to conserve and use.

*Conservation is a widely-used and popular term, but what does it mean?*

*Conservation means "wise use." Conservationists believe in using land and wildlife resources sustainably to allow for a prudent and thoughtful approach to their management, ensuring they're used by future generations and not exploited to a level where they are lost forever.*





*"Ironically, the elimination of hunting and trapping cultures may actually speed industrial 'development' and exploitation of nonrenewable resources — with disastrous consequences for wildlife and the environment."*

— Alan Hescovici,  
*Second Nature* 1997

Between 1981 and 2008, the United States took more than 1.3 million bobcats through regulated hunting and trapping programs. During this same time, the bobcat population grew from an estimated 1 million animals in 1981 to around 3.5 million animals in 2008. The bobcat population grew while allowing for an average of 47,000 animals to be taken by trappers and hunters. Bobcats, and furbearers in general, are a great example of sustainability.

## Ensuring sustainability

Today, trapping and hunting are highly regulated by management agencies to prevent long-term negative impacts to populations. The sustainability of wild animal populations can be confirmed through scientific management and the monitoring of wild populations to ensure that the long-term trends are sustainable. Monitoring helps to better understand the impact of human actions on wildlife as well as other potential impacts resulting from disease, toxins, or habitat loss.

## How can wildlife be sustainable?

Mortality in the wild occurs in many different forms including diseases (e.g., rabies, mange), accidents (e.g., roadkill), predation, and starvation. If the number of animals that die are offset by the number born, the population should be secure over the long term. However, these causes of mortality are often exacerbated by habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution, and other human influences to the landscape.

Regulated trapping can replace — and help manage — other forms of mortality in a much more controlled manner. This is done using scientifically-tested traps and through the careful control of harvest via season timing, bag limits, harvest methods, and other regulations.

Trapping during the suitable time of year not only ensures that harvest replaces other mortalities, such as disease, but also that the fur, meat, bones and other parts are prime and can be used. This is important, as the harvest of wild animals may provide a positive incentive to trap during the appropriate season, proactively managing wildlife and fostering a positive value on wildlife. Ultimately, this helps to ensure their long-term sustainability.

**MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT**  
**<https://furbearermanagement.com>**