

# Trapping on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

by Chris Johnson

For those looking for an excuse to get out this winter and explore the Refuge and its wildlife, trapping season started November 10<sup>th</sup> for many of the Peninsula's furbearers, and it runs through the end of March for several species. To trap on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge you must first attend a trapper orientation class. This orientation class need be taken only once in a lifetime, and it covers State and Refuge regulations, principles of furbearer management, trapping tips, and trapping ethics. Each trapper over the age of 16 must have a valid State of Alaska trapping license and must secure a trapping permit from the Refuge each year.

The Refuge has some special requirements for trapping. These requirements are primarily aimed at maintaining healthy furbearer populations and habitat on the Refuge. They are also designed to promote selective trapping to reduce harvest of non-target species, such as birds of prey, and to promote humane trapping methods. The requirements also seek to minimize conflicts between trappers and other winter outdoor users on the Refuge

I will go over the Refuge special trapping requirements and explain some of the reasons for those requirements. Of course all trapping must be done in compliance with State of Alaska game laws and regulations. On the Refuge all traps and snares must be identified by a registered mark or tag. The State of Alaska does not require trappers to tag their traps, although most states do require trappers to mark or tag their traps. Marking and tagging is not done so the trappers can be harassed, but to encourage trappers to take responsibility for the hardware they are putting out in the field. It also helps in the recovery of lost traps.

All leghold traps must be checked at least every four days in Game Management Unit 15A and 15B-West, and once at least every seven days throughout the rest of the Refuge. 15B-West is that portion of 15B, west of the mouth of Shantatalik Creek on Tustumena Lake northward to the west fork of the Funny River to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge boundary. Conibear and drowning sets must be checked at least once every seven days throughout the Refuge.

The trap check requirement is directed at promoting humane trapping and the timely release of non-target animals. Checking traps regularly also increases the efficiency of the trapline.

Traps and snares are prohibited within thirty feet of sight-exposed baits. The term "sight-exposed" means any visible part of the bait or imitation thereof (excluding dry skeletal items from which the skin, hair, feathers, and flesh have been removed) that is used to visually attract an animal to a trap. This requirement is aimed at reducing the take of non-target animals, especially birds of prey, which hunt by sight. This is also a good trapping technique: you won't catch birds, and any furbearer that you catch won't be so near bait that it frightens off other furbearers.

We ask trappers to report all tags and radio collars taken from furbearers within three days, so that the biologists studying these animals do not waste your tax money trying to locate an animal that is in your garage or shed.

Trapping is prohibited within one mile of public roads, campgrounds and road-accessible trailheads, and within the Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area. Trapping for mink and muskrat using leghold traps size 1 ½ or smaller and 110 or 120 Conibears are allowed in all areas except Skilak Recreation area and the Headquarters Lake area. This requirement is designed to reduce user conflicts and provide opportunities for viewing wildlife near roads and campgrounds, especially for sedentary species such as beaver.

Steel leghold traps having teeth, spiked, or serrated jaws are prohibited. This requirement promotes humane trapping and reduces the likelihood of injury to a non-target animal that is going to be released.

Cubby and flag sets are not allowed when the lynx season is closed, as it is this year. A cubby set is a structure, natural or man-made, that will guide the animal into an area where bait is placed and a flag or wing is used to attract the lynx into the trap. Lynx are very curious and this type of set, especially used with a castor-type lure, can be very effective for them.

The Refuge also has special requirements for trapping beaver: only one set per lodge is authorized in the Game Management 15A portion of the Refuge. A

set is defined as one leghold or Conibear trap or a pole with a configuration of snares. Each lodge that is being trapped during the current season must be visually marked with a pole vertically set in the ice, so that another trapper will not trap the lodge. These requirements are designed to reduce the potential for completely trapping out an entire lodge, either by multiple traps from one trapper or by multiple trappers.

Trappers must submit an accurately completed furbearer harvest report after the trapping season is finished. This information is very valuable to the wildlife managers. Determining population levels of most furbearer species is extremely difficult, so harvest records, which provide a measure of annual trapping effort, provide a useful index of the status of furbearer populations and trends over time in these populations. This is one way that trappers can actively participate in management of the furbearers.

The Refuge will purchase the skinned carcasses of wolverines and wolves during this trapping season.

We will only buy intact carcasses. The biologists use the intact carcasses to study the overall health of the populations. They can also see if the animals are reproducing by looking at the uterus. The carcasses have to come from the Refuge, and they are paying \$50.00 for wolves and female wolverines.

I would remind snowmobilers that the Kenai Refuge is still closed to snowmobile use, due to lack of snow cover to protect the underlying vegetation. If we get a significant snowfall to cover the vegetation, the Refuge Manager may open up the Refuge to snowmobile use.

*Chris Johnson has been a law enforcement officer on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge since 1989. He and his wife Pam live in Sterling with their three children. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters in Soldotna, call (907) 262-7021. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://kenai.fws.gov>.*