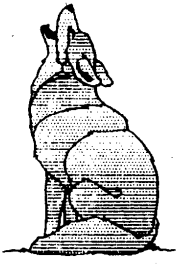
Trapping



A
Rational Response
To
Wildlife Management

TRAPPERS' ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA
EST. 1968

Trappers and Furbearing Animals:

The abundance of furbearing animals and the "fur trade" were linked to early European exploration and associated development of our Country. Today, a traditional fur industry continues in Canada because furbearers are still very plentiful. Also, there is a strong market for fur garments and society, in general, finds the industry acceptable. Most significantly, the fur trade has the support of the Canadian Government. As a renewable resource, furbearers respond well to the modern science of wildlife management. This science applies regulations, seasons and bag limits to recommended harvest levels of "surplus" animals to ensure the health and welfare of the surviving furbearer populations and for the benefit of mankind. The Canadian fur industry depends on 20 different wildlife species, although 90 percent of the animals utilized are derived from 5 or 6 species that are very abundant and prolific. None of the trapped species are in danger of extinction, nor are they threatened by regulated harvests.

80, 000 to 100, 000 Canadian trappers participate in the fur industry for a total annual income of 50 to 85 million dollars. Wild fur and associated businesses have been worth up to 350 million dollars for the annual Canadian economy. Nova Scotia has approximately 5, 000 trappers. Interest in trapping is a personal choice. Most people share a common interest in nature, but childhood relationships "close to" or "away from" natural processes seem to stimulate the acceptance or rejection of trapping.

Trappers have a variety of interests and come from many walks-of-life. Examples include a school teacher searching for a natural experience and outdoor recreation; a student or seasonal worker looking for extra income; a farmer or woodlot owner wanting to reduce and recapture crop losses due to nuisance wildlife. Aboriginal people, representing about half of all Canadian trappers, may have no other source of income and wish to pursue their traditional culture and way of life. Some people involved in disease or pest control and in animal research, can also be considered as trappers.

Wildlife Management:

Humans are by far the most numerous large animal on earth. The extensive industrial development which sustains human survival and prosperity has a tremendous impact on the world environment. Nature has been so altered and disrupted that the interactions of predator and prey animals with their habitats no longer function in a "balanced" manner. Some furbearer species can overpopulate to disastrous levels resulting in habitat depletion for themselves and other species. Populations "crash" due to competition, starvation, disease and/or predation. Death due to old age rarely occurs in nature.

These extreme "boom - bust" cycles can be minimized by the proven techniques of wildlife management. This science strives to maintain optimum numbers and variety of wildlife on a continuing basis. One of the most efficient and practical "tools" of wildlife management is the

harvest of "surplus" furbearers by regulated trapping for the fur industry. Managed wildlife populations are kept healthy, productive and "in balance" by the economic incentives of the fur trade. Such "wise-use" is the true meaning of conservation. Organizations against the fur industry are jeopardizing the proven science of wildlife management and the welfare of furbearer populations.

Overpopulation:

To ensure survival, evolution has provided many furbearing species with a high reproductive rate. This survival strategy follows a principle whereby "too many" is more secure than "not enough", although some "surplus" individuals have to be lost to ensure the survival of the the species. The result is that some furbearers reproduce over and beyond the capacity of the land to support them.

Our pet dogs and cats are prime examples of "surplus" production. Despite attempts at control by having pets spayed or neutered, they still populate beyond the capacity of the communities that support them. Humane societies often fail to find homes for captured strays and surplus pets. As a result they have to euthanize millions of dogs and cats every year throughout the world. They could abandon them to starvation and disease but this would be considered cruel and inhumane.

Ironically, many people who support the principles applied to pets, object to the wise-use of surplus furbearers that cannot find natural homes with adequate food, water and shelter. They would rather see them abandoned to the prolonged agony of starvation and disease. They do not understand that the trapper can be much kinder and more humane than mother nature. Be kind to furbearing animals by helping to control overpopulation.

Competition and Starvation:

People seem to have difficulty in grasping the concept that competition and starvation occur in nature due to limitations of space, food and shelter. When the human community grows, the apartment buildings simply get taller and the grocery store gets larger to supply more food from distant places. This does not occur in the furbearer world where food sources often become scarcer in the winter months.

In unmanaged wildlife populations, the competition for winter food will starve surplus animals, deplete the habitat, weaken the survivors and contribute to reproductive failure in the spring. In managed populations surplus furbearers are removed during a fall and winter trapping season. This reduces competition, safeguards the habitat and assures the health of survivors for successful spring reproduction. Wise-use rather than non-use improves the welfare of furbearers

following the design of nature where predators use prey for the well being of all.

Disease:

The transmission and spread of disease in furbearer populations is accelerated by overcrowding (overpopulation). A regulated harvest, as recommended by wildlife management, can reduce crowding and thus minimize the occurrence of diseases like distemper and mange that are transmissible to pets. Of major concern in other parts of North America is the control of the disease "Rabies" which can be transmitted from wildlife to man. Animals suffer weeks of agony and a slow death when afflicted with most wildlife diseases. A quick death by a trapper is certainly more humane.

Nuisance Wildlife:

Urban people are faced with the need to control nuisance cockroaches and rats. Rural people also have nuisance problems when raccoons destroy corn fields; when beavers flood crop lands, woodlots and roads; when muskrats burrow holes in dykes and when coyotes kill sheep. These furbearers are part of the 5 or 6 species that account for 90 percent of all the animals taken by the fur industry. They are very abundant and prolific.

The nuisance potential of these animals would increase tremendously if the fur industry was discontinued. Ironically, the need for control would dictate that these nuisance animals would still have to be trapped by provincial authorities at great cost to the taxpayer. Why change a regulated harvest system that reduces nuisance problems and is financed by the fur industry?

Science versus Emotions:

The science of wildlife management supports the wise-use of "surplus" individuals for the welfare of the species and the entire population. However "animal rights" groups are promoting the emotional philosophy that humans have no right to use animals for any purpose. Their desire to protect every individual does not consider that the alternatives to population control are competition, starvation, disease and habitat degradation. Ironically, their point of view poses one of the greatest threats to the welfare of the animals they claim to protect..

Anti-animal use philosophies tend to dupe many unsuspecting urbanites who are far removed from natures realities. Few realize that animal rights groups offer no solution to the impact that overpopulation, disease, competition and starvation have on animal populations when left unchecked. Fewer still understand that the "anti's" unfounded position on animal use is a fraud that masks self-serving fundraising campaigns. During the argument where science says "yes" and emotions say "no" in relation to animal use, people become divided and are distracted away from the greatest threat to wildlife: habitat loss.

Habitat:

Habitat destruction and degradation are the real dangers and the greatest threat to wildlife. Many people do not make this connection as portrayed by the following story. "Once upon a time an entire town objected to the activities of a trapper who annually harvested muskrats from a nearby marsh. The trapper was defeated by the emotional views of many citizens. At a later date, the same prosperous town hired a contractor to drain and fill the marsh in order to develop a ballfield - parking lot complex. No one objected except the trapper who realized that his renewable muskrat resource and the eco-system that sustained it would now be gone forever."

The previous illustration centers on a small geographical area. Regretably this scenario is played out on a much larger scale in our northern territories. For example, animal rights sentiments object to the traditional trapping lifestyle of Canada's First Nations People. Yet, industrial development continues unabated thereby contributing to the demise of the environment and the aboriginal fur industry. Should these peoples lifestyle be eliminated due to anti-trapping sentiment and/or industrial activity their only recourse to survival is the welfare program and its often accompanying despair. Is it any wonder that the northern First Nations so vigorously oppose petroleum, hydro, and mineral development on their traditional lands? Moreover, do we have to ponder for very long as to why they will never accept a ban on a renewable fur industry which provides their only readily available source of self-derived income?

Both stories are repeated on a massive scale throughout the country: concerns are aimed at the wrong target. Emotions detract people from many environmental issues. Natural furs are renewable and sustainable resources that are bio-degradable and do not pollute. However, emotions often favour synthetic furs that are not bio-degradable. They are made from non-renewable petroleum resources and compounds associated with pollution. Natural furs are environmentally friendly, emotions just deny it.

Animal Welfare Today:

The fur harvester has the moral obligation to apply the most humane conditions possible when harvesting furbearing animals. Canada is the undisputed world leader in the use, development and research of humane trapping devices and methods. Over 15 million dollars have been spent on humane trapping research by the Fur Institute of Canada. Presently, 92 percent of the species trapped can be harvested by the use of modern quick-kill methods and other devices that are not practical for the larger species (the remaining 8 percent). These species are treated ethically by alterations to traditional traps and by regulations that apply humane practices to the use of the only trapping devices available. As ongoing research discovers more humane equipment, the trapper will use it.Canada is also a leader in the international search for humane trap standards that would establish international performance criteria on a species by species basis. A ban on the industry would not improve animal welfare because research and developments would stop while

pest control trapping would have to continue.

Device improvements and practices for the ethical treatment of animals are conveyed to Nova Scotia trappers by mandatory education for all beginners and for veterans who have not trapped for a 4 year period. Workshops also serve to update all trappers. The near future may see mandatory education for all trappers, regardless of the number of years spent on the trapline.

Conclusion:

The trapping industry is often judged by emotions rather than by scientific facts. Our own life experiences prove that decisions based on feelings rather than facts, can have disastrous consequences. The Nova Scotia Trappers Association wishes to thank you for considering this paper in your search for a balanced view of trapping and its vital link to the realities of nature.