

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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TRAPPING POLICY PROPOSED FOR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

Limited trapping of furbearing animals on National Wildlife Refuges would continue to be permitted under an updated trapping policy proposed by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The proposal makes no major changes in existing policy, but consolidates previous directives and clarifies administrative procedures for allowing trapping on National Wildlife Refuges. The proposal is consistent with recommendations which Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus approved March 29 for management of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Furbearers are mammals whose pelts (and sometimes carcasses) generally have commercial value. Some of the more commonly harvested species are muskrat, nutria, raccoon, fox, mink, beaver, and skunk. Trapping is presently permitted on about 20 percent of the 390 National Wildlife Refuges.

Under the proposal, the Service would continue to permit trapping of furbearers where it contributes to or is compatible with the management objectives of the refuge. The proposed policy is based on the premise that furbearers often produce a harvestable surplus (more animals than are needed to maintain desirable breeding population levels).

"Under good habitat conditions and sound wildlife management practices, harvestable surpluses of furbearers are frequently produced on refuges," Service Director Lynn A. Greenwalt said. "Properly regulated trapping has

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no harmful effect on the long-term well-being of such wildlife populations or their habitats. The Service also recognizes that trapping, along with hunting and fishing, is a necessary tool of effective wildlife management and a legitimate recreational activity."

Trapping on National Wildlife Refuges is sometimes necessary to manage furbearer populations. High concentrations of animals such as muskrat can devastate vegetation that is essential to a balanced ecosystem. Certain furbearing predators can also destroy waterfowl nests, eggs, and young. The toll on duck nests by raccoons, for example, can run as high as 80 to 90 percent on some areas. Excessive numbers of furbearers also may increase the likelihood of rabies or other diseases that can be transmitted to humans, domestic animals, or other wildlife. The Service's proposed trapping policy would include, but is not limited to, such situations.

The proposed policy requires the preparation of a trapping plan for each refuge trapping program. The trapping plan forms the basis for determining whether removal of furbearers is compatible with refuge objectives and which method of removal is most appropriate. Refuge managers are encouraged to require the most efficient and humane trapping techniques available for the target species and habitat of their refuges.

Applicants for refuge trapping permits must possess the required State licenses and permits and must have reached the age of majority in the State in which trapping will occur. Previous trapping experience and training are among other considerations which will affect the eligibility of permit applicants.

Notice of the proposed policy is being published in the July 9, 1979, Federal Register. Additional information and copies of the proposal may be obtained from the Director (RF), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. Public comments on the proposal are invited and should be submitted to the same address by September 7, 1979.

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