

Season's Over, Now What?
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by Jack Turner Jr.

Unfortunately, the trapping season is over. In about two weeks, we'll be ready for the next season. Well at least mentally. As far as our trapping supplies and fur shed are concerned, we've got some work to do.

For some, pulling the trap line usually results in a large pile of tangled and dirty traps, wire, and stakes in the trunk of the car or bed of the truck. Then the mess is transferred to the fur shed or left in the vehicle until we have a day to untangle, sort, and clean the equipment.

While this is okay for you, I prefer to make my job a bit easier. As I am pulling my line, I separate the traps and stakes and place them in a manner that keeps them that way. Any wire on the stakes is immediately cut off and coiled up. Traps that have excess mud on them are "quick cleaned" with a glove or towel.

The next thing I do is to spray off the traps and stakes with a garden hose. Some prefer to go to the car wash and clean traps and stakes. After allowing everything to thoroughly dry, I place my stakes in five gallon buckets. Traps are placed into large plastic containers for storage.

For carrying equipment and catches, trappers often use pack baskets and five gallon buckets. These will need cleaning as well. Every two years, I like to add a coat of varnish to my pack basket to help preserve it. Repairs to the basket may be needed as well.

Cloth or leather gloves will need to be washed to remove blood, dirt, and foreign odors. Boots, waders, or rubber gauntlets may need to be patched or replaced.

In the fur shed, skinning knives will need to be cleaned and sharpened and wire fur stretchers will need to be wiped down. I wipe down the stretchers to remove fat and sticky film. To help keep them from rusting, I like to wipe them down with a light coat of WD-40 or other rust preventative. This helps preserve the life of the stretchers so that rust doesn't transfer to your pelts. Fleshing boards and fleshing knives will need to be cleaned well. Your fleshing knife will most likely need sharpening.

Wire is one trapping supply that is often neglected from treatment. During the trapping season, coiled wire gets wet and begins to rust. So at the end of the season I spray the wire down with WD-40. Another option is to drop it into old wax to keep it from rusting further.

The shed floor and garbage can are usually covered in grease and fat. You'll want to clean these with soap and water to keep down germs, disease, and bugs.

Bottles of lures, baits, oils, etc. are wiped down and separated into species-specific aluminum cans. For example, I have cans marked "mink lure," "muskrat lure," etc. This gives me the opportunity to immediately see what lures I need to stock up on over the summer. Coffee, peanut or baby formula cans work great. Five one-ounce bottles of lure fit nicely into these cans. Lids are placed on the cans to help keep odors down over the hot, humid summer months.

An inventory of all your trapping supplies may need to be done. You will want to check lures, baits, urines, wax, dye, stretchers, traps, replacement trap parts, snares, fur handling equipment, wire, stakes, gloves and gauntlets, trowels, hatchets, boots or waders, etc.

At some point during the off-season, your traps will need to be treated. Treatment may include dyeing, waxing, spray painting, and/or dipping. The most common treatments are dyeing and waxing. This combination allows

the trap to be somewhat camouflaged and protects the trap and helps speed firing of the trap. About fifteen years ago, speed dips started to be used by trappers to treat traps. I have never used this product, but will say that trappers seem split on their decision as to its usage. Spray painting has its limitations, but is primarily used with body gripping traps. I will discuss trap treatment in depth in a future article.

One thing often overlooked is dirt collection. I collect dirt over the summer, allowing it to thoroughly dry and then placing it in sealed five gallon buckets. This dirt is then used during trapping season when wet weather attempts to keep my sets out of commission.

Obtaining permission to trap additional properties next season is one chore that can take time, but might pay huge dividends. The worst a landowner can say is "no." Always attempt to acquire new land to trap. As time goes on, you can drop those properties that aren't producing well. You can never have too much land. And don't forget to do some scouting before season starts.

Still, there are other things to do during the off-season such as attending conventions and meets, as well as practicing making sets. Practicing set making can be as simple or as in depth as you'd like it to be. When I first began trapping, I would make a dirt hole set, bed the trap, place bait, lure, and urine, lay stepping guides, etc. This was done to make me more proficient in getting sets made. Obviously, I would not use real bait, lure, or urine at my practice sets, but the idea was there.

Attending a trappers' convention is one of the best things a trapper can do in the off-season to increase his knowledge. Six to ten trapping related demos are done daily, ranging from weasels to coyotes. Trap modification, fur handling, and snare making are often included as well. While at the convention, one can often pick up traps, lures, or other supplies at bargain costs.

As you can see, there is plenty of work to be done during the off-season. Before we know it, trapping and hunting season will be upon us. Don't wait too long to get started on next season's preparation. ### Jack Turner Jr. 309 Weathervane Lane, Harrison, Ohio 45030.