

TRAPPING IN RHODE ISLAND

There is a long history of trapping in Rhode Island as well as all of North America. It is part of our culture. Furbearers were an important resource to the native peoples of the continent and became important resources for European settlers. Early trappers explored the interior of the continent in search of furbearers, often being the first non-native people to witness and document the natural wonders of the continent. Fur was an important commodity exchanged between Native Americans, settlers and Europeans for cash and other goods, and a driving force behind the colonization of the continent.

Historically, people trapped mainly as a means of subsistence. In some parts of North America some people still do, but today most trap for the same reason that many people like to hunt, fish, or grow a garden. They enjoy the experience of being outdoors, interacting with their natural surroundings and possibly sharing that experience with others. Market prices and demand effect fur prices and consequently the economic incentive to trap. Additionally, the business of assisting property owners with problems related to wildlife is a growing industry.

Fur that is harvested by trappers is generally sold to local, independent fur-buyers or directly to large fur processing companies. In most states, local fur auctions are hosted by trapper organizations and held during and/or after the trapping season. In Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Trappers Association hosts one or more fur auctions per season. Local trappers bring their various furs (pelts), and regional, independent fur-buyers bid on the furs. Proper fur handling is important. The price that a trapper receives for his or her pelts will be directly affected by how well they are prepared. Properly prepared pelts will always receive a better price than those that are improperly prepared.



You need a valid trapping license to trap in Rhode Island. Trapping licenses are purchased from the Department of Environmental Management. To trap some furbearers a special permit is required in addition to a trapping license. Permits to trap fisher and beaver are issued by the Division of Fish and Wildlife. Fisher, coyote, and beaver pelts must be tagged by the Division of Fish and Wildlife prior to sale or export. All trappers are required to submit a fur harvest catch card at the close of the trapping season. All trapped animals are recorded by county of harvest. Failure to return the card will result in a loss of trapping privileges for the following season. Trapping on private land requires written permission from the landowner. A special permit is required to trap on state management areas, and can be obtained from the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Great Swamp Field Headquarters.



All mammals possess some hair; however the term “furbearer” is used to describe those species that have been traditionally harvested for their fur. It is a diverse group, and includes rodents and carnivores. In Rhode Island, as elsewhere, trappers are only allowed to harvest those animals that are common.

In Rhode Island you can trap the following furbearers:

Mink	Beaver	Red fox
Muskrat	Fisher	Gray fox
Raccoon	Weasels	Coyote
Skunk	Opossum	

There is no open season for river otter or bobcat.

Some people view trapping as a cruel or inhumane activity. These viewpoints may be based on misconceptions about how regulated trapping is conducted and the kinds of traps that can be used. Any type of trap, used incorrectly, can be inhumane. Leaving an animal in a cage-type trap, unchecked and exposed to the elements can be inhumane. Trapping regulations are established and enforced to ensure approved trap types are used correctly. The Division of Fish and Wildlife and Rhode Island general laws regulate the types of traps that can be used as well as their size and placement. State law prohibits the use of foothold traps in Rhode Island except under special permit from the Division of Fish and Wildlife. Such authorization is granted only when other means to control depredating animals, primarily canids, have proven ineffective. The inability to use foothold traps limits the harvest of red fox, gray fox and coyote, as foothold traps are the only effective and practical means to capture these wary species. There are two basic types of traps: live restraining (cage or “box” traps, foothold traps) and kill-type traps (body-gripping traps, mouse traps). The types of traps that are allowed for use in Rhode Island are as follows:

Body-gripping traps- Commonly referred to as conibear or smooth-wire traps; these traps are designed to kill an animal quickly. An animal is encouraged or directed to pass through the trap opening and is killed by the trap striking the back of the head, neck, or body. Widely used for muskrat, mink, and beaver.



Cage or “box” traps- These traps are usually constructed of wire mesh and are designed to hold an animal until it can be released or euthanized. Commonly used for raccoons, skunks, and other animals not reluctant to enter the confined space or in areas populated by domestic pets.



Species-specific traps- These are live restraining type traps designed specifically for capturing and restraining raccoons. Most are characterized by triggering and restraining mechanisms that are enclosed within a housing. The Division of Fish and Wildlife developed certain criteria for what constitutes a legal species-specific trap in Rhode



Island. Not all traps marketed as “species specific” or “raccoon” traps meet these criteria. Be sure to check carefully with state regulations and trap characteristics before purchasing and using these types of traps.

The placement of traps is specified in regulations. Certain trap types can only be



used in water sets or placed at a minimum height above the ground. Regulations are reviewed annually and can be adjusted according to need or management goal. All traps must at a minimum be affixed with the trapper’s Rhode Island trapping license number. All traps must be checked at least once in a 24-hour period. Trapping regulations may change annually and one should always read and know all trapping regulations before setting traps.

Modern trapping does not lead to the extirpation or extinction of fur-bearing mammals. In fact, some species of furbearers are more common today than they have been in a long time. Coyotes, beaver, raccoons, opossum, and fisher are all more common in Rhode Island and elsewhere in New England than they have been in over two hundred years. The challenge for wildlife managers today is to balance the viability of wildlife populations with the needs and concerns of the general public. Regulated trapping, along with habitat protection and public education, is an important component in this process.

Wildlife agencies strictly regulate and monitor harvests of furbearers and methods of harvest. Wildlife biologists are responsible for ensuring the long-term viability of furbearer populations. Trapping seasons are set to coincide with the time of year when furbearer populations are at the highest level and young animals are not dependent on adults for survival. Harvest levels are monitored through mandatory harvest reports and pelt tagging for some species. Collection of harvest data and trapper-caught carcasses provides biologists with valuable insight into furbearer population dynamics.

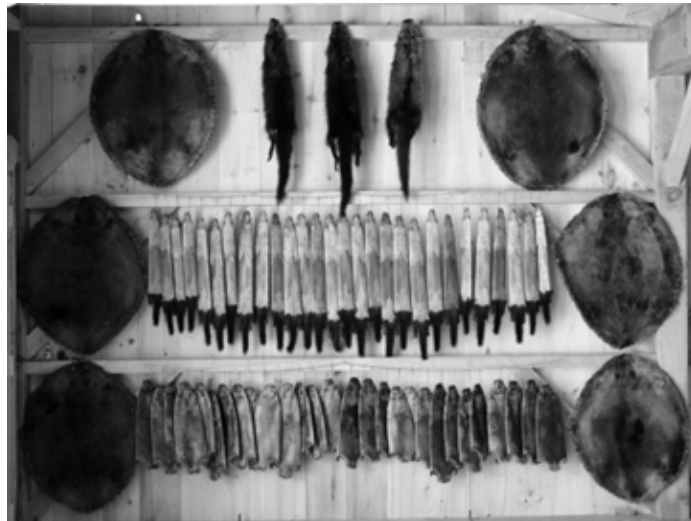


The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, in cooperation with state and provincial fish and wildlife agencies, veterinarians and trappers are participating in a program to develop best management practices (BMP’s) for trapping furbearers in the United States. In 2003, the first BMP document “*Best Management Practices for Trapping Coyotes in the Eastern United States*” was released. BMP’s are part of an international commitment to promote the humane use of traps and trapping methods for capturing wildlife. Extensive research effort is being conducted to improve the welfare of captured animals and improve selectivity, efficiency, practicality, and safety. BMP’s are recommendations that state and other wildlife agencies can incorporate into furbearer management programs.

For more information about trapping in Rhode Island contact:

Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife
 Great Swamp Field Headquarters
 P.O. Box 218
 West Kingston, RI 02892
 (401)-789-0281

or the Department of Environmental Management website at www.dem.ri.gov



Rhode Island Trappers Association Fur Auction photograph, trapper setting trap, and trap photographs courtesy of RI Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Raccoon photograph courtesy of IAFWA

Mink photograph courtesy of Michael H. Francis

Fur shed photograph courtesy of F. Cooper.

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