Washington State Trapper Education

Student Manual

Washington Department of FISH & WILDLIFE

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Code of responsible trapping

All responsible trappers should adhere to the following code:

- Respect private property and ask permission from the landowner before the trapping season.
- Know selective and humane trapping systems and use them appropriately.
- Be aware of others using the outdoors and do not interfere with their activities.
- Assist property owners with wildlife damage problems.
- Avoid areas or sets likely to capture domestic animals.
    - Washington law requires that you release, unharmed, any wildlife you trap outside the species' open season. If you cannot release the animal unharmed, leave it in the trap and contact the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife immediately.
- Be a conservationist; trap sustainably.
- Check traps daily, preferably in the early morning.
    - Don't set more traps than you can check.
- Dispatch trapped furbearers in a humane manner away from other people.
- Promptly report wildlife problems such as disease, pollution, or habitat destruction.
- Identify and record all trap locations accurately.
- Pick up all traps promptly when you have finished trapping.
- Utilize furbearer carcasses for human, domestic animal, or wildlife food whenever possible.
- Dispose of unused carcasses properly.
- Educate and assist new trappers.
- Support strict wildlife and habitat law enforcement.
- Respect the rights and feelings of others, even if you disagree with them.
- Cooperate with wildlife management agencies.

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History of trapping

The fur industry has been important throughout American history. From the first colonists on the Atlantic coast to modern day American society, trapping has played an important role. The first colonists not only traded for furs but also trapped for fur and food. Modern day trappers help manage wildlife populations and contribute fur to other industries.

In Washington, the fur trade contributed to early settlement of the area. Major fur companies such as the Pacific Fur Company, Hudson Bay Company, and North West Fur Company purchased furs, supported trappers, and encouraged development of fur trading posts and forts. Fort Okanogan, Fort Spokane, Fort Vancouver, and Fort Nisqually were some of the fur trading posts in Washington.

By the 1800s the fur resources were overexploited. The British had overharvested the resource in anticipation of losing control over a large portion of North America. Although the settlement of the west reduced the fur industry, it did not reduce the pressure on furbearers. Many of the new settlers trapped for both fur and food. Unregulated trapping seasons allowed settlers to trap and hunt as many furbearers as they pleased which caused furbearer populations to drop to dangerously low levels in the last half of the 1800s.

To ensure their continued survival in Washington, most furbearers have had managed seasons since the early 1900s. Today, trapping is managed for all furbearers. There are currently 28 species that trappers can legally harvest in Washington. These animals are a collection of furbearers, small game, and unclassified wildlife.

Furbearer management

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW or Department) provides opportunities for people to trap furbearers and unclassified wildlife in Washington. This trapping is regulated to ensure this opportunity is maintained for future generations. The Department recognizes the cultural and economic importance of trapping as well as the ecological role that furbearers and unclassified species have in the ecosystem. Though historical unregulated trapping resulted in drastic changes to the abundance and distribution of many species, controlled harvesting can, in some cases, protect property and crops from damage, reduce the impact of parasites and diseases on other wildlife and domestic animals, and protect habitats from degradation.

The Department has three management goals for furbearers. They are to:

1. To preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage small game, furbearers, and unclassified species and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Manage small game, furbearers, and unclassified species populations for a variety of recreational, educational, cultural, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, wildlife viewing, ceremonial uses by Native Americans, and photography.

3. To manage statewide small game, furbearers, and unclassified species populations to provide sustainable harvest opportunities and preserve ecological function.

When setting trapping seasons, WDFW staff take into consideration population dynamics, when pelts are in prime condition for market, the number of trappers, and the harvest rate of wildlife. In situations where the Department wants to establish a very limited open season for trapping of a furbearer but decides the season length cannot effectively control the desired low harvest level, a quota system or bag limits can be used.

Trappers in Washington must buy a license to trap. The revenue generated from the sales of licenses and tags to individual hunters, trappers, and anglers makes up about 25% of the Department's budget. The sale of trapping licenses supplies the Department with vital information on the numbers and distribution of active trappers in the state. The mandatory report that licensed trappers submit at the end of the season also provides critical data for monitoring furbearer populations. When coupled with harvest figures, the license data can supply valuable information on trends involving trappers.

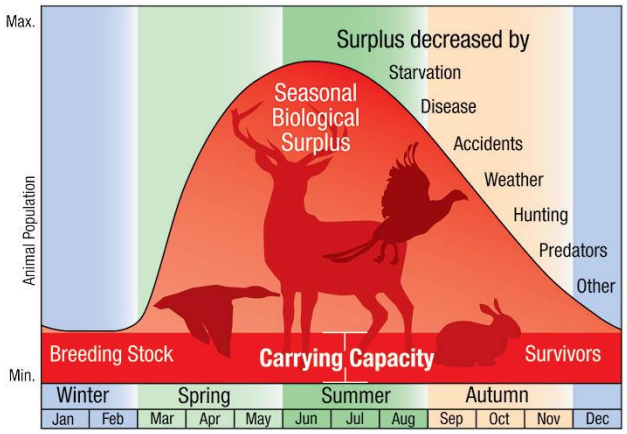
A prospective trapper getting her license. Photo by WDFW.

Carrying capacity

"Carrying capacity" is a term that hunters and trappers hear often. It is defined as "the number of animals that the habitat can support throughout the year without damaging the habitat." Good wildlife habitat has four basic requirements. The requirements are food, water, cover, and space. These requirements should be in a good arrangement. Most wildlife require different things from their habitat but are generally mingling with other wildlife that have similar habitat needs met in the same area.

The carrying capacity of habitat evolves over time as it is influenced by yearly changes, land use practices, weather, plant succession, and even the numbers and types of wildlife that use the habitat. The concept of carrying capacity is a key factor in wildlife management because a given habitat can only support so many healthy animals. "Social carrying capacity" is a related term that refers to how humans tolerate wildlife in the shared environment. Support for wildlife can diminish when people experience negative interactions with wildlife and damage to private property. Mitigating or preventing damage

caused by wildlife is important for maintaining social carrying capacity of wildlife in human-dominated landscapes.



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The number of animals in a specific area can increase in late spring and may continue to rise as food and cover become more abundant. Most of the time, the increased number of animals are new young. As winter approaches and the food declines, the number of animals the habitat can support declines as well. The animals outside the carrying capacity are known as surplus animals. Hunters and trappers generally try to harvest only the surplus animals that would have otherwise died due to starvation, predation, or other causes.

Wildlife populations commonly fluctuate due to changes in the habitat. Habitat loss or conversion can seriously limit the amount of suitable habitat available for wildlife, causing them to disperse from the area, compete for food and space within limited habitat, or even die of starvation, predation, or other natural causes. Therefore, changes in the habitat can seriously impact wildlife populations.

Trapping seasons and regulations

You must complete trapper education training before you can purchase a trapping license. In-person trapper education courses are taught by volunteer trapper education instructors, many of which are also members of the Washington State Trappers Association. A home study option coupled with the Washington state trapper education exam is also available.

Trapping in Washington is governed by laws passed by the state legislature, successful public initiatives, and rules (or regulations) adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission. Regulations, including season dates, are published in the Furbearer Trapping Regulation Pamphlet. It is the responsibility of each trapper to obtain a trapping pamphlet and familiarize themselves with all current rules and seasons prior to trapping. The trapping pamphlet is available on WDFW Trapping webpage, wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/trapping. **The regulations contained in the back of this manual were valid at the time of its printing.**

Be aware, the trapping pamphlet is not a complete list of all the laws and rules associated with trapping. The following is a list of the current Revised Code of Washington (RCW) laws and Washington Administrative Codes (WAC) that govern trapping. Trappers can check the current RCWs and WACs at leg.wa.gov/state-laws-and-rules/.

RCWs	RCW title
77.15.190	Unlawful trapping—Penalty.
77.15.191	Revocation of trapper's license—Placement of unauthorized traps.
77.15.192	Definitions.
77.15.194	Unlawful traps—Penalty.
77.15.198	Violation of RCW 77.15.194 or 77.15.196—Penalty.
77.32.545	Removal of trap—Identification of traps—Disclosure of identities.
77.65.460	Trapper's license—Training program or examination requisite for issuance to initial licensee.
WACs	**WAC title**
220-400-050	Requirements for sealing of pelts and collection of biological information for river otter, cougar, lynx, and bobcat.
220-400-060	Taxidermy and furdealing records.
220-416-010	2024-2025, 2025-2026, 2026-2027 Small game and other wildlife seasons and regulations.
220-417-010	Trapping seasons and regulations.
220-417-020	Report required of licensed trappers.
220-417-030	Wild animal trapping.
220-417-040	Use of body-gripping traps—Special trapping permit required.
220-450-030	Live wildlife—Taking from the wild, importation, possession, transfer, and holding in captivity.

Common trapping regulations violations

The most common violations of the trapping regulations are listed below:

- **Failure to tag traps**: All traps must be tagged with a metal tag exhibiting the trappers name and address or their WILD ID.
- **Failure to check traps:** Nonlethal restraining traps (e.g., cage traps on land) must be checked daily and animals removed within 24 hours of capture. Non-body gripping kill traps set in water, such as colony traps, funnel traps, and swim through traps, must be checked and animals removed within 72 hours.

- **Illegal trap:** It is unlawful to trap wild animals with body gripping traps except with a special trapping permit to abate an animal problem. These traps include but are not limited to: Conibear, coilspring, longspring, snares, and jump traps.
- **Trespass:** Always contact landowners and receive permission prior to trapping on their lands.

Trapper's report of catch

Trapper's report of catch tell wildlife managers how many, locations, and species of furbearers harvested, along with the trapping effort, or number of trap nights, that it took to harvest those animals. Individuals who have purchased a trapping license are required to complete their trapper's report of catch by using the Department's WILD licensing system, found online at fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov, before April 20. Information on trapper reporting is available online in the Furbearer Trapping Regulation Pamphlet at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/trapping. Everyone who purchased a trapping license must submit a report, even if they did not set traps or harvest any wildlife. Failure to submit a trapping report is considered an infraction.

The importance of filling out the trapper's report accurately cannot be stressed enough. The information in the report is important and needed by the Department to manage furbearer resources. If you harvest a bobcat or river otter, you must also have those pelts sealed by presenting the pelts, on or off the carcass, to an authorized Department employee or authorized individual under permit with the Department.

If you harvest a bobcat, you must also submit the bobcat's lower jaw (both sides) to the Department or a Department licensed pelt sealer for aging before a pelt can be sealed. The Department has a video on how to remove the lower jaw on its YouTube channel at youtu.be/-GlPhBvbny4. Lower jaws must have as much flesh as possible removed and allowed to dry in the open air in a safe place like a cardboard box, paper bag, or in a plastic bag with salt or borax to prevent decay. **Make sure to label the pelt and jaw so it is clear which pelt belongs to which jaw.**

Responsible trapping

Washington's wildlife is a public resource. The management, harvest, and marketing of furbearers are watched by state and federal agencies, special interest groups, and interested citizens. Washington trappers are a small fraction of the state's total population. This small group of users is sometimes opposed by those who think that trapping is inhumane, unnecessary, and can be a threat to wildlife.

Trappers must accept responsibility for their activities and actions. They must trap legally and ethically; with an understanding of the resource they are harvesting. Trapping laws and regulations are part of a wildlife management system that provides a flexible working structure to conserve resources and allow the harvest of surplus animals.

Trappers should strive to only remove the surplus animals. Many furbearer species have high birth and death rates. The high number of animals during the birthing season will not be able to survive the winter because the habitat will not be able to handle the increase in animal numbers. The ones that cannot survive are considered surplus animals. If these animals are not harvested, they will most likely die from starvation, disease, other predators, or many other causes.

Trapper's image

You are the future of trapping. Your activities should show a responsible and ethical approach to trapping. The actions you take and what you say will help the non-trapping public form opinions about trappers and trapping. Remember that trapping and other regulated hunting can be an emotional issue and interactions like pictures, social media posts, and online groups can help or hurt the public's view. If you think and act responsibly, ethically, and humanely while trapping and while interacting with non-trappers, you will project a good image of trapping. Conservationists and wildlife managers recognize trapping as the most efficient means of managing some wildlife populations when it is conducted by responsible trappers. All trappers should follow the Trapper's Code that is listed on the inside cover of this manual. Things that you can do to project a good trapping image include:

- **Promote regulated trapping:** Your excitement and enthusiasm for trapping is the best promotion. Sharing why you enjoy trapping in a respectful manner is a great way to spread the message that trapping is a fun outdoor activity.
- **Be respectful:** You should be proud of your harvest—it's hard work to trap! But everyone's views are different; there are people who may become upset at the sight of a dead animal or who don't understand regulated trapping. Please be respectful of another's viewpoint. Just because it's not the same as yours doesn't mean it's wrong.
- **Do the right thing:** Follow trapping regulations and report illegal activity. **Do not confront a poacher.** Observe the activity and relay any information about the location, suspects, vehicles, etc. to WDFW Law Enforcement at 360-902-2936, option 1.
- **Think before you post:** Posting trapping photos on social media can be a fun way to share your experience. Be mindful of how the picture may look to non-trappers. Consider how others may perceive it and if it portrays trapping in a positive light. Don't post photos of animals in traps.

When taking photos of your harvested furbearers, make sure to follow these simple tips:

1. Remove the animal from the trap.
2. Clean its fur of any blood.
3. Look at the best lighting and generally have the animal facing the sunlight/light source.
4. Pose the animal in a respectful way.
5. Make sure to be mindful of the animal's tongue as it will often be hanging out of the mouth.
6. Kneel beside or behind the animal.

WDFW has more photo taking tips available on MyWDFW.com, mywdfw.com/hunting-highlights-september-2021/.

Other wildlife users

Trappers share the wildlife resource with a wide variety of user groups. Since furbearers are a public resource and are found in areas where other outdoor activities may be taking place, trappers should be aware of these other activities and plan their sets accordingly. This will help ensure that the traps don't accidently trap a pet. Some traps, like cage traps, are designed to easily release non-target animals. Some of the public may not agree with trapping and might not want to see evidence of the activity, especially the dispatching of a trapped animal. The challenge for all of us is to understand and accept each other's views and uses of our wildlife resources.

A winter hike. Photo by WDFW.

Pre-season preparation

The time to start thinking about trapping is in early fall. There are many things that must be done before the season opens in November. One of the most important things is to determine where you will be trapping. Whether it is posted or not, all land belongs to somebody. Many federal lands, state lands, and timber company lands are open to trapping. If you want to trap on private lands, you must obtain landowner permission. It is up to the trapper to know where they are and ensure they can legally trap in their desired location(s). WDFW has a webpage detailing places to go hunting at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations, which can also be used for trapping.

Once the trapper has identified an area to trap and confirmed access permission, they should start scouting for places to set traps. While prospecting for fur, trappers should carefully look for wildlife sign like tracks, droppings, feeding areas, burrows, or even hair in fences where animals squeeze underneath. Some trappers tie up bait without traps in a favorite set location to see if furbearers are active in that area. When planning the trapline, a trapper must always remember not to put out more traps than can be checked within the time limit required by law.

Trappers must use either their name and address or WILD ID number on their trap tags. You can find your WILD ID on your trapping license. Early fall is a good time to send away for trap tags, which must be attached to every trap. Most if not all trapping magazines have ads for tags with your name and address stamped on them. Be sure to order tags early enough so they arrive before you start trapping.

Other chores that can be done before the season include trap preparation, preparing baits/lures, ensuring motor vehicles are working, sharpening axes and knives, reviewing the trapping regulations, and ensuring all equipment is in good working order.

Some trappers read books on trapping or subscribe to a trapping magazine. The more you can learn from these sources before trapping season like identification of wildlife sign and habitats, the more effective you will be. Trappers also tend to check a lot of maps since they can show hidden ponds as well as access roads in an area. Many new trappers prefer to buy their lures from a reputable trapper supply house. This is probably a good idea because the quality of a lure can make or break your season.

In late summer, the Washington State Trappers Association has its annual rendezvous in eastern Washington. This event allows trappers to meet and exchange ideas and tricks on the trapline. Visit the Washington State Trappers Association at watrappers.com/ for more information.

Make sure to review the regulations and associated RCWs and WACs. It is your obligation to know the laws and rules. You may also want to have a copy on hand when trapping to refer to in the field. Keep it in a waterproof bag or have it laminated to prevent water damage. Visit the WDFW website wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/trapping for the current trapping regulations. These regulations are generally updated once a year and are effective from April 1 through March 31.

Pre-season preparation checklist

- Buy a trapping license
- Obtain landowner permission (if private property)
- Scout for furbearer sign
- Order trap tags
- Repair and adjust traps
- Prepare baits and lures
- Consult trapping magazines and/or books
- Study the trapping regulations
- Check that all vehicles and equipment are in good working order
- Consider getting a tetanus shot

Traps

Experienced trappers usually agree that it pays to buy the best traps available. Top quality traps keep working season after season with only limited maintenance. Cheap traps, on the other hand, often start

falling apart after only a few weeks of use. However, cheap traps may be the way to go in areas where traps have been removed or stolen in the past. Remember to be aware of where you are placing traps and what other animals may be using the area. Be familiar with current rules and regulations before you purchase or use any traps.

Body gripping traps

Body gripping traps are not allowed to be used for recreational trapping in Washington. A body gripping trap is defined in RCW 77.15.192 as, “a trap that grips an animal's body or body part. Body gripping trap includes, but is not limited to, steel-jawed leghold traps, padded-jaw leghold or padded foot-hold traps, Conibear traps, neck snares, and non-strangling foot snares. Cage and box traps, suitcase-type live beaver traps, and common rat and mouse traps are not considered body-gripping traps.”

Traps that are body gripping may include but are not limited to: longspring traps, coilspring traps, single underspring traps, body-grip, and snares. Body gripping traps may be used with Special Trapping Permits issued by the Department. You can apply for a special trapping permit on WDFW’s website, wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/hunting/trapping.

Non-body gripping traps

These come in many designs. Most are rather costly, but will give years of service with a minimum amount of upkeep. If you are handy with tools, you can build your own traps. It is critical that the trap sits perfectly flat and does not rock when the animal steps into. If it does, this will alert the wildlife that there is something wrong, and they will not enter the trap.

Cage trap

These traps are generally made of large wire mesh in a box shape. They come in many different sizes and, in most cases, have one spring driven door. Once in the trap and the door has sprung, wildlife cannot get back out of the trap. If a trapper accidently traps a non-target animal, it can easily be released just by opening the door.

Cage trap. Photo by WDFW.

Weasel box trap: These traps are a solid box with a trap inside. There is a hole only big enough for a weasel to enter. Generally, the box is wood or plastic.

Weasel box trap. Photo by Karen Parker.

Colony trap: These traps are generally box-style traps that are placed on the bottom of a body of water with two doors, one on each side. The doors are in the down position at time of setting and allow an animal to push open the door and enter the trap. The doors are gravity driven and do not have a trigger mechanism. Colony traps are trapping the entire time they are in the water since the trap is not triggered and does not need to be reset.

Colony trap. Photo by Karen Parker.

Swim-through trap: These traps are a two-door cage style trap submerged in a body of water. They give the impression that the furbearer can swim through, but they trip the closing mechanism when swimming through.

Swim through trap. Photo by Karen Parker.

Funnel traps: These traps are a cylindrical cage style trap placed in a body of water that has two funnels running into the cage area. The funnels are made to expand to allow furbearers in but to close back down and trap them inside. These traps should be set below the water line.

Funnel trap. Photo by Karen Parker.

Suitcase-style beaver trap: The suitcase-style beaver trap is a spring-driven cage trap. The trap lays open like a suitcase and when triggered the strong springs close the trap up and enclose the trapped animal within the cage. Suitcase-style beaver trap placement is more versatile than a swim-through trap since you don't need to find a narrow place to funnel beaver into the trap. These traps are very strong and can be dangerous to set and place because of their large size and powerful springs. It’s important to securely anchor the trap to something solid like a tree or rebar to ensure the trap stays in place after it springs. When setting the trap, make sure to use the safety ring to prevent accidental triggering of the trap and injury. After baiting the trap, use a long stick to disengage the safety ring.

Suitcase-style beaver trap. Photo by WDFW.

Table 1 indicates suggested minimum height, width, and length of non-body gripping furbearer traps. This table is not a complete list of cage trap sizes and is only meant to illustrate the minimum size to be effective when trapping certain species. If you are using a two-door trap, you will want to increase the length to allow for door closure.

Table 1. Trap dimensions and possible catches

Minimum trap dimensions	Trap Dimensions (height, width, length)
Short-tailed weasel, Long-tailed weasel	5 x 5 x 24
Muskrat	6 x 6 x 20
Marten, Mink	7 x 7 x 17
Raccoon, River otter	10 x 12 x 42
American badger	10 x 12 x 42
Beaver	12 x 12 x 36
Red fox	15 x 15 x 48
Bobcat	15 x 20 x 42

Trap preparation

New traps take some preparation before they are ready for the trap line. Many trappers go over them to make sure the triggers work properly and there are no holes in the traps. Trap tags should be attached at this point to ensure each trap has the required information attached to it. A good rule of thumb on trap tags is to attach two tags to each trap, one on top and one on the bottom. This way you are always in compliance with the law.

Trap modification

Some trappers today choose to make modifications to commercially available traps. However, with the cage traps currently legal in Washington, modifications are not needed. Trap modifications cannot be used to modify a cage trap to become a body gripping trap.

Trap checks

When you set out a trapline, you assume responsibilities. Animal welfare is a top priority. Most furbearers are nocturnal, so it is best to check your traps as early in the day as possible. One important difference between trapping and hunting is your commitment to work your trapline every day until you remove your traps. Hunters can choose the days they want to hunt, but trappers must check their sets every day. Bad weather or other problems should not change your plans. In Washington, nonlethal restraining traps (e.g., cage traps on land) must be checked daily and animals removed within 24 hours of capture. Non-body gripping kill traps set in water, such as colony traps, funnel traps, and swim through traps, must be checked and animals removed within 72 hours. Though time consuming, the benefits of daily morning trap checks include:

- Less chance that animals or traps will be stolen
- If traps have been disturbed, you can reset the trap
- Less chance for predation, self-injury, or damage to the pelt

- Release non-target animals
- More opportunities to reset and catch another animal
- Animal welfare considerations

Other trapping equipment

In addition to traps, there are other pieces of equipment that are just as important on the trapline. This section will identify some of the standard equipment that most Washington trappers utilize. Remember that the following equipment is what has historically worked for most trappers, but you need to find what works for you. As with most other pieces of equipment, buying the best quality usually pays off in the long run. Some trapping equipment you may want to invest in is listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Additional trapping equipment and description

Equipment	Equipment description
Hip boots or waders	Trappers who are working around water will want to invest in hip boots or chest waders. These items are waterproof and will make trapping more comfortable and enjoyable. It is always a good idea to carry an extra pair in your vehicle, along with an extra set of clothes.
Packbasket	Many trappers carry their traps and animals in a packbasket made of woven wood strips or fiberglass. Both types can be kept clean and relatively odor free by rinsing them out in a stream. Special pouches can be made or bought to be attached to the outside of your packbasket.
Axe	Most trappers prefer a long-handled, single-bladed axe with a head weight of about three pounds.
Knife	A knife is an essential tool for anyone in the outdoors. A pocketknife or belt knife is great for trappers because they are small and light but sharp and effective at small tasks. Remember that blades dull and carrying a sharpener may be a good idea.
Pliers	Trappers will want to have a good pair of pliers which can be used to repair traps or replace trap tags on the trapline.
Digging tool	Trappers may want to have a digging tool such as a shovel, trowel, hoe, or Pulaski for use in setting their traps. Longer handles on these tools make them more useful, but long handles can stick out of the packbasket and catch low hanging branches.
Extra trap tags	It is imperative to bring extra trap tags. If for some reason a tag is lost, you can replace it and still be legal. Attaching the tag with wire may increase the chances it will stay on the trap. You can also bend and roll the tag onto the handle.
Gloves	Most trappers wear gloves while trapping to keep their scent off their traps and to stay warm and dry. These can be disposable gloves, rubber gloves, or leather gloves. Gloves should stay as free as possible from foreign odor.
Lures and baits	Trapping lures and baits are used to attract furbearers. They are generally made from assorted animal glands and organs or the target animal's favorite foods. You can make your own or purchase commercial lures.

Rain gear	Rain gear will keep you dry in rainy conditions. Trappers should have a raincoat and rain pants unless they are using hip boots/waders. Lightweight materials may not hold up to the rigors of the trapline.
Survival gear	Survival gear is necessary because you are generally off the beaten path. Having some basic survival gear will help keep you alive should you get lost or injured.

Health and safety

"Stay alert and stay alive." This is a rule that all trappers live by. The trapline is no place for carelessness. Since trappers are usually alone and a long way from medical aid, one accident can spell the end of a trapping season, or even worse. All trappers should attend a first aid class long before trapping season opens. These classes are usually offered year-round in your local community. A smart trapper carries a basic first aid kit and a survival kit with a fire starter with them as well.

A view of the Paysayten wilderness. Photo by WDFW.

Ice trapping

In parts of eastern Washington, trapping through the ice is a common practice. Unfortunately, every year people drown when they break through ice that is too thin to support their weight. Most experts consider three inches of ice the minimum for one person to walk on. Even on three inches of ice, a person must still look out for thin or soft spots caused by current or an underwater spring. When crossing ice, always carry your axe in your hand to help pull yourself out if you break through. One last warning for ice trappers is to never use your hand to feel for traps set through a hole in the ice. If your hand should get caught in the trap under the ice, you may never leave that spot.

A river otter on the ice. Photo by Gentry Scott.

Releasing trapped wildlife

There are times when a trapper will have to release an animal from a trap. Sometimes a non-target animal enters the trap and, since these are live capture traps, they will not be able to get out until the trapper checks their trap. A non-target animal is any animal that the trapper was not attempting to catch. Non-target animals could include domestic animals, wildlife that are not legal to trap, or legal wildlife species outside of the trapping season. Remember that any trapped animal is potentially dangerous and should be handled with caution. To release cage-trapped animals, just lift the door. Washington law requires any wildlife trapped outside of the species' legal trapping season to be released unharmed. If the wildlife cannot be released unharmed, trappers must leave the wildlife in the trap, and a WDFW representative must be notified immediately. Lawfully trapped wildlife must be lethally dispatched or immediately released.

Trapline safety reminders

- Stay alert. The trapline is no place for carelessness.
- Attend a local first aid class before trapping season starts.
- Always have a small first aid kit accessible.
- If you have a cell phone, keep it accessible.
- Always carry your axe sheathed and in your hand so you can control it if you fall.
- Know the symptoms of frostbite and hypothermia and know how to avoid and treat them.
- Wear layers of clothes that can be added or removed as the conditions dictate.
- Keep a spare set of dry clothes and shoes in your vehicle.
- Always be careful when traveling on ice.
- If you carry a firearm, you should attend a firearm safety course.
- Be sure your vehicle, boat motor, or snowmobile is in top running condition to avoid a long walk or an unplanned night in the woods.
- If you use a snowmobile, always carry snowshoes in case you break down.
- Use a wading staff when crossing rivers or streams.
- Always let someone know where you will be trapping in case an accident occurs.
- When trapping from a boat, follow boating safety rules.

Dispatching trapped animals

It is imperative that hunters and trappers use ethical and humane methods to dispatch wildlife. Most of the public do not want to see wildlife dispatched. Keep this in mind when trapping and try to dispatch wildlife out of sight when in areas with other people. It is illegal to move the trapped animal off the property in which it was trapped, but you might be able to move to a more secluded part of the property. Dispatching animals humanely and out of the public's view should help ensure trapping can and will continue.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has published guidelines for the humane euthanasia of animals. Most of the guidelines are intended for euthanasia of domestic animals in a lab or vets office. The AVMA recommendations applicable to the trapline include shooting with a small caliber firearm (usually a .22), the use of gas, or cervical dislocation (for small furbearers like marten, long-tailed weasels, and short tailed weasels). While these are standard methods of dispatching most trapped animals, there may be legal or practical situations where they may not be directly applicable.

The use of carbon dioxide gas (CO_2) is a common method. The animal in the trap is placed in a solid box large enough for the animal and the trap. After the lid is placed on the box, the box is filled with CO_2 through a hose from a CO_2 canister. CO_2 is odorless, colorless, and heavier than air. The gas in the box will displace the air and the animal will usually become unconscious in less than a minute. After more time has passed, the animal will die from lack of oxygen.

For large land animals such as badger, bobcat, red fox, and raccoon, the preferred dispatch method is a well-placed shot to the head. Proper placement of the bullet to dispatch furbearers is paramount. Draw a line from the outside corners of the eye to the inside corner of the opposite ear. Aim for the intersection of the two lines (red dot), with a very slight downward angle towards the back of the neck.

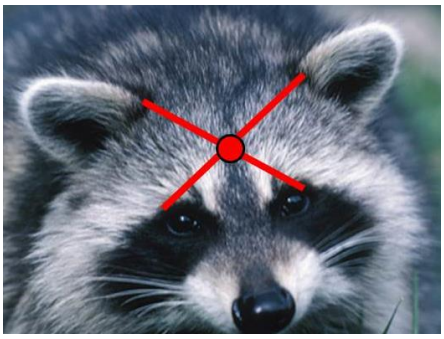


Diagram for illustrative purposes by WDFW.

When humanely dispatching an animal for rabies testing, please remember the animal must not be shot in the head; instead, aim for the lung/heart area directly behind the front lower shoulder, at the point of the elbow as close as possible to the heart.

Wildlife such as beaver, otter, mink, and muskrat are generally trapped in non-body gripping kill sets that trap the animals under water. These traps are legal in Washington if the trap does not grip the animal's body, and if once trapped, the animal cannot reach the surface again.

There are rare occasions when trappers are put in a difficult position where none of the above dispatch methods can be effectively or legally used. These situations could involve trapping animals in a no shooting zone where discharging a firearm is not allowed. In those areas, trappers should plan to use other methods of dispatching. With advanced planning, these situations can be prevented.

If you would like more information on humane euthanasia, review the AVMA's guidelines for the euthanasia of animals online at avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Euthanasia-Guidelines.aspx.

Wildlife on the trapline

Furbearing wildlife are generally recognized as having a fur coat of commercial value. Furbearers in Washington include American badger, American beaver, bobcat, ermine, long-tailed weasel, marten, mink, muskrat, raccoon, red fox, and river otter.

Trappers can trap unclassified wildlife as well. These species include mountain, coyote, European rabbit, gophers (except protected Mazama pocket gophers), gray and fox squirrels (except protected western gray squirrels), ground squirrels (except protected golden-mantled ground squirrels and Washington ground squirrels), mice, moles, nutria, Virginia opossum, porcupine, rats, shrews, spotted skunk, striped skunk, voles, and yellow-bellied marmot. Unclassified animals can be hunted or trapped year-round and are not actively managed by the Department.

In this section, the furbearers in Washington are broken into two groups - terrestrial and aquatic. There is also a section that identifies protected species that look like harvestable wildlife. By understanding the animal's food, habitat, and habits, responsible trappers can improve their ability to trap effectively and avoid non-target animals.

This section will also give information on how to properly place trapping sets. The trap recommendations in each furbearer section are only suggestions. Many different traps are available and will trap furbearers just as well.

Visit the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' furbearer management webpage for additional resources and best management practices for trapping at furbearermanagement.com/. Not all the traps listed on this site are legal in Washington, but the resources cover a variety of species and traps along with information about furbearer management and the human dimensions of trapping.

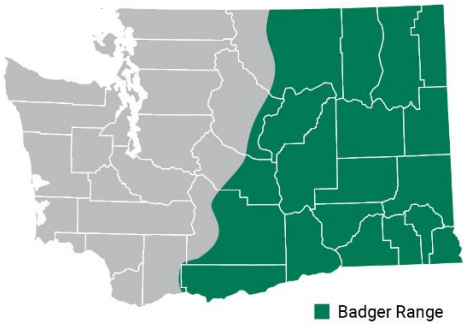
Terrestrial wildlife

The following information identifies furbearers in Washington that spend most of their time on land.

Badger

The American badger is a mid-sized (10 to 11 pounds) member of the weasel family that uses underground burrows for resting, denning, and catching prey. They forage underground by digging into the burrow systems of prey species, which commonly include ground squirrels, prairie dogs, marmots, and pocket gophers. Badgers also feed on carrion, insects, reptiles, and birds. The current distribution of American badgers includes portions of eastern Washington from the eastern Cascade foothills to the Idaho border. American badgers are generally found in grassland, shrub-steppe, desert, dry forest, parkland, and agricultural areas. They require soils that allow them to excavate den sites, which support prey species like ground squirrels.

A badger. Photo by WDFW.



Area of the state where badgers can be found.

Badger sets

Trappers generally use a single-door type box trap that is 10” x 12” x 42”. Bait the trap with chicken and attractors such as feathers, eggshells, cotton balls, and/or marshmallows. Traps should be very well built, as badgers are strong and have been known to destroy light traps.

Bobcat

Bobcats can be found throughout all of Washington and are probably more common than most people realize. Bobcats appear to be using suburban settings more often, although due to their reclusive ways, they are not often seen. Adult male bobcats weigh 20 to 30 pounds and average three feet in length. Females are considerably smaller and may weigh less than a large house cat. Bobcats can be various shades of buff and brown, with dark brown or black stripes and spots on some parts of the body. Bobcats are opportunistic and will prey upon a wide variety of animals. Food sources include mice, voles, rabbits, gophers, mountain beaver, yellow bellied marmots, deer, insects, reptiles, birds, and carrion. Bobcats of eastern Washington tend to be a much lighter buff color than those of western Washington. Both color phases occur along the eastern side of the Cascade Mountains.

Rock cliffs, outcroppings, and ledges are important to bobcats for shelter, raising young, and resting sites. Large brush or log piles and hollow trees or logs are used in wooded areas. Finding bobcats in open fields, meadows, and agricultural areas is not uncommon, provided enough brushy or timbered areas for escape cover is nearby. Bobcats occur less frequently in areas of deep winter snow. Unlike lynx, bobcats have relatively small feet, and snow greatly reduces their mobility and ability to catch prey.

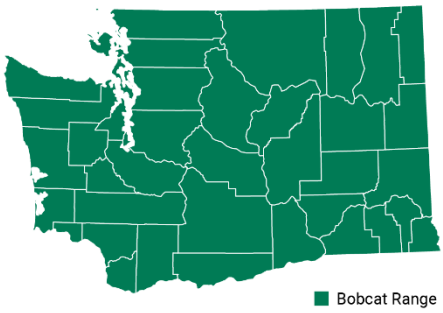
The home range size of bobcats in western Washington varies from 2.5 to six square miles for adult males and about half that for adult females. Home range size in eastern Washington tends to be larger. Hunters can also harvest bobcat during the bobcat hunting season. A hunter needs to have a small game license to hunt bobcat.

Anyone who harvests a bobcat is required to have the hide sealed within 20 days of the close of the hunting or trapping season by an authorized Department employee or authorized individual under permit with the Department. They also must submit the bobcat’s lower jaw (both sides) for aging before

a pelt can be sealed. Lower jaws must have as much flesh as possible removed and allowed to dry in the open air in a safe place like a cardboard box, paper bag, or in a plastic bag with salt or Borax to prevent decay. Make sure to label the pelt and jaw so it is clear which pelt belongs to which jaw. The hide must not be frozen, so a seal can be attached. When having the hides sealed, the WDFW staff member will ask the following information:

- Date of harvest
- Method of harvest
- Bobcat's sex
- If the bobcat was an adult or juvenile
- Which county and GMU it was trapped

A bobcat. Photo by Della Chapman.



Area of the state where bobcat can be found.

Bobcat sets

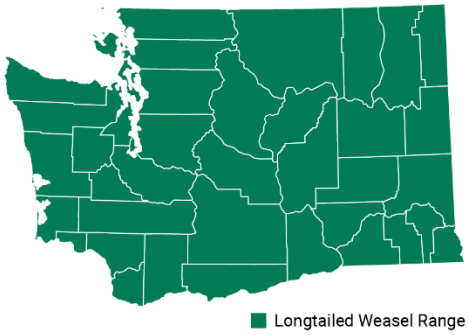
Trappers generally use a single-door type box trap that is 15" x 20" x 42". Bait the trap with poultry or rabbit carcasses and feathers for a sight attractor. Set the trap in the vicinity of an animal kill or a travel way to and from cover. Use brush or grass on the top and sides of the trap to give the appearance of a natural "cubby" or a recess in a rock outcrop or in brush. Cover the cage bottom with soil.

Long-tailed weasel

The long-tailed weasel is the second smallest member of the weasel family found in Washington. The primary food of long-tailed weasels is small mammals, predominantly rodents, including shrews, voles, young cottontail rabbits, mice, woodrats, rats, tree squirrels, chipmunks, ground squirrels, snowshoe hares, pikas, and moles.

Long-tailed weasels are widely distributed and found throughout Washington. A factor limiting distribution of long-tailed weasels is availability of water. When water is available, they may be found in a variety of habitats including brushland, open timber, brushy edges of fields, grasslands, swamps, rock piles, talus slopes, woodpiles, junk piles, and in and around buildings. Home ranges are between 29.7 and 39.5 acres, with male's home ranges being larger than females.

A long-tailed weasel. Photo by Larry James.



Areas of the state where long-tailed weasels can be found.

Long-tailed weasel sets

Trappers generally use a single- or double-door type box trap that is 5” x 5” x 24”. These traps can also be placed in weasel boxes to help entice a weasel’s curiosity. Bait the trap with fish, fresh chicken liver, and/or chicken entrails. Set the trap in an old brush pile, under an outbuilding, or under a fence, since the long-tailed weasel is likely to investigate any small, covered area.

Marten

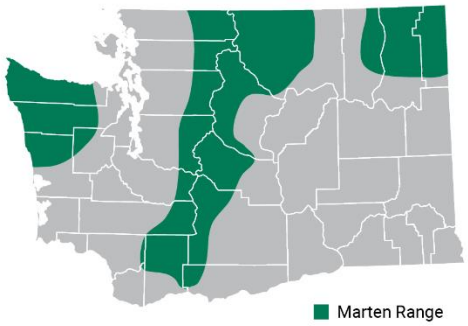
Pacific martens are a small to mid-sized (0.9 to 3.3 pounds) forest carnivore in the weasel family. Pacific martens are terrestrial, arboreal, and forage in and underneath the snow. They are prey generalists and feed on a variety of small mammals, birds, insects, carrion, and berries.

This species uses cavities in large woody structures (e.g., live trees, snags, logs, log piles, stumps) and talus for resting and denning. Despite their small size, they use relatively large home ranges (0.8 to 10.5 square miles). To protect the low density, marten populations on the Olympic Peninsula, marten trapping is closed in Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, and Grays Harbor counties.

Martens can be found in boreal forest and taiga ecosystems, as well as mid- and high-elevation forests in mountainous regions at more southern latitudes. The coastal and Humboldt martens are the exceptions to this, as they use lower elevation forests.

The fisher, a protected species, has been confused with marten in the past. Make sure to clearly identify the species before you harvest it.

A pacific marten. Photo by WDFW.



Areas of the state where marten can be found.

Marten sets

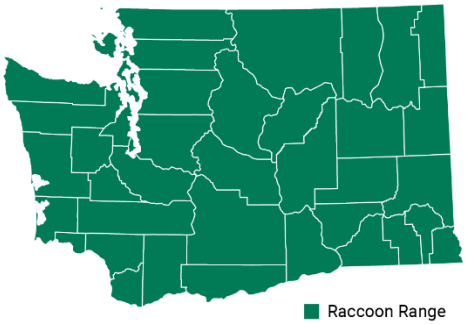
Trappers generally use a single-door type box trap that is 7” x 7” x 17”. Bait the trap with fresh bloody meat such as chicken or rabbit. Use sight attractors like feathers or fur. Wrap the cage trap in something dark because marten like to investigate dark holes. However, marten seem to like a set in which the back looks like it might be open.

Raccoon

The raccoon is a native mammal that measures about three feet long, including its 12-inch bushy, ringed tail. Adult raccoons weigh 15 to 40 pounds. Raccoons will eat almost anything but are particularly fond of creatures found in water—clams, crayfish, frogs, fish, and snails. Raccoons also eat insects, slugs, carrion, birds, and bird eggs, as well as fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Around humans, raccoons often eat garbage and pet food. Although not great hunters, raccoons can catch young gophers, squirrels, mice, and rats.

Raccoons prefer forest areas near a stream or water source but have adapted to various environments throughout Washington. Raccoon populations can get quite large in urban areas due to hunting and trapping restrictions, few predators, and human-supplied food. Hunters can also harvest raccoon during the raccoon hunting season. The hunter needs to have a small game license to hunt raccoon.

A raccoon. Photo by Brian Danell.



Area of the state where raccoon can be found.

Raccoon sets

Trappers generally use a single-door type box trap that is 10” x 12” x 42”. Bait the trap with fish-flavored cat food, corn, ripe bananas, bacon, sardines, peanut butter, jelly, and/or marshmallows. Place the trap where the animal, or evidence of the animal, has been seen or at its den entrance.

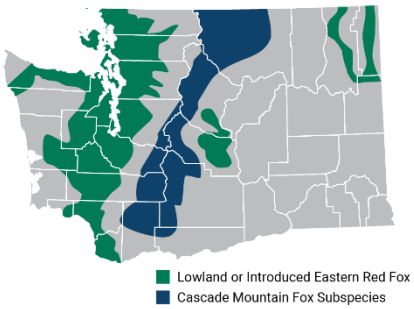
Red fox

Adult red fox stands about 14 inches at the shoulder and average three feet in length. They have erect, relatively large, pointed ears and a long, pointed muzzle. Adult males weigh 10 to 15 pounds and adult females weigh slightly less. Their prey is generally snowshoe hares, mice, voles, shrews, moles, ground squirrels, tree squirrels, pikas, rats, chipmunks, small birds, beetles, grasshoppers, berries, some grasses, and carrion of deer, elk, and other animals. In addition, fox may eat opossum, young raccoon, skunks, housecats, dogs, weasels, mink, muskrats, and bird eggs. Red fox are opportunistic predators, taking whatever food is available and easily caught.

The home range of red foxes’ averages about one to three square miles. There is a greater population in western Washington and the Cascade mountains than in eastern Washington. Hunters can also harvest fox during the fox hunting season. The hunter needs to have a small game license to hunt fox.

To protect endangered Cascade red fox, fox trapping and hunting are closed within the exterior boundaries of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie, Okanogan, Wenatchee, and Gifford Pinchot national forests.

A red fox. Photo by John Thompson.



Areas of the state where foxes can be found.

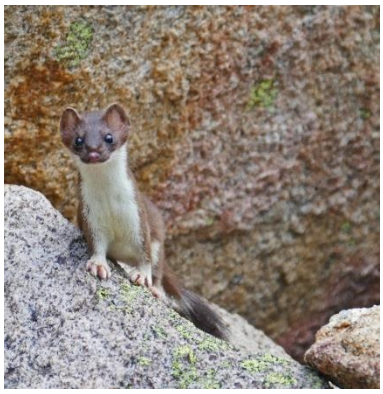
Fox sets

Trappers generally use a single-door type box trap that is 15” x 15” x 48”. Bait the trap with tainted meat, eggs placed in a nest, marshmallows, and/or cotton balls. Take precautions to eliminate human scent from the trap and the area around the trap. Place bait in a hole dug under the rear of the trap. Cover all sides of the trap with a tarp or other material. Sift dirt onto the bottom of the cage to cover the wire bottom.

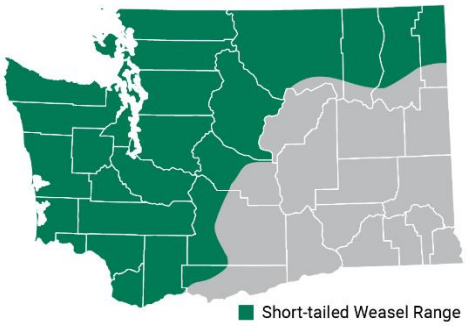
Short-tailed weasel (ermine)

Short-tailed weasels are also called ermine. Typically, male ermine are larger than females. The total length of adult male ermine averages eight to 13 inches including the 2.8-to-4-inch tail. The smaller females average seven to 11 inches in total length including 1.6 to 2.7 inches of tail. Adult males weigh 2.5 to 6.8 ounces and adult females weigh one to three ounces. Small mammals such as voles, shrews, mice, snowshoe hares, pikas, bushy-tailed woodrats, gophers, young cottontail rabbits, rats, chipmunks, and ground squirrels make up the diet of ermine. During periods of deep snow, ermine will burrow through and hunt under the snow. They will often hunt for mice in their burrows.

Ermine are active year round. Recent studies show that ermine hunt primarily during the day throughout summer and during the night throughout winter. They are more restricted in their distribution in Washington than long-tailed weasels. They are found throughout western Washington, on the east slope of the Cascade Mountains, and in the northern one third of Eastern Washington. Ermine are found primarily in higher elevations. Generally, brown phase weasels are less sought after by fur buyers than white phase weasels.



A short-tailed weasel. Photo by WDFW.



Area of the state where short-tailed weasels can be found.

Ermine sets

Trappers generally use a single- or double-door type box trap that is 5” x 5” x 24”, or weasel boxes with traps set inside the box. Bait the trap with fish, fresh chicken liver, and/or chicken entrails. Set the trap in an old brush pile, or under an outbuilding or fence, since the weasel is likely to investigate any small, covered area.

Aquatic wildlife

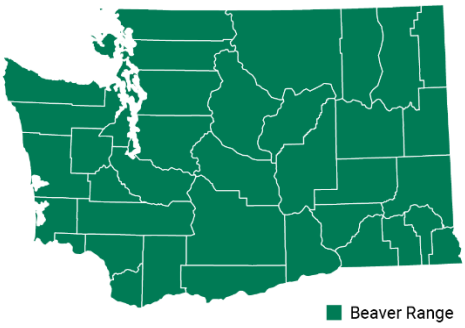
The following information identifies furbearers in Washington that spend most of their time in water.

Beaver

Beavers are the largest rodents in North America, with adults averaging 40 pounds and measuring more than three feet in length, including the tail. Beavers eat the leaves, inner bark, and twigs of aspen (a favorite food), alder, birch, cottonwood, willow, and other deciduous trees. Beavers also eat shrubs, ferns, aquatic plants, grasses, and crops, including corn and beans. When the surface of the water is frozen, beavers eat bark and stems from a food "cache" (a safe storage place) they have anchored to the bottom of the waterway for winter use. They also swim out under the ice and retrieve the thick roots and stems of aquatic plants, such as pond lilies and cattails.

Beavers are found where their preferred foods are in good supply along rivers and/or in small streams, lakes, marshes, and even roadside ditches containing adequate year-round water flow. In areas where deep, calm water is not available, beavers that have enough building material available will create ponds by building dams across creeks or other watercourses and impounding water.

A beaver. Photo by WDFW.



Parts of the state where beaver can be found.

Beaver sets

Trappers generally use a suitcase type trap or a swim through type trap like a 12 x 12 x 36. Bait the trap with freshly cut tree sprouts or branches, and/or commercial lures. Some are also successful using a 15" x 15" x 48" cage trap set right at the water's edge next to a beaver slide.

Mink

Adult male mink weigh two to 3.5 pounds and are typically larger than adult females, which weigh 1.5 to four pounds. The total length of adult males ranges from 23 to 28 inches compared to 18 to 23 inches for adult females. Although they are primarily nocturnal, mink may occasionally be seen during the day. Mink will eat nearly anything they can kill. Strictly carnivorous, mink will feed on fish, muskrat, mountain beaver, small rodents, carrion, and rabbits. Mink may travel some distance from water when hunting.

Male mink will maintain a home range of two to three square miles. Although travel is usually restricted to within 1,000 feet of a den, adult males can travel long distances in a single night's hunt. Adult females maintain home ranges of about one square mile or about half the size of adult male home ranges. Excellent swimmers capable of catching fish, mink readily enter the water when traveling, hunting, in pursuit of prey, or for escape. In some areas that completely ice over, mink may use dens with underwater entrances and do much of their hunting under the ice.

Mink are found throughout Washington near most streams and bodies of water. A semi-aquatic animal, mink prefer habitat near swamps, marshes, streams, rivers, lakes, ditches, canals, or ponds.

The fisher, a protected species, has been confused with mink in the past. Make sure to clearly identify the species before you harvest it.

A mink. Photo by Keith Nelson.

Area of the state where mink can be found.

Mink sets

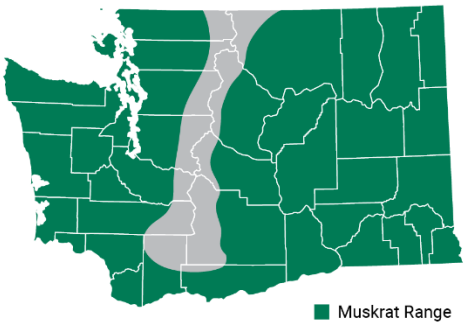
Trappers generally use a single-door type box trap that is 7” x 7” x 17” or swim through traps. Bait the trap with fresh bloody meat such as chicken or rabbit, and you can use sight attractors like feathers or fur. Wrap the cage trap in something dark because mink like to investigate dark holes.

Muskrat

Muskrats weigh two to four pounds and reach lengths of 18 to 25 inches, including their 8- to 11-inch, sparsely haired tails. Their coat color is generally dark brown, but individuals can range from black to almost white. Muskrats eat a wide variety of plants, including cattails, sedges, bulrush, arrowhead, water lilies, pondweed, and ferns. They also eat alfalfa, clover, corn, and other crops if muskrats find them in their territories. Muskrats normally feed within 150 feet of their main dwellings, but they will travel much farther in search of food.

Muskrats are found throughout still or slow-moving waterways, including marshes, beaver ponds, reservoirs, irrigation canals and ditches, and marshy borders of lakes and rivers. They don’t live in mountainous areas where cold weather makes their food unobtainable.

A muskrat. Photo by Kristopher Ebbert.



Area of the state where muskrat can be found.

Muskrat sets

Trappers generally use a single-door type box trap that is 6” x 6” x 20”. Trappers are also very successful in using colony traps, swim through traps, and funnel traps. Bait the trap with corn, carrot greens, sweet apples, or cattail roots.

River otter

River otters average four feet in length, including the tail, and weigh 20 to 28 pounds. Adult females are somewhat smaller than males. River otters are opportunists, eating a wide variety of food, but mostly fish. River otters usually feed on four to six inch long, slowly moving fish species, such as carp, mud minnows, stickle backs, and suckers. However, otters actively seek out spawning salmon and will travel far to take advantage of a salmon run.

Although seldom seen, river otters are relatively common throughout Washington in ponds, lakes, rivers, sloughs, estuaries, bays, and in open waters along the coast. In colder locations, otters frequent areas that remain ice-free in winter—rapids, the outflows of lakes, and waterfalls. River otters avoid polluted waterways but will seek out a concentrated food source upstream in urban areas. River otters can be found in fresh, brackish, or salt water, and can travel overland for considerable distances.

The fisher, a protected species, has been confused with river otter in the past. Make sure to clearly identify the species before you harvest it.

Anyone who harvests a river otter must contact a WDFW Regional Office to have the hide sealed within 20 days of the close of the trapping season. The hide must not be frozen, so a seal can be attached. When having the hides sealed, the WDFW staff member will ask the following information:

- Date of harvest
- Method of harvest
- Otter’s sex
- If the otter was an adult or juvenile
- Which county and GMU it was trapped

A river otter. Photo by WDFW.

Parts of the state where river otter can be found.

River otter sets

Trappers generally use a single-door type box trap that is 10” x 12” x 42”, and swim through traps. Bait the trap with fresh fish. Cover the bottom of the trap with sand. River otters may be trapped in suitcase type traps used to capture beavers, but trappers should modify the sides so the otters can't escape.

Protected wildlife

There are species of protected wildlife in Washington that closely resemble furbearers, game animals, and unclassified animals but are illegal to harvest. Some of these protected species may have historically been harvested but are no longer legal to harvest, often due to population declines. These species include Canada lynx, Cascade red fox, fisher, wolf, and wolverine. **These species cannot be harvested in Washington.**

These species are presented in this manual to ensure trappers can distinguish between legally harvestable wildlife and protected species. If you see any of these species, please share your observation using the WDFW wildlife reporting form at wdfw.wa.gov/get-involved/report-observations. Providing detailed information, such as a photo and exact coordinates, will improve the confidence and value of this observation to WDFW. For more information, please visit wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/listed.

Canada lynx

Canada lynx are a protected species in Washington. Sightings of Canada lynx and their sign are documented and verified when possible. The lynx is generally between 11 and 38 pounds and occurs only in the boreal forests of North America. Lynx are prey specialists, with snowshoe hares making up the bulk of their diet. They are physically adapted to forage for snowshoe hares in deep snow.

Between 50 and 100 Canada lynx likely reside in Washington today across the North Cascades, Kettle River Mountain Range, and Selkirk Mountains.

Lynx occupy subalpine and boreal coniferous forests that have substantial accumulations of snow during the late fall, winter, and early spring. In Washington, lynx habitat includes Engelmann spruce, lodgepole pine, and subalpine fir forests at or above 4,600 feet in elevation. Lynx typically hunt for snowshoe hares in early successional forest habitats where hares are most abundant. Females commonly use mature forest stands for denning, and their den sites are often located in tangled piles of fallen trees.

A lynx. Photo by National Parks Service Ken Conger.

Cascade red fox

The Cascade red fox is an endangered subspecies of red fox that is protected in Washington. The Cascade red fox occupies alpine and subalpine habitats in the southern Cascade Mountain Range and prefers to avoid the wet, dense forests of the westside Cascades. They tend to prefer the open, drier subalpine forests on the east side of the Cascade crest with subalpine meadows, parklands, and open forests as primary habitats.

No resident Cascade red fox population is currently known to exist north of the Interstate 90 corridor. Climate change could reduce the availability of habitat for this species. Seasonal home ranges for Cascade red fox vary in size from one to four square miles.

Cascade red foxes commonly occur in three color phases: red, cross, and silver/black. All three phases have been reported within a single litter of pups. These foxes are prey generalists and prey upon a variety of small and mid-sized mammals, insects, fruits, birds, and carrion. Pocket gophers, voles, and snowshoe hares are the most common mammalian prey.

To protect the Cascade red fox, fox trapping and hunting are closed within the exterior boundaries of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie, Okanogan, Wenatchee, and Gifford Pinchot national forests.

A Cascade red fox in silver/black color phase. Photo by Lynda Ken.

Fisher

Fishers are a protected species in Washington. Sightings of fishers and their sign are documented and verified when possible. Fishers are a mid-sized carnivore (4.4 to 13 pounds) in the weasel family that use forested habitats. They commonly prey upon small and mid-sized mammals, such as snowshoe hares, squirrels, mice, and voles. They also feed on ungulate carrion, fruit, insects, and birds. Fishers are known for their ability to prey upon porcupines. Fishers use uncharacteristically large home ranges for an animal of their size (average sizes are more than 19 square miles in northern portions of their range), with male home ranges typically being twice as large as those of females. Large trees, large snags, and large logs with cavities are important habitat features and are commonly used as rest sites and den sites.

Fishers occur only in the boreal and temperate forests of North America. Fishers inhabit coniferous and mixed coniferous-deciduous forests, and they tend to avoid areas with significant human activity and

developed areas. Home ranges are commonly characterized by a mosaic of forest stand ages in low to mid-elevation forest landscapes, and these mosaics tend to be dominated by forests with mid-sized to large diameter trees. Fishers are consistently associated with forests that provide moderate to high canopy closure and the presence of large woody structures such as cavity trees, snags, and logs. WDFW is currently monitoring the fisher's expansion into habitat that they formerly used in Washington.

Fishers were lost from the state in the early to mid-1900s and have only recently been reintroduced to the Olympic Peninsula and Cascade Mountain Range in Washington. Because they are a poorly known species and have been missing from the state for many years, they are often confused with more common species including mink, marten, and river otter. Fishers are dark brown, with a lighter grizzling (i.e., white and light brown hair mixed with the dark brown hair) on their face, head, and shoulders. They have rounded ears, large feet, and a long tail that makes up about 40 percent of their body length. Mink are smaller than fishers, and they have small, rounded ears, a shorter tail, small feet, and most have a patch of white on their chin. Marten are also smaller, are a lighter brown color, and have a proportionately shorter tail. River otters are similar in length but are a lighter brown color, have a rounded nose/snout, have small ears, and are much stockier than fishers.

Fishers are easily incidentally captured in traps set for other species. If you trap a fisher by mistake, the Department would appreciate you getting some photos or video of the fisher before promptly releasing it. After releasing the fisher, please check the trap to see if it left any hair or droppings. The Department would like to get samples left in the trap for DNA analysis. Please prepare the samples per the instructions below.

- Hair: Place any hair in a paper envelope to allow the hair follicles to dry. Lined envelopes or plastic envelopes will not allow the hair to dry and will damage the sample.
- Droppings: Place the droppings in a plastic bag. Note the collection location and date on the bag and then freeze the droppings. This will allow the Department to thaw and properly dry the sample before extracting DNA.
- Contact Jeff Lewis at jeffrey.lewis@dfw.wa.gov or by phone at 360-902-2374 to discuss how to get the samples to the Department for testing.

A fisher. Photo by Paul Bannick.

Wolf

Wolves are a protected species in Washington. Sightings of wolves and their sign are documented and verified when possible. Gray wolves are highly social and form packs consisting of a breeding male and female, pups from the current year and previous years, and sometimes other individuals. Typical pack size in the northern U.S. Rockies is five to 10 animals. Packs defend territories that generally average 193 to 386 square miles.

Wolves are carnivores and feed primarily on hoofed mammals. Elk, deer, and moose are the main prey in western North America, while other ungulates (e.g., bison, bighorn sheep, caribou), beavers, and smaller animals eaten to a lesser extent. Wolves are also natural scavengers and readily feed on the carcasses of dead animals. As top-level predators, gray wolves influence the abundance and behavior of their prey and other predators, which in turn can affect vegetation patterns, occurrence of other wildlife, and other ecological processes. About 10 to 15 percent of the members of a population are comprised of younger solitary animals dispersing from their natal pack to seek a mate, vacant habitat, or another pack to join. Dispersal distances average 37 to 62 miles but occasionally exceed 180 miles.

Wolves are habitat generalists and can thrive in almost any habitat (i.e., forests, prairies, swamps, mountains, deserts, and tundra) with sufficient prey and limited human-caused mortality. In western North America, the species is generally found in forests and nearby open habitats characterized by lower elevations and gentle terrain, especially during winter.

A wolf. Photo by WDFW.

Wolverine

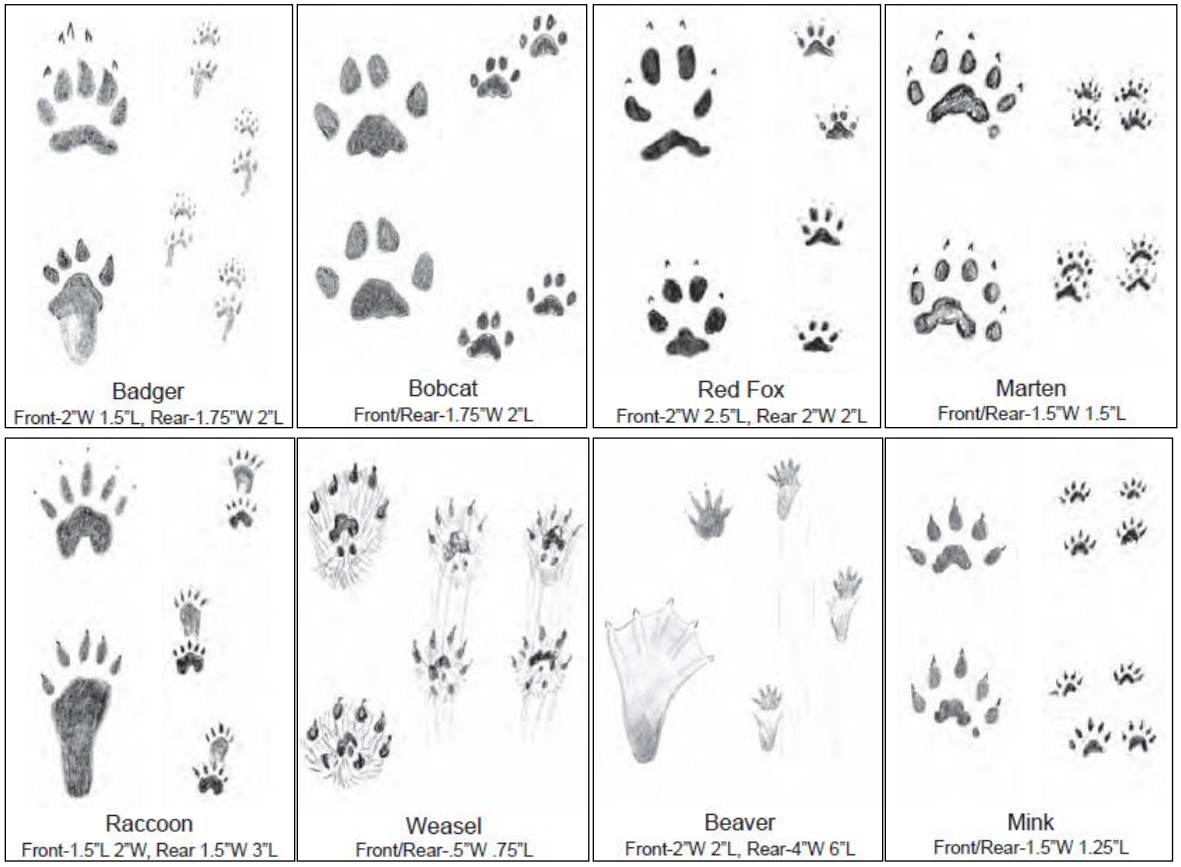
Wolverines are a protected species in Washington. Sightings of wolverines and their sign are documented and verified when possible. The wolverine is a wide-ranging carnivore and the largest terrestrial member of the weasel family. Wolverines are prey generalists and commonly feed on small and mid-sized mammals and ungulate carrion. For an animal of their size (18 to 33 pounds in Washington), wolverines use very large activity areas (i.e., 77 to 770 square miles).

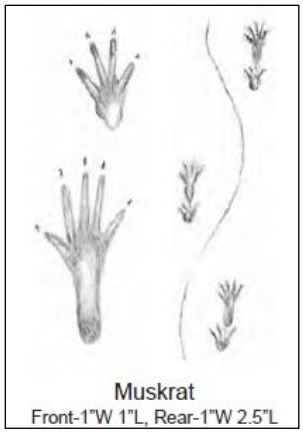
Wolverines occur in the remote mountainous areas of the Cascades and in northeastern Washington. Wolverines avoid humans and developed areas and have recently been detected near Mt. Adams and in the Goat Rocks Wilderness in the South Cascades. In Washington, wolverines occupy alpine and

subalpine-forest habitats, especially within North Cascades National Park and the wilderness areas of Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. If you happen to come across a wolverine or catch one in your sets, please take pictures or video if you can and send them to Jeff Lewis at jeffrey.lewis@dfw.wa.gov or by phone at 360-902-2374.

A wolverine. Photo by WDFW.

Furbearer tracks





Track images provided by: Mary Wentz, Silvertip Productions

Furbearer diseases and parasites

Any successful trapper will come into direct contact with a variety of wildlife. It is important that trappers recognize the potential for contracting diseases from infected animals. Diseases in trapped animals are caused by viruses, bacteria, parasites, or fungi. Diseases in wild populations are not uncommon and, in some instances, may reach epidemic proportions. A person who believes he or she may have contracted a wildlife disease or parasites should consult with a physician as soon as possible and explain to the doctor the possible sources of infection.

These illnesses are covered in this manual to make you aware that they are found in Washington's furbearers, but contraction of these illnesses is rare. For more information, visit the CDC website at cdc.gov/diseasesconditions/.

Some mammals are known to be susceptible to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. For more information, WDFW has produced guidance to prevent human transmission of SARS-CoV-2 to wildlife, available on wdfw.wa.gov/about/covid-19-updates. WDFW encourages all individuals, including hunters, trappers, wildlife control operators, and wildlife biologists who handle or work near wildlife to follow CDC's recommendations for reducing the risk of SARS-CoV-2 spreading between people and wildlife.

Tips for handling diseased animals

- Do not handle any wildlife found dead from no apparent cause.
- Use rubber gloves while handling and skinning wild animals, especially if you have cuts or scratches on your hands.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after handling wild animals.
- Consider dusting or spraying furbearers with insecticide by first placing the whole animal in a plastic bag to contain fleas.
- Report any observations of sick or dead wildlife to the Department online at survey123.arcgis.com/share/a384e90f69744f2e846135a9ce80027 or by email at wildlifehealth@dfw.wa.gov.

- When consulting a doctor for an illness, be sure to explain your direct contact with wild animals.

Furbearer diseases

Eleven diseases that may present a hazard to trappers include rabies, tularemia, plague, sarcoptic mange, raccoon roundworm, toxoplasmosis, leptospirosis, yersiniosis, echinococcus granulosus, distemper, and tick-borne diseases. Trappers should report any observations of sick or dead wildlife to the department online survey123.arcgis.com/share/a384e90f69744f2e846135a9ce80027f or by email at wildlifehealth@dfw.wa.gov.

Rabies

Rabies is caused by a virus which infects the nervous system of mammals. In Washington, bats are the primary wildlife that carry rabies. While rabid raccoon, skunks, foxes, and coyotes have not been identified in the state, the virus can be transmitted from bats to these mammals. Transmission of the rabies virus to humans is due to exposure to saliva after being bitten by an infected animal. The symptoms are similar to the flu and may persist for days. If you suspect you may have come in contact with rabid wildlife or if you are bitten and believe the animal had rabies, either confine the animal or kill it without damaging the head. Save the head for health officials to examine, since this is the only way to test for rabies.

If a trapper suspects exposure to a rabid animal, they should contact their local health department who will help determine exposure, arrange treatment if necessary, and test the animal. If you must touch a suspected rabid carcass, make sure to use disposable gloves and dispose of them properly afterward. For more information see the Department of health (DOH) Rabies webpage at doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/Rabies.

Tularemia

Tularemia is a disease caused by bacteria. Many species of animals can be infected by this disease, including humans. In Washington, tularemia is most often found in beaver, muskrat, and rabbits. A human who contracts tularemia commonly has a high temperature, headache, body ache, nausea, and sweating. A mild case may be confused with the flu and inadvertently ignored.

Tularemia is transmitted in a variety of ways. The bacteria may be contracted by drinking contaminated water or by eating insufficiently cooked meat from infected animals. Blood sucking ticks or deer flies may also spread the disease. With trappers, the disease is usually transmitted by direct contact with the carcass of an infected animal and the bacteria entering a cut or scratch. Trappers handling beaver, muskrat, and rabbits should wear disposable rubber gloves and wash their hands well when finished. If you get sick immediately after handling one of these species, notify your health care provider.

Plague

Plague is a bacterial disease that is carried by rodents such as ground squirrels and wood rats. Transmission of the disease is usually by fleas. Carnivores such as coyotes and bobcats become infected

by feeding on infected animals, from bite wounds from infected animals, or by bites from infected fleas. Although infected coyotes do not usually become sick, bobcats have much less tolerance and may die from plague. Humans are also susceptible to the disease. Trappers run the risk of contracting plague from a carrier flea from a trapped furbearer or by handling a diseased animal with hands that are cut or scratched.

Symptoms of plague include fever, restlessness, confusion, and pain surrounding swollen lymph nodes. It is important to consult a doctor promptly and explain your contact with any wild animals. Failure to treat the illness with antibiotics can be fatal.

Sarcoptic mange

Mange is most prevalent in coyotes and red fox. Mange is caused by a parasitic mite that causes extreme irritation when it burrows into the skin. Early symptoms of mange in furbearers are a flaking and cracking of the skin accompanied by hair loss. Disease transmission is by direct contact with infected animals. It is difficult for a trapper to contract mange from an infected wild animal. However, mites can burrow into your skin and then die, causing severe itching for several weeks.

Raccoon round worm

Raccoon round worm is a common intestinal parasite and can cause fatal nervous systems disease, eye disease, and other problems in various wildlife and domestic animals. The eggs of this parasite are passed in the raccoon's feces. Other animals and human beings are infected after accidentally ingesting eggs. In other animals and human beings, the eggs hatch and the larvae undergo a very aggressive migration to the brain, eyes, and other tissue, causing severe damage and, in some cases, death. The disease can be prevented by always washing your hands after handling live raccoons, traps, and particularly after having been in an area where raccoon feces have accumulated. **Raccoon traps should also be cleaned and boiled after use to kill any eggs which may be attached.**

Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is caused by a single-celled parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii oxoplasmosis*. In the Pacific Northwest (British Columbia), raccoons have been shown to have high prevalence of *T. gondii*. People can become infected with toxoplasma by eating undercooked, contaminated meat, accidentally ingesting of undercooked meat after handling it, not washing hands thoroughly, drinking water contaminated with *T. gondii*, or accidentally swallowing the parasite after contacting infected feces.

When illness occurs, it is usually mild with "flu-like" symptoms (e.g., tender lymph nodes, muscle aches, etc.) that last for weeks to months and then go away.

Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis (lepto) is caused by bacteria that are spread most often through the urine of infected animals. The most common mechanism of infection in people is by direct contact with an environment that has been contaminated with urine from an infected animal. The bacteria enter the body through a

cut/scratch or through the eyes, nose, or mouth. In Washington, lepto is found often in raccoons, skunks, mice, rats, and squirrels. Some marine mammals and fish may also carry the bacteria that cause leptospirosis.

A human who contracts leptospirosis most often has very high fever, headache, chills, muscle aches, vomiting, yellow skin/eyes (jaundice), abdominal pain, diarrhea, and potentially a rash. Some infected people may have no symptoms at all.

Yersiniosis

Yersiniosis is a bacterial infection that is most often caused by eating undercooked meat. In Washington, yersiniosis is associated primarily with larger rodents. Symptoms of yersiniosis in humans include fever, severe abdominal pain (similar to appendicitis), and diarrhea.

Echinococcus granulosus

Echinococcus granulosus is a parasitic tapeworm. *E. granulosus* in Washington has been found in elk in western Washington, and wild canids are the likely hosts. Prevention measures should include avoiding fecal matter from either wild or domestic canines and washing hands after handling canids, especially coyotes. Most human infections result in no clinical signs or illness, but it can also cause slowly enlarging masses in the liver or lungs.

Distemper

The virus that causes distemper in wildlife is not known to infect humans. However, domestic dogs and cats may be able to contract distemper from infected furbearers if they have direct contact. In Washington, distemper is not uncommon in coyotes, foxes, raccoons, skunks, and mustelids (mink, otters, martens, etc.).

Tick-borne diseases

Ticks are small blood feeding parasites that feed on birds, deer, other game species, and sometimes people. Once a tick has crawled aboard a host, they will look for a good spot to burrow their mouthparts into the skin and drink the host's blood. They can feed anywhere from a couple of minutes to several days depending on the tick species. Visit the Washington Department of Health website doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/pests/ticks/tick-photo-gallery for more information on the common ticks found in Washington.

A tick's bite can spread serious and potentially deadly diseases. Luckily, there are only a small number of tick-borne diseases reported each year in Washington. One of the most common diseases they spread is Lyme disease. Hunting and trapping brings you into tick habitat, and ticks can live on the wildlife you harvest, so take precautions to avoid being bitten.

- Before you go, treat clothing and gear with permethrin. Always follow product instructions.

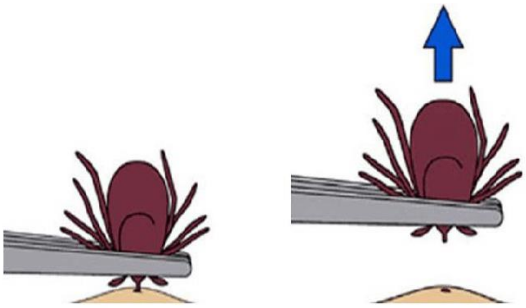
- Wear a long-sleeved shirt and long pants. Tuck shirt into pants and wear gaiters over pant legs and boots to limit access to your skin.
- Watch for ticks when transporting and dressing animals.
- Ticks may drop off the animals to find a new source of blood.
- Check yourself often for ticks and remove them immediately. Ticks can be small and hard to see or feel. Look carefully on all parts of the body. Ticks tend to hide around the head, neck, ears, and body folds such as armpits, behind knees, and groin.
- Take a shower or bath as soon as possible to remove any ticks that may still be crawling on you.
- Remove attached ticks slowly and gently, using fine-tipped tweezers applied as close to the skin as possible.

Most tick-borne illnesses can be treated effectively when detected early. See your doctor right away if you develop a fever, rash, or flu-like symptoms after being in tick-infested areas.

It's also important to protect your domestic animals from tick bites and tick-borne disease. Ask your veterinarian about tick prevention for your domestic animals before they go afield. If you have concerns that your domestic animal picked up a disease, contact your veterinarian.

Safely removing a tick

Make sure to remove ticks promptly once you notice them. The most effective way to remove a tick is to use fine tip tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull upward with steady even pressure. Do not twist or jerk when removing the tick as this could leave the mouthparts in the skin. If the mouthparts do not come out with the tick's body, try to use clean tweezers to remove the left-over mouthparts. After tick removal, clean the area well with rubbing alcohol, soap, and water. Visit your doctor if you develop flu-like symptoms, fever, or a rash within one month of tick removal and inform the doctor of your proximity to furbearers.



How to safely remove a tick. Illustration used with permission from Washington Department of Health.

Save the tick! The Washington Department of Health will identify it!

If you do find a tick, save it! Put the tick and a few blades of grass in a small, hard container. Send it to DOH for identification. It's simple: follow the steps on the submission form found at doh.wa.gov/ticks. You'll help us monitor ticks to better understand the risk of tick-borne disease in our state. On DOH's website, you can also learn more about Washington's ticks and how to protect yourself.

Fur handling equipment

To receive top dollar for their furs, a trapper needs equipment to prepare the fur properly. There are variations on the setup and design of the equipment, and you will want to find out what works best for you. Trappers may also want to check with fur dealers to determine how the dealers would like the furs. If they want raw furs that have not been fleshed, then that may cut down on the trapper's work. Table 3 lists equipment that a trapper will need to completely prepare the furs for sale.

Table 3. Pelt preparation equipment list

Equipment	Pelt preparation equipment description
Beaver boards	These boards are generally made from half inch plywood and allow the beaver fur to be stretched and tacked to the board to dry.
Belly board	This board slides between the fur and perpendicular to the stretching board in the belly area of the fur to make it easier to remove the fur from the stretching board.
Comb or brush	This is used on the finished furs to make them more presentable and remove sticks, burs, etc.
Electric heater or wood stove	Most trappers try to maintain a temperature between 50- and 65-degrees Fahrenheit in their work area. A fan helps circulate warm air throughout the work area. Most trappers use a small electric heater or wood stove to provide the heat.
Fleshing beam	A rounded beam that is used to hold the skin while fleshing. The skin goes over the beam like a sock and a fleshing knife is used to remove fat and flesh. The beam will generally be leaned at an angle against an immobile sawhorse or table.
Fleshing knife	A fleshing knife is used to remove flesh and fat on the skin. If flesh and fat were left on the skin, the fur may fall out or slip. This is also referred to as a draw knife.
Hand scraper	This is also a tool used for fleshing skins. It is a one-handed tool, generally.
Insulated work area	A well-insulated, well heated, and well-lit area to work is paramount to processing fur. This can be a shed, garage, or shop if it is big enough to allow plenty of room to skin your catch, stretch the fur, and allow warm air to circulate completely around stretched furs. A fan can help circulate air in the work area.
Knife sharpener	The knife sharpener can be a whetstone, steel, or a set of crock sticks, but the trapper must be able to effectively use it. Always wipe and wash the blade clean before applying it to a sharpening device.
Metal hoops	Metal hoops allow the beaver skin to be tied to the hoop for drying.
Nails and push pins	These are used to tack the skins to the stretching board or beaver board.
Needle and thread	A needle and thread are used for sewing up holes and cuts in the skin.
Rubber apron and gloves	These are used to protect clothing and hands when handling the skins. They can be disposable or reusable items.
Skinning knives	In general, a knife with a deep belly will help keep you from accidentally piercing the fur. A dull knife forces the skinner to apply too much pressure to cut and often results in a cut hand or a hole in the pelt.

Skinning Table	A sturdy table or bench is required for skinning and stretching. The table should be able to hold a large beaver or coyote as well as several tools without bowing. Any material constructed table should be good but plastic tables clean up easier.
Stretching board	The stretching board is used to hold the shape of the fur while it dries. Each type of furbearer requires a stretching board that is sized to that animal.
Tail stripper	This is used to remove the tail bone from furs on which the tail is retained.
Wire stretcher	This is a wire frame stretching board.
Yard stick	This is used to determine the proper stretching size for a skin.

Pelt preparation

Three things determine the value of a pelt: the current market, the quality of the fur on the hide, and the way it has been handled. Since handling is the only factor you can influence, particular attention should be paid to this part. A good trapper takes pride in producing fur that is clean, well-handled, and uniform in appearance. Fur that has been well handled commands the best possible price because it is easy to grade, handle, and resell. There are certain ways that each kind of animal should be handled to result in the best pelt. The animals usually need to be skinned, fleshed, and dried to go to market. Check with prospective buyers on how the fur should be prepared before preparing the furs.

This section covers basic information on skinning, fleshing, stretching, and freezing furs. Fur Harvesters Auction Inc. has allowed WDFW to use their pelt handling manual for a well done "how to" on preparing your pelts for the fur buyer. This manual can be found at furharvesters.com/publications.html.

Please note that in the Fur Harvester Auction Inc. manual there are several species described that are legal for harvest in other areas but protected in Washington and illegal to harvest here. These species are fisher, lynx, wolf, and wolverine.

Skinning your catch

First, the outside fur of the animal should be dry, and any burrs or lumps of dirt combed out of the fur. Most animals are dried either by hanging them up or placing them on several pages of newspaper and turning periodically. After the animal is dry, you will want to start skinning. There are a couple ways fur buyers like to have the skins prepared so make sure to check with them before you start skinning. The first is "cased furs." This style of skinning is just like removing a sock from your foot. The other is "open furs." Open furs are skinned just like a deer or elk. Trappers should wear protective gloves when skinning to protect themselves from parasites and possible disease transmission.

Fleshing the skin

After skinning, trappers must make sure to remove any flesh and fat that is left on the skin. If left on the skin, the flesh and fat will not allow the skin to dry properly and rot which can make the fur slip or fall out and affect the quality of the fur. To easily remove the fat and flesh, trappers should use a fleshing

beam and fleshing knife. It might be a good idea for trappers to have multiple fleshing beams for different sized animals.

Stretching the skin

Once the skin has been fleshed, the skin needs to be stretched for drying. Stretching is not necessarily the most accurate term because the skins are actually held in place to dry to prevent shrinking or shriveling. Trappers can stretch cased fur skins on wire stretchers or wooden stretchers. Open fur skins should be dried on plywood boards or wire rings. Regardless of how long it takes, the fur should remain on the stretcher until it is completely dry, except for coyote, bobcat, fox, and marten. These skins should be dried until almost completely dry to the touch, then turned back to fur side out and dried for several more days on the stretching board or wire stretcher.

Freezing fur

Many trappers will freeze whole animals, skins, or dried skins to hold them until they can work them up, sell them, or to hold them from one season to the next in hopes that fur prices will increase. There are some problems with doing this which should be addressed so that the trapper doesn't end up with a skin that has no value.

Whole animals can be frozen if you have a lot of freezer space. These animals shouldn't stay frozen for longer than two or three months as the nose and ears will start to freezer burn. Freezer burning is a process which dries out spots or pieces of skin completely, creating an area that will not tan later.

Skins can be frozen and finished up later. This is okay if you do not flesh the hide before freezing, as the fat layer helps prevent freezer burn. They can be held for quite a while using one of two methods.

- Squeeze out all the air, roll them with the fur out, and push them into heavy (3mil) plastic bags before freezing them.
    - Be careful not to stack them so high they cannot freeze quickly.
- Put the pelt in a gallon milk carton, fill the carton with water and freeze.
    - This method keeps the hide from freezer burning for a longer period.

The most successful way to keep dried fur until next year is by freezing. However, dried skins kept in freezer bags will usually have a tell-tale yellow color to the fat deposits, and buyers will downgrade this fur to stale, making it worth half what fresh skins are worth. The longer a skin is held, the less likely it is to tan, making it worth less money.

Marketing of fur

Most fur is sold for use in the garment industry worldwide. It may be used for coats, trim, or linings. Demand for fur differs from year to year depending upon uses and fashion trends. Europe has been the largest buyer of many types of American fur. In the last few years, China and Russia have become

increasingly important in the fur market, with strong competition from U.S. and Canadian buyers. China and Russia have lower tanning and manufacturing costs and are producing an increased quality of finished goods. Changing fashions, emphasis on long or short-haired fur, length of coats, etc. also influences the price of fur.

Individual trappers will have to pick a method or combination of methods of selling fur that best suits their interests and needs. All methods have some advantages and some disadvantages. Selling fur is not much different from playing the stock market; sometimes you come out ahead and sometimes you don't. New trappers are encouraged to contact other trappers, trapper associations, or trapping publications for possible sources of buyers and for marketing advice before selling. A trapper who is up to date on marketing information and understands at least some of the complexities of grading fur is more likely to sell his catch for what it is worth. To get the best price when marketing your furs you should handle the fur correctly, know the current prices of fur, and only trap when the fur quality is prime.

Local sales

There are several choices when it comes to selling your catch. The first is a local buyer. They often are or have been a local trapper and know the fur in your area well. Local buyers usually will buy whole animals, green (skinned but not fleshed or stretched) skins, and/or finished hides.

Advantages of selling locally are:

- The local buyer may purchase the entire lot of fur, and you receive immediate payment.
- You pay no commissions or shipping costs.
- You can sell whenever you want.
- You get to know the buyer personally, and they get to know you.
- The local buyer can give you hints and tips for being successful.

Disadvantages of local selling are:

- You should expect lower prices.
- Some buyers are not good at grading fur or do not know what price they will receive when they resell your fur. Fur prices often fluctuate in a season, making firm prices impossible to maintain.

Selling by mail

Many trappers sell by mail. Licensed trappers will get several price lists and shipping tags from fur houses. Trapping periodicals carry many ads of fur buyers who claim they will pay the highest possible prices with honest grading.

The advantages of selling by mail are:

- You can sell whenever you want without driving long distances.

- The fur buyer will usually buy your whole catch, and you will get payment in a few days.
- There are no commissions taken out, and some buyers will pay postage.
- Most mail buyers will "hold separate" for 10 days or so and will return your furs to you if you are not satisfied with the price. You should always check to make sure they will do this if you have not dealt with the buyer regularly.

Disadvantages of selling by mail are:

- Price lists can be very deceiving, with some buyers quoting higher prices than what they will really pay.
- Buyers may raise the price for one or two furs, but then downgrade the rest of your catch to lower the total price they are paying you.
- Any time you are dealing with one buyer, you have the disadvantage of not having competitive bidding to determine what the market value of your catch is at the time you sell.

Auction sales

Fur auctions are available in Washington to those trappers who want to have their furs priced by several buyers at the same time. You can put a minimum price on your fur and not sell if the bids do not reach that price. Auction houses will generally charge a commission, including on fur withdrawn from the sale without being sold. Also, it often takes all day to get the fur sold. There are a few different auction options for Washington trappers. The Oregon Territorial Council, Fur Harvesters, and North American Fur Auctions take place several times a year.

Advantages of auction sales are:

- They usually offer four to five auctions a year.
- These are large auctions with wide attendance.
- Often there will be more than 100 buyers at a sale.
- Your fur, unless in large lots, is sorted with other fur of the same species and quality into lots, and a buyer can buy exactly what they need for a particular order.
- Your fur will bring the market price, due to the heavy competitive bidding.
- Grading is done by experienced staff to assure that fur is placed in the right lots.
- Auctioneers get more for your fur because higher prices increase their commissions.

Disadvantages of auction sales are:

- The fur sales are held one to three months apart, so you may have to wait to sell.
- Fur that does not meet the minimum price is held over until the next sale.
- Large auction houses charge around 11% commission on sales.
- Market conditions can change between the time you catch your fur and the time it sells.
- Auction fur prices can change between 10 – 50% in a single month if the market is not stable.

Furbearer utilization

Furbearers were historically harvested for more than their fur, and the tradition of utilizing all parts of the animal can continue today. In modern times, it is not as common to eat furbearers, but some are quite tasty when prepared properly. Additionally, the glands of many furbearer species can be turned into lures and perfume. Making the most of the animals you harvest will not only increase the value of the animal to yourself and others, but it may also increase public acceptance of trapping. Unlike with big game commonly hunted for meat, Washington does not have wastage requirements for furbearers. This means that trappers are not required to retrieve meat from their catch. If you choose not to eat the meat from furbearers that you trap, it can be used as bait for other furbearers. All carcasses should be disposed of properly.

When cooking any kind of wild game, one thing that we all must remember is that their meat is leaner than domestic livestock and should be cooked differently. The leaner protein and more robust muscle tissue will require a “lower and slower” cooking approach. Crockpots and/or pressure cookers are great tools to help get tougher cuts of wild game to be more tender. You can find wild game cookbooks online or in bookshops that will give you a good idea on how to prepare tasty meals, and you can modify those recipes for other kinds of meat. The USDA recommends cooking wild game meat to an internal temp of 145 degrees.

Washington State Trappers Association

The Washington State Trappers Association (WSTA) has been a long-time partner with the Department in trapper education. Most of Washington’s education instructors are members of the WSTA. These dedicated volunteer instructors helped WDFW staff on updating this manual.

One of the most popular events of the WSTA is the Annual Rendezvous, currently held in mid-August over a three-day period. The first Rendezvous was held in 1969, two years after the association was formed. Events at the rendezvous include trapping presentations by some of the most knowledgeable trappers in the state. In addition, there are vendors with fur and trapping supplies, two or three raffles, an auction, a contest for the children and the rest of the family, and a membership meeting. Awards are given to the winners of the contests plus awards for members, good food, and a whole lot of camaraderie. Along with the additional events and activities, WSTA puts on a trapper education class which is required if you wish to buy a trapping license.

Visit the WSTA website to learn more about the organization at watrappers.com/index.html.

Wildlife control operator program

The Wildlife Control Operator (WCO) program certifies experienced and professional practitioners who prioritizes abatement methods, including trapping, that is allowed to assist the public with wildlife damage issues and charge a fee. WCO must report their submit their WCO activity separately, and can do so through their WILD ID at fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/login or they can contact SpecialTrapping@dfw.wa.gov for more information. It is unlawful for recreational trappers to trap nuisance wildlife on the property of another for a fee or other compensation without certification as a WCO. If you are interested in becoming a WCO please visit the WCO webpage online at wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/nuisance-wildlife/wildlife-control-operators/faq.

Glossary

Table 3. A glossary of terms used in the Washington state trapper education student manual

Term	Definition
Bacteria	Common one-celled micro-organisms
Body gripping trap	A trap which catches and holds an animal by the body
Cage trap	A trap designed to enclose an animal and usually to hold it alive
Carcass	The part of an animal which remains after the pelt has been removed by skinning
Carnivore	An animal that primarily eats other animals
Carrion	Dead animals available as food for other animals
Carrying capacity	The number of animals that a given area of habitat can support
Cased fur	A pelt that has been skinned by cutting across the hind legs and pulling it down over the body
Coniferous	Types of trees that have needles and cones; coniferous trees usually stay green all year
Colony Trap	A two-door submersion trap. The doors are not mechanically closed, but close by gravity. This trap allows multiple animals to enter the trap.
Cubby	A small enclosure, either natural or man-made, that prevents an animal from getting to the trap bait except from one direction
Droppings	Feces of an animal
Fleshing	The act of removing excess fat and meat from a pelt
Fleshing beam	A large wooden or fiberglass form designed to hold and support the pelt while fleshing
Frostbite	A serious health hazard involving the freezing of the skin or other body tissues
Guard hairs	The long, glossy hairs that overlay and protect the softer, denser underfur
Habitat	The place where wildlife lives; principal components are food, water cover, and space

Home range	The area over which an animal travels in its day- to-day activities
Hypothermia	A serious health risk involving loss of body heat resulting in loss of coordination and possibly death
Leghold trap	A trap which catches and holds wildlife by the foot to either hold it alive or drown it; unlawful for use in Washington state without a special permit issued by WDFW.
Lure	A substance or device used to attract wildlife to a trap
Non-target animal	Species for which a trap was not intended (e.g., protected wildlife, rabbits, etc.)
Parasite	A plant or animal that lives on or in another species without benefiting the host
Prime Pelt	Normally refers to a pelt in which the winter fur is completely grown in and the hair follicles completely mature
Rabies	A serious viral disease of warm-blooded animals transmitted primarily in the saliva of infected animals
Raw fur	A pelt that has not been salted or tanned (may be stretched and dried)
Sarcoptic mange	An infection caused by mites which burrow under the skin
Tanning	The process of preserving a hide by treating it to make leather
Swim Through trap	A double door submersion trap that allows the animal to see through the trap but once it enters the doors spring closed like a cage trap.
Tularemia	A bacterial disease of rabbits and rodents that can be transmitted to humans through cuts or scratches while skinning infected animals

FURBEARER TRAPPING REGULATIONS

Effective from April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026, both dates inclusive

TRAPPER EDUCATION REQUIREMENT

If you are buying a Washington State Trapping License for the first time you must pass the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) exam in safe, humane, and proper trapping techniques. For information on trapper education, contact the Hunter Education section of the WDFW Olympia headquarters office at (360) 902-8111 or see wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/education.

ANNUAL TRAPPING LICENSE

A trapping license year begins on April 1 and ends on March 31 of the next year. Fees below include transaction and dealer fees.

Resident Trapping License $41.60
Youth Trapping License $18.50
Non-Resident Trapping License $200.00
Fur Dealer's License $200.00

Trapping and fur dealer's licenses are available online at fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov and at all WDFW license dealers. Trapping and fur dealer's licenses may also be purchased through the Commercial Licensing program at the WDFW Olympia headquarters office (in person or by mail) for an additional application fee.

STATEWIDE TRAPPING SEASONS

A trapping license authorizes the lethal harvest of furbearing animals for their hides, pelts, or other resources during the trapping season. Furbearers may not be taken from the wild and held alive for sale or personal use without a special permit pursuant to WAC 220-450-030. Any wildlife trapped for which the season is not open shall be released unharmed. Any wildlife that cannot be released unharmed must be left in the trap, and a WDFW representative must be notified immediately. Lawfully trapped wild animals must be lethally dispatched or immediately released. A firearm may be used to dispatch trapped animals where firearm use is allowed. For more information on lethal dispatch, see wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/nuisance-wildlife/trapping and the Trapper Education manual at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/education/trapping.

FURBEARER SPECIES	SEASON DATES	RESTRICTIONS
Badger, Beaver, Bobcat, Mink, Muskrat, Raccoon, Red Fox, River Otter and Weasel	Nov. 1 - Mar. 31 during the current license year	
Marten	Nov. 1 - Mar. 31 during the current license year	CLOSED in Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, and Grays Harbor counties
Red Fox	Nov. 1 - Mar. 31 during the current license year	CLOSED within the exterior boundaries of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie, Okanogan, Wenatchee, and Gifford Pinchot National Forests

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Director
Kelly Susewind

Wildlife Program
Mick Cope, Wildlife Program Director

Olympia Office: (360) 902-2515

Visitors:
Natural Resources Building
1111 Washington St. SE
Olympia, WA

Mailing Address: PO Box 43141
Olympia, WA 98504-3141

Email: WildThing@dfw.wa.gov

Regional Offices:

Region 1
(509) 892-1001
2315 North Discovery Place
Spokane Valley, WA 99216-1566

Region 2
(509) 754-4624
1550 Alder Street NW
Ephrata, WA 98823-9699

Region 3
(509) 575-2740
1701 S 24th Ave.
Yakima, WA 98902-5720

Region 4
(425) 775-1311
16018 Mill Creek Blvd.
Mill Creek, WA 98012-1541

Region 5
(360) 696-6211
5525 S 11th Street
Ridgefield, WA 98642

Region 6
(360) 249-4628
48 Devonshire Road
Montesano, WA 98563

Fish and Wildlife Commission
(360) 902-2267
wdfw.wa.gov/about/commission

Website
wdfw.wa.gov

TRAP CHECK REQUIREMENTS

- Restraining traps (any non-killing set) must be visually checked (via binoculars, trail camera, spotting scope, or in person) each calendar day and captured animals must be removed within 24 hours of capture.
- Kill traps must be checked and animals removed within 72 hours.

IT IS UNLAWFUL TO TRAP FOR WILD ANIMALS:

- With body-gripping traps which include, but are not limited to, foot-hold traps, snares, and conibear-type traps. Specified body-gripping traps identified by WDFW may be used with a special trapping permit to abate human-wildlife conflict under WAC 220-417-040.
- Using game birds, game fish, or game animals for bait, except nonedible parts of game birds, game fish, or game animals may be used as bait.
- Within thirty feet of any exposed meat bait or nonedible game parts which are visible to flying raptors.

IDENTIFICATION OF TRAPS AND DISCLOSURE OF IDENTITIES

Trappers shall attach to the chain of their traps or devices a legible metal tag with either their WDFW identification number (trapper ID or WILD ID) or the name and address of the trapper in English letters not less than one-eighth inch in height. Failure to identify traps is a misdemeanor punishable under RCW 77.15.190. When a property owner, lessee, or tenant presents a trap identification tag to WDFW and requests the identification of the trapper, WDFW shall provide the requestor with the name and address of the trapper. After disclosing the trapper's name, WDFW will also release the requesting individual's name and address to the trapper. It is unlawful to take a wild animal from another person's trap without permission, or to spring, pull up, damage, possess or destroy the trap; however, it is not unlawful for a person to remove a trap placed on property owned, leased, or rented by the person. See RCW 77.32.545.

PERMISSION TO TRAP ON PRIVATE LAND

A state trapping license allows the holder to trap furbearing animals throughout the state; however, a trapper may not place traps on private property without permission of the owner, lessee, or tenant where the land is improved and apparently used, or where the land is fenced or enclosed in a manner designed to exclude intruders or to indicate a property boundary line, or where notice is given by posting in a conspicuous manner.

CLOSED AREAS

Most public lands are open to trapping, but some areas may be closed. Closed areas include, but are not limited to, state and national parks, most federal wildlife refuges, and state game reserves. Trappers should check with land managers prior to trapping. Legal descriptions of state game reserves are found in the game bird hunting regulations at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations and Chapter 220-411 of the Washington Administrative Code.

TRAPPER REPORT OF CATCH

All licensed trappers must report their trapping activity (regardless of success or whether they trapped or not) by April 20. Annual reports must be made using the department's designated Trapper's Report of Catch form or WILD licensing system, found online at fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov. It is the responsibility of the licensed trapper to ensure their report is complete, with all trapping activity and harvest reported. Any trapper not reporting by April 20 will be in noncompliance of reporting requirements. False reports will be considered the same as noncompliance. Failure to report trapping activity is an infraction, punishable under RCW 77.15.160. Licensed trappers that are also certified Wildlife Control Operators (WCO) must submit their WCO activity separately, and can contact SpecialTrapping@dfw.wa.gov for more information.

SEALING REQUIREMENTS FOR BOBCAT AND RIVER OTTER

It is unlawful to possess or export from the state of Washington bobcat or river otter pelts taken in Washington without a WDFW identification seal attached. All bobcat and river otter pelts, on or off the carcass, must be presented to an authorized Department employee or authorized individual under permit with the Department for sealing by April 20. Pelts must be presented in a way that the hide can be sealed. No frozen hides or carcasses will be accepted. Pelts must be fully thawed prior to sealing appointment if previously frozen.

Whomever submits a bobcat or river otter pelt for mandatory sealing must have collected the following appropriate and accurate information from the harvester that is required for sealing: the harvester's name and WILD ID, date of kill, location of kill, sex of the harvested animal, and harvest method.

Whomever brings a bobcat in for sealing must also provide a cleaned and dried complete lower jaw (both sides) for aging before a pelt can be sealed. Bobcats being sent to taxidermists or sold to fur buyers may be sealed prior to jaw submission so long as the individual signs a statement that it is being taken to a WDFW licensed taxidermist or fur buyer and that they will submit the jaw to the department by the April 20 deadline.

Before bringing in the lower jaw, remove as much flesh as possible and allow it to dry in the open air in a safe place, in a cardboard box or paper bag, or in a plastic bag with salt or borax to prevent decay. **It is imperative to label the pelt and jaw so it is clear which pelt belongs to which jaw.** More information on bobcat pelt sealing and jaw collection, including a video demonstration of jaw removal, can be found online at https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/species/lynx-rufus.

Contact a regional office to schedule an appointment for pelt sealing and jaw collection (wdfw.wa.gov/about/regional-offices) prior to bringing in a bobcat or river otter.

INCIDENTAL TAKE OF CANADA LYNX, FISHER, AND WOLVERINE

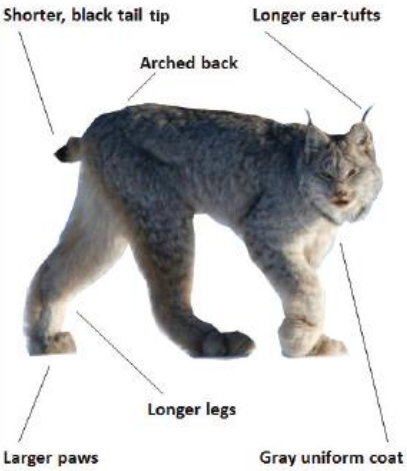
Canada lynx, fisher, and wolverine are protected in Washington. Accidentally trapped Canada lynx, fisher, or wolverine that are uninjured must be released immediately and the incident must be reported to WDFW (WildThing@dfw.wa.gov or 360-902-2515) within 24 hours. The report must include the circumstances surrounding the incident, observed physical and ambulatory condition of the animal, and final disposition of the animal. Any Canada lynx, fisher, or wolverine that cannot be released unharmed must be left in the trap, and a WDFW representative must be notified immediately.

INCIDENTAL TAKE OF FOX

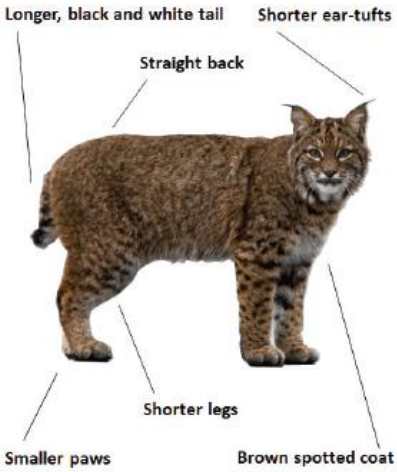
The Cascade red fox is a state-endangered subspecies of fox in Washington. Fox trapping is closed in certain areas to protect this subspecies. Any uninjured fox that is accidentally trapped in areas closed to fox trapping must be released immediately and the incident must be reported to WDFW (WildThing@dfw.wa.gov or 360-902-2515) within 24 hours. Any fox that cannot be released unharmed must be left in the trap, and a WDFW representative must be notified immediately.

This pamphlet is a summary of the trapping seasons and regulations (Chapters 220-400, 220-417, 220-440 and 220-450 of the Washington Administrative Code) adopted by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. This pamphlet does not contain nor is it intended to contain all department regulations. Caution: Emergency regulation changes may occur while seasons described in this pamphlet are in effect and will supersede information contained herein. Area news media will be informed of changes as they occur.

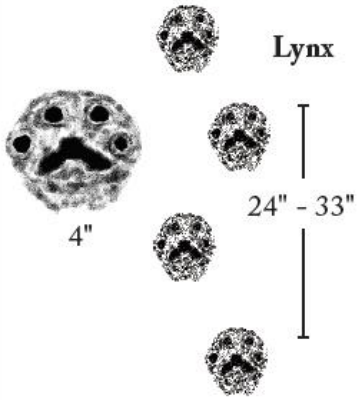
Lynx or Bobcat?

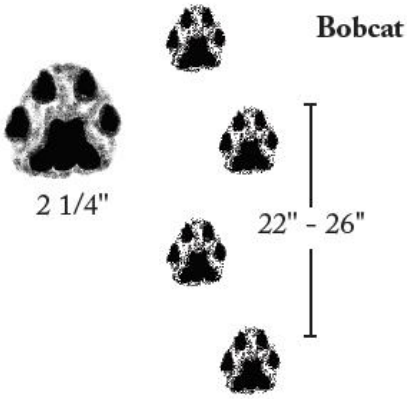


Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*)
Photo by Keith Williams



Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)
Photo by Kevin Pickell





Identification of Fisher and Marten in Washington

Fishers are protected under both federal and state law and may not be trapped or killed.

Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten or mink.

Pelage Colors

Fisher — dark brown with lighter shading on head, back of the neck and back.

Marten — light brown to brown (cinnamon, russet), with creamy brown/ beige face and occasionally chest with darker brown legs, feet and end of tail.

Size

Fishers are bigger, darker and have noticeably longer and fuller tails than marten. Fishers tails average 14-15 inches in length and Martens tails average 6.5-7.5 inches in length.

Ear Shape

Fishers — rounded "teddy-bear" shaped ears

Martens — more pointed ears

Elevation

Fishers and martens overlap in elevation. Therefore, elevation should not be used as an indicator of species presence.

FISHER

Photo by Paul Bannick

MARTEN

WDFW Staff

Trapping Information

Use cubby boxes, with a closed front and 2.5 inch entrance hole, to avoid catching fishers.

Wolverine Identification

Washington Department of FISH & WILDLIFE

Photo by Sabrina Logeais

Wolverines are protected under state and federal law and cannot be trapped or killed.

In Washington, wolverines average 18 to 33 pounds and use very large activity areas (i.e., 77 to 770 square miles). Wolverines occupy alpine and subalpine-forest habitats and occur in the remote mountainous areas of the Cascades and in northeastern Washington. They typically avoid humans and developed areas.

Be sure of identification if trapping other species in wolverine occupied areas. Avoid setting traps where wolverine tracks are observed. Leaning poles for marten traps should be less than 4 inches in diameter and set at a 45-degree (or greater) angle with trap and bait placed at least 4 feet above ground (or snow) level to avoid wolverine.

Photo by from The Wolverine Foundation

Other species commonly mistaken for wolverines include: badger, bear, fisher, marmot, and porcupine. Wolverines can be distinguished by their light colored "mask" across the forehead and around the eyes, and a distinctive blond stipe along their sides.

Front and hind tracks have 5 toes and are 3.5-7 inches long by 3-5 inches wide

WDFW Regional Offices

Eastern - Region 1
2315 North Discovery Place
Spokane Valley, WA 99216-1566
509-892-1001
Counties served – Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Walla Walla, Whitman

North Central - Region 2
1550 Alder Street NW
Ephrata, WA 98823-9699
509-754-4624
Counties served – Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan

South Central - Region 3
1701 South 24th Avenue
Yakima, WA 98902-5720
509-575-2740
Counties served – Benton, Franklin, Kittitas, Yakima

North Puget Sound - Region 4
16018 Mill Creek Boulevard
Mill Creek, WA 98012-1541
425-775-1311
Counties served – Island, King, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom

Southwest - Region 5
5525 S 11th Street
Ridgefield, WA 98642
360-696-6211
Counties served – Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat, Lewis, Skamania, Wahkiakum

Coastal - Region 6
48 Devonshire Road
Montesano, WA 98563
360-249-4628
Counties served – Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason, Pacific, Pierce, Thurston

For more information about the Trapper Education Program, contact our staff in Olympia at (360) 902-8410 or visit our website at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/education/trapping

WDFW is committed to hosting accessible events for everyone. **Request ADA accommodations or language and communication services** (interpreters, written information in other languages, or other services) at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, or call 833-885-1012 or TTY (711), or email CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov. WDFW encourages participants to make requests at least **20 days before the event** to allow time to make the arrangements.

Washington Department of
FISH & WILDLIFE