

**What are the Benefits of Regulated Trapping to the Public?**  
**Article from Sep - Oct 2004 Buckeye Trapper**  
**by Justin Tyler Walters**

For the past hundred years there has been an ever increasing interest in banning a practice that has been a part of the American landscape since its founding. What I am referring to is the practice of trapping in order to harvest furbearing animals and promote wildlife management. I feel that trapping should be unconditionally accepted and supported, when it is managed in the right manner by local, state, and federal agencies. This regulated trapping is of great benefit to the public. In the following paragraphs I will support my opinion with actual facts and studies conducted by wildlife biologists.

Today trapping is done as an annual pursuit by many people in the United States and Canada. Many homeowners also use trapping to deal with wildlife problems and property damage. Research has found that people who participate in trapping do so for many reasons. The most commonly listed reasons are family tradition, wildlife management, and income. An important observation has been that in today's society trapping has often been referred to as a form of "recreation" or a "sport". However, the body of research shows that these terms do not do justice to the importance of the activity.

Whether being conducted by aboriginal trappers in Canada and Alaska or by outdoorsmen in suburban or rural areas of the lower forty-eight states, the value of these people is that they perform a necessary function for themselves and society. For many, this is an essential part of their life. It is an activity which links them to nature and the land. With proper wildlife resources, people today can still choose to participate in this lifestyle, which has been practiced since the beginning of time. This is a unique opportunity for people in the United States and Canada because this lifestyle cannot be practiced throughout most of Europe and the rest of the industrialized world.

Even though trapping is a legal part of the lifestyle of many in the U.S. and Canada it is not without controversy. This controversy is embedded in the beliefs of those who promote animal rights. "Animal rights" are based on personal values and philosophy, while the agenda for "animal welfare" is based on science. The "animal rights" and "animal welfare" agendas represent entirely different perspectives on human and animal coexistence.

"Animal welfare" advocates believe that human use of animals is appropriate as long as practical measures are taken to ensure that human use does not cause any undue pain or suffering to animals. Wildlife biologists and all responsible trappers and hunters are firm supporters of "animal welfare".

"Animal rights" advocates oppose any human use of animals because they believe animals have the same rights as humans, and therefore should not be used, eaten or owned by people. The primary concern of "animal welfare" advocates is the well being of animals. The primary concern of "animal rights" advocates is the moral obligation of people. The concern for animals is actually a secondary concern for "animal rights" advocates.

Professional wildlife biologists support "animal welfare". The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) adopted the following position in 1989. "The IAFWA acknowledges that humans have an inseparable relationship with all other parts of the natural world. Furthermore, humanity is answerable to another set of laws and concepts that is uniquely a product of human society. Animals cannot be subject to those laws and concepts and therefore do not have the rights of humans. It is agreed; nonetheless, that animal welfare is a realistic and desirable concept, which we support. Humanity does have responsibilities to animals; ensure ecological integrity, preserve genetic diversity and sustain species and ecosystems. All animals use other animals for their existence. The responsible human use of animals is natural and appropriate."

Wildlife biologists have concerns about the implication of the "animal rights" philosophy. Millions of acres of

wildlife habitat have been acquired, protected and managed for wildlife by public and private natural resource management agencies. Much of this has been made possible through funds generated by consumptive users of wildlife who collectively have a stake in the preservation of wildlife resources. Under the "animal rights" agenda, there would be no wildlife management, and subsequently, many species of wildlife would decline or become extinct without protection afforded by their management. Populations of other species could explode, increasing human-wildlife conflicts.

As our society becomes more urban, we become removed from natural systems and the processes that function within them. Our understanding and appreciation of those natural processes have decreased over time. We no longer have to harvest our own food, and as a result, we do not see the death involved in processing meat or the habitat loss, pesticide use, and death of animals that destroy crops and livestock. The death of an individual animal is a normal, natural, and regularly occurring event. Animal species have adapted reproductive strategies to compensate for these natural losses. These reproductive strategies evolved over millions of years of death causing factors, including human predation. When a human uses a wild animal, that death is not a wasted one. Animals have always provided the material and spiritual support that maintains us as individuals and societies. We must continue to support conservation efforts that ensure sustainable use.

Wildlife agencies, as well as the public who trap, have long been interested in developing and refining traps and trapping techniques that improve the welfare of furbearers captured for research, damage control, fur, and food. The goal has been to design traps that will hold animals unharmed, or in the case of kill-type traps, dispatch them as quickly as possible. Many new and improved models have gradually replaced older designs. Trap research in North America has been funded jointly by the government of Canada, The International Fur Trade Federation, State and Provincial Wildlife Departments, and The Fur Institute of Canada. Wildlife agencies use the findings of these studies to assess and incorporate new information into trapping regulations and trapper education programs.

While research has led to entirely new trap designs for some species, modification of existing kill traps and foothold traps are also of great importance. Adjusting chain length, adding swivels to the chain, adjusting pan tension, and replacing conventional jaws with offset, laminated, or padded jaws can improve the welfare of captured furbearers. Researchers continue to explore new and innovative design possibilities.

Foothold traps are sometimes used to capture rare or endangered species, unharmed, so that the animals can be reintroduced into favorable habitats to re-establish healthy populations. The foothold trap also plays an important role in protecting the health and viability of many established or newly re-established populations of rare and endangered species. The foothold trap is an important management tool for protecting rare endangered species from undesirable levels of predation. There are dozens of endangered or threatened plant, reptile, bird, and mammal species in the U.S., which are being protected and managed through the use of foothold traps. The target animals that are trapped during these operations to reduce habitat damage or predation on the rare species are either removed or relocated after capture.

A trap is a mechanical device that, when it is set, will close only on objects heavy enough to disengage the trigger. Those who are unfamiliar with trapping may assume that traps are not selective. They think that they will catch anything. Trappers and wildlife researchers set their traps in such a way that only the species or even the individual animal they are targeting is likely to be captured. There are eight key techniques trappers use to insure their trap sets are selective. They include location, type of trap used, size of trap used, pan tension, lure or bait used, position of trigger, trap set, and timing.

Where a trap is located determines to a great extent what animals are likely to enter it. Traps may be located underwater, in trees, near den sites, and travel routes. The use of certain types of traps virtually eliminates the chance that certain species will be caught. The size of the trap determines to some extent what animals it will catch. Pan tension is adjustable on most non-kill traps. As a result, traps are often set so that only relatively

heavy animals like coyotes and beaver are caught. Specific baits and lures, often used in conjunction with trap sets, are attractive to specific species of animals. Lures in the form of urine or scent gland extracts are more attractive to the species from which the scent is derived. Trigger configuration on kill-type traps can be set to allow non-target animals to pass through without setting off the trap. How a trap is placed influences what animals will be caught. Stepping sticks, rocks, or scat placed around the trap can prevent some species from approaching a set. Finally, the timing of when the traps are set during the trapping season can influence which gender and what age the animals may be. These same elements, all of which make traps highly selective in terms of what they will catch are used not only in fur harvest trapping, but also in the use of live traps for research and conservation programs. These methods are also used for problem animal control and property damage situations.

Wildlife biologists spend a lot of time and effort monitoring wildlife populations, mapping critical habitats, and acquiring and managing land for habitat conservation. They set up laws by which trappers must abide. These laws are known as regulated harvest. Regulated harvest helps to maintain wildlife populations, which in turn decreases the potential for negative interaction between humans and wildlife. Regulated harvest provides a local, healthy, organic, source of food with minimal impacts to other resources. Many of the other sources of food require changes in wildlife habitat. Regulated harvest helps to maintain some populations in ecological balance with their habitat. Many of these animals are increasing due to human changes to the landscape like loss of predators, and the change of forestland to suburban or agricultural habitats. Regulated harvest helps to protect declining, rare, threatened, or endangered species by targeting specific predators that are negatively affecting recovery efforts. Regulated harvest also provides an opportunity for millions of people to interact with nature and the great outdoors.

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered that a small shell and mangrove covered island in Florida's Indian River be forever protected as a "preserve and breeding grounds for native birds". His mission was clear. He wanted to protect the island's pelicans from poachers and plume hunters. With this first sanctuary the National Wildlife Refuge System was formed. The system now encompasses more than 92 million acres in the United States and is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is:

"To preserve a national network of lands and waters for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and plant resources of the United States for the benefit of present and future generations."

Regulated trapping has been conducted as part of the sustainable use of wildlife resources, as well as an important part of refuge management programs for many years. An extensive evaluation of refuge management programs was conducted by the service in 1997 documenting the importance that trapping has had on the refuges. The study examined mammal-trapping programs on 281 national wildlife refuges during the five-year period. The service report stated, "The report demonstrates the importance of trapping as a professional wildlife management tool" and "mammal trapping also provided important benefits for public health and safety and recreational, commercial and subsistence opportunities for the public during the period."

The (NWRS) came up with eleven reasons for trapping on refuges. They are in order of importance: recreation/commercial/subsistence, facilities protection, migratory bird predation, research, surveys/monitoring, habitat protection, endangered species predation, public safety, feral animal control, population management, and disease control. Trapping activities on refuges are regulated and the people who participate are required to be licensed and follow many other rules as well those which ensure these activities are done properly. Enforcement officers and biologists monitor activities to ensure trapping is done in accordance with existing laws.

After researching the benefits of regulated trapping to the public I believe even more strongly that we should be allowed to continue to trap for years to come. Trapping helps control the populations of many kinds of animals. It is also a more cost effective way to manage wildlife, when done with the cooperation of the

government and the public, than any other proven method except for disease and starvation. Thousands of trappers trap for their livelihood each year. Scott Hartman, the former President of the National Trappers Association and its current Director of Membership and Affiliate Relations has said, "For North America's more than one-half million trappers, the purpose of trapping varies - for assisting wildlife biologists and furbearer studies, to population and disease control, protection against soil erosion, and for food, clothing and income. And yet, thanks to good management practices, furbearers are more numerous in North America today than 100 years ago. The public needs to know that there is no trapping of endangered species and that we continue to research and encourage the use of the most effective and humane techniques. Trapping has been an integral part of our American Heritage, and we intend to see that it continues to contribute to abundant wildlife and sound management programs."

I could not put it any better myself. Trapping has been a part of our American heritage. The pursuit of furbearers had a significant part in the development of our country in its formative years. It is interesting that furbearers helped shape America into what it is today. If we continue to employ good management practices we should be able to trap effectively for years to come, and everyone will benefit. ### Justin Tyler Walters, 3060 Panther Dr., New Lexington, OH 43764

Editor's Note: The OSTA wishes to congratulate Justin Tyler Walters, who is this year's winner of the \$500.00 "Charles L. Dobbins Memorial Scholarship"! You have just read his winning essay on the topic of "What are the Benefits of Regulated Trapping to the Public?"