



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

CONSERVATION BRIEF

Public Safety and Regulated Trapping

In discussions associated with regulated trapping, a misperception exists that traps, particularly foothold and bodygrip traps, pose a threat to public health and safety. This unfounded concern has served as a cornerstone in both state and federal proposed legislations to prohibit or severely restrict the use of these tools on the landscape.

Contrary to this “risk of traps” theme from groups opposed to trapping, the best available evidence demonstrates that these tools do not pose a threat to humans, and in fact are used throughout the United States to safely manage wildlife and habitats, and ensure public health and safety.

Across the United States, trapping is a highly regulated activity. Rules and regulations addressing human health and safety are developed by state wildlife management agencies and enforced

EXISTING LAWS

Laws that regulate trapping may include the following:

- Mandatory trapper licensing
- Mandatory trapper education
- Mandatory trap check times
- Mandatory trap owner

identification

- Restricted seasons
- Restrictions on size and type
- Restrictions on where traps may be set

by over 7,000 trained conservation officers nationwide. Most states require trapper

certification involving education and testing.

As a case study, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources maintains a trapping

incident database that records interactions between trappers and the public. From 2005 to 2021, Wisconsin’s 20,000 licensed trappers efforts resulted in 74 million trap nights in a state home to 6.8 million people. Not a single incident was reported of a person being caught in a trap.

This lack of evidence of traps posing a threat to human health and safety are mirrored by two natural resource oriented entities, the International Hunter Education Association and the North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association. Both groups maintain incident databases to track trends related to incidents associated with



A Conservation Officer checks to make sure a trapper has a license. Agencies regulate trapping with many laws, and trappers are typically required to be licensed. *Photo: Joli Vollers*

hunting, fishing, and trapping. Their databases identified that trapping is not an activity that results in people being captured in traps.

Lastly, trap research conducted by AFWA has been conducted in 42 states by hundred of trappers in real world settings. No person has been caught in a trap during these activities.

While often not part of the conversation, regulated trapping is utilized across the country to ensure the safety and welfare of the public. The traps most often sought to be outlawed are used at international, regional, and military



“Our organization annually tracks incidents of safety lapse by the public in harvesting wildlife. We track tree stand incidents, hunting incidents, etc. The frequency of a person being caught in a trap is a ‘nonevent’ in that we don’t even track them, as that situation is so rare, and it would be an extreme anomaly.”

ALEX BAER

Executive Director, International Hunter Education Association-USA



“We enforce trapping and conservation laws throughout all 50 states, with over 7,000 trained conservation officers nationwide. Lawful trapping does not represent a threat to public safety and the occurrence of a person being caught in a trap is an extremely rare event. Traps just don’t pose that kind of safety risk to the public.”

HEATHER DUGAN

President, National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs



A certified trapper education instructor teaches students how to safely use a foothold trap during a state agency course. Participation in regulated trapping typically requires completion of a certified trapper education course. *Photo: Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency*

airports to ensure safe runways and airspace for aircraft. Foothold traps are used strategically to remove problem wildlife such as coyotes in urban and suburban settings. In the northeastern US, traps are utilized to monitor collaborative U.S.-Canadian efforts associated with rabies vaccination programs.

Certain aquatic furbearers like muskrat, beaver, and nutria, are trapped to ensure the structural integrity of flood control structures such as levees, dams, and drainage ditches, prevent contamination of drinking water sources, and prevent flooding of highways and railroads. These

efforts are carried out by federal, state, city, and county employees, as well as private citizens.

Continued use of regulated trapping as a tool through the regulated framework provided by state wildlife agencies is necessary to promote continued public safety. The lack of evidence of human related captures or injury in any type of incident under well monitored incident programs, demonstrates that regulated trapping does not pose a human health and safety risk.



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“For the past 25 years we have conducted scientific trap research on the selectivity of trapping devices in over 42 states, and under real trapping conditions, in monitoring and collecting data on hundreds of trappers, testing hundreds of trap types over months, we have never had a person caught in a trap. The banning of traps under the guise that they are threats to the public is a red herring in the conversation around this activity.”

BRYANT WHITE

Program Manager of Trapping Policy, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies