

Why New Hampshire Needs Trapping

By Patrick Tate, Fish and Game
Furbearer Biologist

Trapping seasons are underway in New Hampshire, a time when beaver, otter, mink, ermine, fox, fisher and other furbearers can be taken by licensed trappers. Furbearing species are abundant on New Hampshire's landscape, something Fish and Game knows because mandatory reporting requirements are in place for any person licensed and participating in trapping.

Trapping is an activity that spans the history of our region. Native Americans used a form of trapping called snaring to acquire food and clothing. European settlers also relied on these resources to survive in the rugged New England environment.

Over the years, the tools, techniques and skills have changed and improved. Modern-day trapping is a closely monitored and highly regulated activity. Today's participants must adhere to specific trap types and sizes, check times, mandatory education and reporting, licensing and seasons. Traps now sold are modern-day systems that are certified by the Best Management Practice process under the watchful eye of the International Organization for Standardization. The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, in cooperation with the Fur Institute of Canada, worked closely to scientifically document the animal welfare, efficiency, selectivity, practicality and safety of modern traps.



Reaching a new generation: Barry Campers earn their Trapper Certification in 2016.

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Busy beavers quickly build dams that block waterways, causing flooding and property damage.



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Regulated trapping provides both ecological and societal benefits – at no cost.

Furbearer trapping continues to be an active outdoor pastime in New Hampshire. In 1928, a total of 1,544 trapping licenses were sold; after that, numbers varied from year to year, with an average of 500-700 trappers and the occasional year when more than 1,000 licenses were sold. When fur prices declined in the 1990s, participation waned. The years following 2000 saw a renewed interest and upward trend, with 418 trapping licenses sold in 2010 and 548 in 2015.

Trapping remains a critically important tool for wildlife management in New Hampshire. A good example of why we need trappers is the busy beaver, or “nature’s engineer.” During the winter of 2014-2015, licensed recreational trappers provided 36,996 nights of trapping effort and removed 2,044 beavers in New Hampshire, free of charge. Wildlife Control Operators provided 23,169 nights of trapping and removed 1,177 beavers, services paid for by the requesting property owner.

In the absence of trapping efforts, beaver populations would increase. This could cause flooding of property and roads, and blocked culverts and drainage pipes. After Massachusetts restricted the use of traps by voter referendum in 1996, that state's beaver population increased from 24,000 to 70,000 animals in just five years. This significant rise in beaver numbers resulted in flooding of residential areas, structures and roadway infrastructure. Consequently, the Massachusetts Legislature later modified the law to allow the use of restricted traps and trapping outside the regulated trapping season to control beaver populations.

Trapping is also one of the tools that is helping New Hampshire restore populations of American marten, a species listed as threatened in the state. Regulated trapping of fisher is necessary to manipulate the impact on American marten. Marten occupy the same habitat as fisher and have overlapping prey selection. In part because of fisher trapping, New Hampshire is now seeing growth in its marten population.

People trap for many reasons – for recreation, food, commerce and to help manage our wildlife resources. Trappers have invaluable skills that benefit both people and wildlife, providing the state with wildlife management labor and tools at no cost to society. Without their specialized skills, managing furbearer populations would be difficult indeed. So thank a trapper today!

