

My Urban Wilderness
Article from May - Jun 2009 Buckeye Trapper
by Rich Griggs

I started writing the following article probably twelve years ago and put it away still unfinished. I try to attend all of the Ohio State Trapper's Conventions and recently attended the 2008 convention in Lima. I ran into the Editor of The Buckeye Trapper, Mike Gray, and told him that I had this article that I needed to finish and he urged me to finish it and send it in. So I got it out and finished it – at least as best that I could recall.

I have been a part time trapper off and on for the last twenty years. Living in a major mid-west city, my biggest problem is finding places to trap that aren't miles away! Well, I finally found my Urban Wilderness and it was only a couple of miles from home!

One day I found myself talking to a homeless man who had been living in his van, which he had parked in the middle of approximately fifty acres. This property consists of about a thirty-acre lake and twenty acres of woods and brush. During our conversation he told me of all of the wildlife he had observed. There were rabbits everywhere and he told me he had seen several fox. He said he had even watched as a fox chased down and killed a rabbit!

Of course this got the trapper in me very excited! As I was leaving I took a closer look around and saw a lot of beaver cuttings. They all looked old, but I was hoping they were still around.

During the next few weeks I went to the courthouse and looked up the owner of the property and was able to get an aerial photograph of the property. I contacted a man who works for the owner who told me that he didn't see any problem with me setting traps, but he said he would have to talk to the owner. It turned out that this man and two of his co-workers were also trappers but hadn't trapped in years.

I checked back after a couple of weeks and was told that the owner had given me permission to trap! One of the employees even took me on a tour of the property and pointed out some beaver cuttings. These cuttings were fresh. He also showed me a spot where the beaver were coming up onto the bank to feed! I was getting very excited and couldn't wait until the season opened.

During a scouting trip I found some more beaver sign and lots raccoon, mink, and fox sign. Unfortunately I also found a beaver lodge that had been burned out since my last scouting trip!

Getting more and more excited, I made a trip to the OSTA convention and probably spent more money that I should have. Fortunately for me, I have a very understanding and supportive wife. Jennifer does not necessarily agree with hunting and trapping but is supportive of me!

I wanted to focus my trapping on the beaver, but also wanted to trap some of the 'coon and fox. I have never trapped beaver but I hope to catch a few. I was going to give snares a try this year also for the first time.

The weekend after opening day I finally got to set some traps. As I pulled onto the property I saw it! Most of the property had been bulldozed and was barren! After getting over the shock I made a couple of 'coon sets and left.

I talked to one of the workers and they told me that they were going to put up some condos or apartments. They had even filled in some of the lake, completely covering one of the beaver lodges! After checking empty traps, I decided to make a couple of more sets. I was making a post set with a lone weed about eight inches high. I had set the trap and sat it down beside me to do something and when I went to pick it up again my thumb hit the pan and, yeah, you guessed it, the jaws of a 1-½ coil spring slammed shut. One jaw on each side

of my thumb joint! There wasn't much pain, but when I got the trap off it was badly bruised and swollen. I thought it was broke. I did finish the set but that was it for the day.

Over the next couple of days I took four raccoon of average size. Two were caught in cage traps baited with marshmallows and one was taken in a pocket set baited with sardines. This set was rigged with a drowner and the last 'coon was caught in a snare set in a trail. This was the only snare I had set and had made a catch! I really wanted to set some snares for the beaver when the season opened in a few weeks.

I decided to tan all of the raccoons and had a kit I wanted to try. The process was easy and the skins tanned pretty well. I tanned two cased and opened the other two.

I was really disappointed about the property being bulldozed and pulled what sets I had. The beaver were still in the lake and hadn't moved back into the river like I thought they would with all of the construction. I found plenty of fresh sign and even got permission to trap another property on the river. The owner told me there were lots of beaver in the river. While scouting the property, I found where the beaver were coming out of the water and walking down the middle of a dirt road.

Beaver season was approaching fast but not fast enough. I talked my wife into letting me order a half dozen of the MB750 coilsprings. I couldn't wait to get them set! When beaver season started I set all of the MB750's on one side of the lake, which is the side of the lake that I could drive onto and almost right to the edge of the water. My first set was at the bottom of a steep rockslide bank where a lone sapling had been cut down by a beaver but had not yet been whittled to nothing. I wired the tree to the stump so the beaver wouldn't haul it away. Just below the surface at the water's edge there was a ledge still all small rocks. I set one of the coilsprings on the ledge and stabilized it as best I could. I used a large rock for the drowner weight. The other traps were all set in similar fashion but I didn't have to contend with the rocks.

The next day my brother-in-law, Mike Gallion, went with me to check the traps and to hopefully get some pictures. The first trap I checked was the rockslide sapling. I could tell even before I slid down the bank that I had caught a beaver. I pulled the drowner wire up and up popped a big beaver. It was a close call though as the beaver was being held by one back toe! The MB750's did what they were supposed to do and held on. Later at the house we weighed it at sixty pounds. Of course the now expert beaver trapper had to explain how the trap and drowner were set to his audience of one! Mike took some pictures and then I had to carry the beaver up the steep bank covered in rocks. This was quite an ordeal but I was smiling the whole way. We checked the other traps and had caught a couple of smaller beaver. I wasn't going to be able to check traps during the week so I didn't set any more until the next weekend when I set a couple of body grippers in some slides. I caught a couple more beaver ending with five beaver total for the season.

Nowadays my Urban Wilderness is all apartments and condos. Part of the lake still exists and I wonder every time I pass by if the new residents are getting along with the old! Since my first beaver season twelve years ago I have been lucky enough to get permission to trap beaver elsewhere. I was able to help a co-worker with some nuisance beaver that were flooding and cutting his hardwoods.

About four years after the season you just read about, we moved out to the country. I can walk out my back door to hunt and trap now! There aren't many beaver around here, but there are plenty of other critters. Just last season I saw some otter tracks in the snow by the creek behind my house. I live in a zone where we can't trap otter, but that will change as the population grows.

I am absolutely positive that I spent too much money at this year's convention but trapping season is again fast approaching! As much as I am looking forward to the OSTA hosting the NTA convention this year, where I am sure I'll spend too much, I am really looking forward to this season! I bought more beaver traps and am going to try some snares for mink this year.

If you've never attended a convention, plan on going to the convention in 2009 – it should be a good one! Oh, yeah. Bring your wallet! ### Richard Griggs, Marysville, OH.