

Chapter 3

Furbearer Management



Content Standard - *Students use knowledge of furbearer management principles, practices, and issues to explain current management programs in their state*



FWS Photo

Biologist with wolf

Responsible trappers learn about wildlife and take action to conserve it for future generations



FWS Photo

Volunteer works on nest box at a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuge

Introduction

Wildlife management is a science. Wildlife biologists are professionals. Biologists apply the basic principles of ecology to maintain and manage wildlife. Many biologists are as highly trained as physicians, lawyers, or college professors.

Some wildlife biologists specialize in the management of furbearers and their habitats. Furbearer biologists monitor animal populations, habitat, and diseases that may affect furbearers or cause human health problems. They develop management goals and create plans to meet those goals.

Furbearer biologists set regulations to protect or restore threatened and endangered species, allow for the harvest of surplus animals, or reduce overabundant furbearer populations. They also work to educate landowners and the general public. Without public education, it is difficult to have public support for management programs.

Few people truly understand wildlife management. Along with biologists, experienced trappers are among the people most knowledgeable about wildlife. This is because trappers must study wildlife and habitats to be successful.

As people learn more about wildlife, they usually care about it more. When caring leads to actions that conserve wildlife for future generations, the person has become a conservationist. This chapter will introduce you to the principles of furbearer management. Through further study and experience, you can develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become a true conservationist.



Identify the government agency with the authority to manage furbearer resources and regulate trapping in your state

State wildlife agencies have the authority and responsibility to manage furbearer resources and regulate trapping. Write the correct name of your state wildlife agency in the space below:

Explain the difference between a renewable and a non-renewable resource

Natural resources fall into one of two categories: renewable and non-renewable. Renewable resources are living things with the capacity to regenerate. Plants and animals are renewable resources. For example, when trees are cut down, new trees can grow there again from seeds. Similarly, when some wild animals are harvested by people or die due to disease, predation, or starvation, the remaining animals have young and the population increases again. Trees and animals are resources that can be renewed as long as the habitat is available.

Non-renewable resources are non-living items that are finite and do not regenerate themselves. Coal, oil and natural gas are examples of non-renewable resources.

Identify the components of habitat and name three types of habitats used by furbearers

Wildlife habitat is made up of food, water, cover, and space. Each species of wild animal needs certain kinds of food and cover. Each species also needs a certain amount of space, or habitat, to provide for its needs.

The quality and quantity of habitat in an area affects the number of species present, and the population level of each species.

Each species of wild animal is associated with a certain kind of habitat. Wetlands, forests, grasslands, and farms are common types of habitat used by furbearers.

Arrangement is an important characteristic of habitat. When habitat types are mixed, the area will generally support more species and higher populations of wildlife.

State agencies have the legislative authority to manage wildlife on behalf of the public



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Trees, like wildlife, are renewable



FWS Photos

Oil is a non-renewable resource



FWS Photo

Beaver lodge - habitat

Furbearer Management



FWS Photo

Biologist tracking wildlife

Identify two key concepts of sustainable management of wildlife resources

Native wildlife populations are natural resources - biological wealth - that must be sustained and managed for the benefit of present and future generations of people.

Wildlife biologists focus on protecting, preserving, and improving habitats and ecosystems. It is important to understand that biologists also focus on maintaining sustainable populations of wildlife, not individual animals.

Most species of wildlife, including furbearers, have short life spans. In the long term, individual animals do not endure, but populations do.

Sustainable management of furbearer populations depends upon these two key concepts:

- A focus on habitat
- A focus on the furbearer population

Name three principles that are applied in the harvest of wild animals in North America

Biologists generally look for three requirements before allowing the harvest of wild animals:

- The species is not threatened or endangered
- The harvest techniques are acceptable
- Killing the animals serves a practical purpose

Identify the major factors that affect wildlife populations

Furbearer populations change over time. Populations are highest after the young are born each year. Some animals die due to weather, food supplies, diseases, and predation, so the number of animals declines until more are born the following year. Animal populations also change over longer periods of time, usually due to changes in the quantity and quality of habitat.

Many wild animals, including furbearers, produce a lot of young. A few ani-



Silvertip Productions

Millions of Americans hunt and trap



imals can quickly populate an area of suitable habitat. River otters provide one example. In many states river otters were extirpated long ago due to habitat destruction and unregulated killing. In recent years, some river otter habitat has been restored. Biologists and trappers captured river otters in states where the populations were high, and released a few in the restored areas. Within a short time, the otter populations expanded to fill the available habitat.

The number of animals a given area can support throughout the year is known as its biological carrying capacity. Limiting factors determine what the biological carrying capacity will be. Food is a common limiting factor. Water, shelter, space, disease, and predation are other types of limiting factors biologists must monitor.

Over the course of many years furbearer populations may decline a lot more than normal due to catastrophic events. Examples include habitat destruction such as forest fires, extreme weather such as blizzards, and diseases such as rabies. If a few animals survive, the population is capable of recovering when conditions return to normal. During these times, biologists may restrict harvest and take other actions to help the animals or the habitat.

Explain the difference between managing furbearers for compensatory mortality and additive mortality

Biologists consider several factors when setting management goals for each furbearer species. Two of these factors include the biological carrying capacity of the habitat, and the cultural carrying capacity. Biological carrying capacity refers to the number of animals the habitat can support. Cultural carrying capacity refers to the number of animals that society will accept, which may be a lower level than the biological carrying capacity.

Under normal conditions furbearers produce a surplus of young. Wildlife managers can set seasons, bag limits and trapping methods to allow part of the annual surplus to be harvested. Biologists manage for compensatory mortality by substituting regulated trapping for other mortality factors that would otherwise reduce the population. When managing for compensatory mortality, trapping does not affect the overall population that survives until spring. If trapping did not occur, a similar number of animals would be lost due to limiting factors, such as a lack of food or shelter. The population level is determined by the biological carrying capacity of the habitat.

While some furbearer populations can change dramatically, most populations become stable when their population reaches the biological carrying capacity. In some areas high furbearer populations can cause major problems. Beaver, for example, may flood farm fields and roads, or interfere with city water

Habitat destruction leads to long term declines in wildlife populations

Extirpated means that a species no longer exists in a range where it once lived. It does not mean that a species is extinct.



Eyewire.com

Working together, biologists and trappers have restored river otter populations to much of their former range

Major Factors that Affect Wildlife Populations

- Changes in habitat
- Carrying capacity
- Limiting Factors such as food, weather, & predation

Extinction means a species is no longer found anywhere. Passenger pigeons, for example, are extinct.

Wildlife agencies and supporters have restored many species that were once extirpated from entire states. River otters, fisher, and beaver are furbearers that were extirpated from many states and later restored.

Furbearer Management



USDA Photo

Beaver damage



FWS Photo

FWS employee sets trap for problem beaver

Wildlife populations are usually highest in the spring after young have been born.

supply systems. When furbearer populations cause too many problems, biologists may decide to reduce the numbers below the area's biological carrying capacity. In this case, biologists are managing for additive mortality to bring the population down to its cultural carrying capacity.

Identify regulated trapping as the most efficient and practical means available to accomplish regular furbearer population reductions

Regulated trapping is an important part of wildlife management programs. The regulated use of the furbearer resource is not only acceptable but in some cases has significant benefits. When furbearer populations cause conflicts with people, or with other wildlife species and habitats, biologists may adjust trapping regulations to increase the harvest and reduce the population. Regulated trapping is the most efficient and practical means available to reduce furbearer populations and it does so at no cost to the public.

While furbearer population reduction is not a goal for all furbearer management programs, population reduction in specific areas can be beneficial. Furbearer population control can reduce the number of furbearer problems with people; lower predation on rare, threatened, or endangered species; or reduce damage to habitats and property.

Identify situations where trapping is used to directly manage wildlife

Regulated trapping helps manage wildlife and habitats. Trapping is used to protect many rare and endangered species of plants and animals, wetland habitats, and personal property. Regulated trapping is also used for localized disease control, wildlife research, and wildlife restoration.

In 1997 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) reported trapping was used on 487 management projects at 281 National Wildlife Refuges.

The case of the piping plover, a beach nesting bird, is a good example. The piping plover is a threatened shorebird protected by the United States and Canada. Foxes, raccoons, mink, and striped skunks prey on piping plovers when they nest. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service uses trapping in and around piping plover habitat to reduce local populations of these predators. Some of the other rare species protected by trapping programs include pink lady slippers, pitcher plants, the desert tortoise, sea turtles, Attwater's prairie chickens, brown pelicans, least terns, and black-footed ferrets.

Safety - Animal Welfare - Responsibility - Furbearer Conservation



Beaver, muskrats, coyotes, raccoons, opossums, red foxes, mink, and other animals are often trapped to protect local habitats and personal property. Traps are the only efficient and practical tool that can be used to remove these animals.

Explain the three major issues related to furbearer management

Three major issues affect the conservation and management of furbearers. These include:

- Human population growth, which degrades and destroys habitat
- Public intolerance of furbearers
- Opposition to any use of wildlife by animal rights groups

Human population growth causes the loss of furbearer habitat. The range of some furbearer populations has already been reduced. Habitat destruction has eliminated the possibility of restoring some furbearing species to areas they once inhabited. Unlike habitat destruction, regulated trapping is a sustainable use of furbearers. Trapping does not threaten the continued existence of furbearer populations.

Public intolerance of furbearers is another issue. As wildlife habitat continues to be split up by development, biologists are faced with new challenges. Examples include coyotes killing pets, beavers cutting landscape trees or flooding roadways, raccoons invading homes, and human health threats from diseases such as rabies. These problems are highly publicized and they make some people want to lower or eliminate furbearer populations. As a result, nuisance animal trapping has become a growth industry. This concerns biologists because it shows increasing numbers of people view furbearers as problems that should be destroyed, instead of valued resources that should be conserved and used.

Animal rights activists reflect a different view, which goes against traditional values of using animals for food, clothing, and other purposes. Activists want to eliminate all trapping and stop managing furbearers. If animal rights activists are successful people will have fewer options for solving furbearer problems. Additionally, people could not use furbearers the way they do now.



USDA Photo

Predator trapping has helped the endangered California Least Tern recover from near extinction



FWS Photo

Wildlife biologists face challenges:

Human population

Public intolerance for furbearers in populated areas

Opposition to sound management by animal rights groups

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has a Wildlife Services Program to manage damage, minimize wildlife threats to public health, resolve conflicts with wildlife in urban areas, protect property, protect endangered species, and preserve natural resources. Trapping is an essential tool used by Wildlife Services employees.

Furbearer Management



FWS Photo

Activists oppose fishing, hunting, and trapping



Excise taxes are collected on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment to support wildlife management programs

Identify two funding sources for furbearer management programs

Hunters and trappers provide most of the money for wildlife management programs. The two major sources of funding include:

- Hunting and trapping license revenue
- Excise taxes on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment

Hunting and trapping licenses are sold by states and provide direct revenue for furbearer management. Excise taxes on equipment are distributed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Division of Federal Assistance in Wildlife Restoration Act. Wildlife Restoration dollars, sometimes more than \$200 million a year, are distributed to all 50 states, territories, and Puerto Rico for approved programs that involve wildlife research, management, land purchases, and education.

Chapter 4

Trapping Regulations



Wildlife officers have an important job. Officers strictly enforce trapping regulations. They may also help teach trapper education courses and work on nuisance animal complaints.

Content Standard - *Students demonstrate the ability to understand, support, and comply with trapping regulations*

Introduction

Biologists use hunting and trapping regulations to manage and conserve wildlife. When an animal population is low or endangered, regulations can be used to protect the species. When an animal population is high, biologists can allow more harvest, using the principle of additive mortality. If the population of a species is high enough to cause problems biologists may lengthen the season, raise bag limits, or allow additional methods of harvest so the population can be lowered to an acceptable level.

Hunting and trapping regulations are also used to enhance human health and safety; protect habitat, property, and domestic animals; require the use of selective trapping methods; and meet public expectations for animal welfare.

Most states have a process for setting regulations that allows for public participation. Hunters, trappers, landowners, organizations, and government agencies can participate in the regulation setting process.

As a responsible trapper, you must follow all regulations. If you disagree with a regulation you should participate in the regulation setting process.

Each state has law enforcement officers dedicated to enforcement of hunting and trapping regulations. They may be known as wildlife officers, conservation agents, or game wardens. Responsible trappers work with their local wildlife officers and help develop mutual respect for the role each serves in wildlife conservation. When landowners have furbearer control problems wildlife officers often refer them to responsible trappers they know and trust.

Identify two specific places to obtain current trapping regulations

Each state wildlife agency publishes a brochure that explains current hunting and trapping regulations. A copy of this brochure should have been given to



you with your trapper education manual.

Since trapping regulations may change each year you need to obtain a new copy of the regulations when you renew your trapping license. The most common place to find the brochures is at the location where you purchase your license. You may also obtain the regulations by writing, calling, or visiting a wildlife agency office. In addition, most states publish hunting and trapping regulations on their Web site.

In the space below write down two specific places where you can obtain trapping regulations for your state.

In the space below write down the Web site address for your state fish and wildlife agency.

Explain the process for setting or changing trapping regulations in your state

In the space provided outline the process used to set trapping regulations in your state. Obtain this information from your instructor or your wildlife agency.

Flexible trapping regulations allow biologists to use trapping as a tool of wildlife management

It is your responsibility to know the trapping regulations. Ignorance of the law is no excuse if you are charged with a trapping violation.



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Trappers work with wildlife agencies to improve regulations

Trapping Regulations



Ohio DOW Photo

When furbearers are too abundant, biologists can reduce restrictions on trapping

When furbearers are too scarce, biologists can shorten seasons or take other steps to allow the population to increase

Some states require trappers to tag traps with the owner's name and address



Ohio Dow Photo

Trapping License & Tags

Explain conditions that could lead to changes in trapping regulations

- Furbearer populations rise or fall
- Trapping technology improves
- The number of trappers rises or falls
- Habitat changes
- Nuisance animal problems increase
- Public attitudes change
- Rare or endangered species need protection from furbearers

Demonstrate the use of your current state regulation brochures to find trapping seasons, legal trap types, legal trap sets, and tagging requirements for common furbearers

Choose two common furbearers and use your state's current regulation brochure to fill in the information in the following table.

Furbearer		
Season		
Legal Traps		
Legal Sets		
Tagging Requirements		

Demonstrate the use of your state's regulation brochure to find requirements regarding permission to trap on private property

Requirements regarding permission to trap vary from state to state. A responsible trapper always obtains permission from the landowner.

In the space that follows write down the trapping permission requirements for your state. Use your state's regulation brochure to find this information.



Demonstrate use of current state trapping regulations to determine legal restrictions for trapping nuisance animals

State wildlife agencies may authorize landowners or specially licensed trappers to remove nuisance animals that damage crops, livestock, or property. Use your state's regulation brochure to find the following information and write it in the space provided:

- Under what conditions can nuisance animals be trapped or removed?
- Who may trap nuisance animals?
- What special licenses or training is required?
- What record keeping and reporting is required?
- What type of fees may be charged?



Ohio DOW Photo

Treat landowners with respect

Always ask for permission before trapping on private land

Try to handle nuisance furbearer problems during trapping season when the pelts are prime

Trapping Regulations



FWS Photo

Federal agent with confiscated furs

Regulations concerning possession of furs during the closed season vary widely. Make certain you know the laws for your state!

Penalties

- Fines & Jail time
- Loss of Equipment
- License Revocation

- Public Shame
- Criminal Record
- Loss of Respect



Most states have toll-free numbers where you can report violations

State the maximum penalties for trapping out of season, trapping without a license, trapping without permission, and trapping protected animals

Violations of a state's hunting and trapping regulations are criminal offenses. Conservation officers and judges recognize the difference between an unintentional violation and willful intentions to poach animals out of season or by illegal means. Ignorance of hunting and trapping laws is not an excuse. Hunters and trappers are expected to know the regulations and follow them.

Upon conviction of hunting or trapping violations, a judge may impose fines or jail time. Hunters and trappers convicted of serious violations may have traps, firearms, and even vehicles confiscated by the court. Judges can also revoke licenses and suspend a person's privilege to hunt or trap in the future.

Using your state's regulation brochure, write down the maximum penalties for violating state trapping laws in the space provided.

Explain the process for reporting wildlife violations

As a trapper, you may learn about hunting or trapping violations that need to be stopped. Never confront a violator or get directly involved without an officer present. Instead, observe the situation and quickly report it to your local wildlife officer. Provide descriptions of the violators, vehicles, license plate numbers, locations, and times.

Most states have established programs to stop poaching with toll-free telephone numbers to call when you need to report a violation. These programs go by names such as "TIP" which stands for "Turn In a Poacher." Many states provide rewards for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of violators. Callers can remain anonymous.

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Write the phone numbers of local wildlife offices and your state's TIP program in the space below:

Describe the process for reporting a wildlife violation in the space below:



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Poaching is a crime!

Protect wildlife resources and the heritage of trapping by turning in poachers