

MONTANA FUR HARVESTERS

APRIL - MAY = JUNE 2021

SPRING ISSUE

Legislative News

Feral Academy Adventure

Message from FWP

Trapping is wildlife management

Education is Key

Montana Fur Harvesters

2021 Spring Issue

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Montana Fur Harvesters
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*Cover Photo; a Grey Wolf that we
manage in Montana.*

*Below, Larry Rattray and Tom Fieber
at the Northwest Expo in the Flathead.*



7

Bonus sets on a Wolf Line: When a trapper is running a wolf trapping line and living for months in the high country, the daily grind of running nearly a hundred miles or more a day, can get mentally draining.

6 Some important actions have been happening in Helena this Session.



John Wilson, from a water trapper to a full-fledged wolf trapper and making

Footloose’s Facebook page all in one year. Way to go!

15 Otter Success for Feral Academy

By Rachel Doble 



11 See Victor Perez’s take on working our fur



Notes from the Editor

Spring is coming in Northwest Montana!!

Seems like all I do is get finished with an issue and then back under the gun for another deadline. I should be getting used to it, but still can't figure it out. Setting at the computer today looking out to a beautiful sunny 52 degrees wishing I was outside. I always thought that as I retired and got older that things would slow down, that sure has not happened. Seemed that everything else got in the way of trapping.

Running our trapline every other day since December first up to February 22nd, is a daylight to dark job that didn't leave much time for all the other things. I am still running a business, we built a new home for my Granddaughter, reserved booths for upcoming events at different Flathead venues, got ready for the three-day Northwest Expo in Kalispell, working on legislative issue in Helena and trying to keep up with informing all members of those issues. The 20th of March we will be hosting the Columbia Falls Fur Handling Clinic and starting on putting together the fur booth for the Kalispell Gun Show starting on the 26th of March and running for three days. Once we get past that, Region Trapper Meetings will be starting up, one in April and one on May 1st. I keep thinking I will catch up.

Some good news though, we finished our Granddaughters home until it warms up enough to paint exterior and do landscaping. On another front, things in Helena are on a positive note. Thanks to you

who have been sending in comments, making phone calls and testifying in Helena, a lot of trapping bills have gotten through committees. Legislator, Paul Fielder is doing an amazing job. Ed Hebbe IV from the Montana Trappers Association has been instrumental in getting out information in a timely manner and keeping us up to date on what is happening. Thanks to the Republicans in Helena for supporting us down the line. Larry Rattray, Bert Wustner and myself drove to Helena on March 9th and testified before the Senate Fish Wildlife Committee for the SB60, Trapper Education Bill. We had eleven people testify in favor of it and not one anti in the room. That was unusual. More on this later.

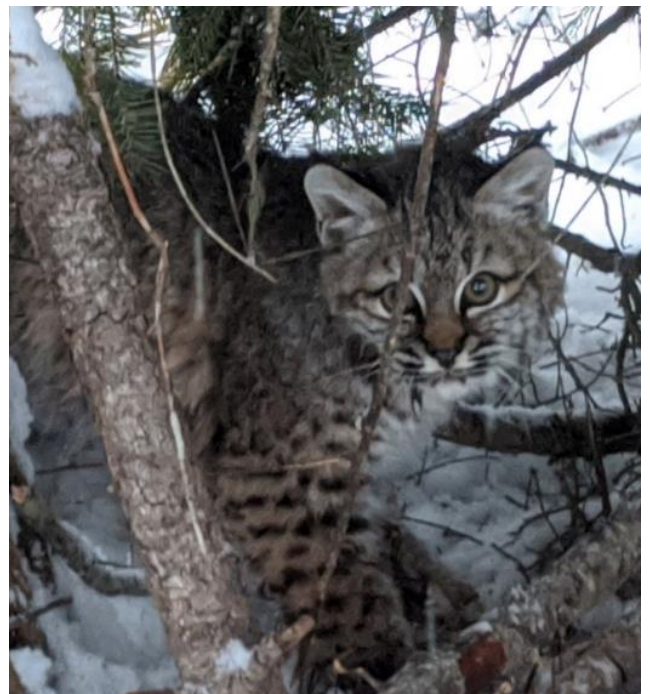
HB505 was tabled in committee, many sportsmen showed up to oppose this bill. This would have given 10 bull elk tags to landowners to use as wanted.

SB60 Trappers Ed Bill passed out of committee unanimously. Passed 2nd reading in the House 99 to 1. Scheduled for 3rd reading on Monday. Just found out the bill has passed and is heading to the Governor's desk to be signed.

I'll provide a bill update later as we have one bill to currently support at this point. All other bills of importance for us are through both chambers and are being returned to the House or Senate and passed on to the Governor.

Last MFH issue was a larger issue thanks to some great articles from Scott Ramsay and Rachel Doble. I received some good emails about them after the magazine can out and request for more electronic versions from new people. I am sure that some of you other members would have some great articles and photos that we would be happy to publish. It is pretty easy to do. Just contact me and I'll help you get started. Scott Ramsay has another article this quarter that you don't want to miss. We need all the advertisers we can get to keep this magazine going. If you happen to know someone or a business that might want to place an ad be sure to mention us. We have very good rates compared to most publications.

Our bobcat quotas were slow to fill over here in region one and two. I had questions from FWP on what I was hearing from other trappers. On my lines we were seeing the cats coming around as usual but most were not committing. We kept a few and



released one. With the prices falling so low we along with some others were not keeping as many and some quit trapping early because of the prices. Did I feel that the numbers were down, not on my line and I never got that from others that I talked to. It will be interesting to see what we come up with at the Spring FWP Trappers Meetings.

We did pick up a black wolf right at the end. It was a good-sized male so we decided to donate it to the Fur Harvesters to raffle off at the end of the Kalispell Gun show on the last day, the 28th of March. Hope we can sell all our tickets. I have him acid tanned and ready for the

Not sure why but Black Wolves seem to be the most valuable of all colors.

winner. He will make a great full body mount or just a wall hanger.



Still waiting to see what happened on the Fisher Project. They should be starting in their breeding season. Jessy Coltrane, biologist for FWP, will be out in the near future checking on Denning Boxes. Each box has a trail camera that hopefully will be recording anything visiting these sites. I expect a report at the May 1st FWP/Trappers meeting. Anyone who has something to protect or complain about, this is your chance.

These are where a lot of discussions are made for the coming future of trapping. Complain at the meetings, not after the meetings when votes are cast.

I am thinking that we will have a busy summer hosting the Fur Booth at various venues so we would sure welcome help from our members. We have yet to have too many at one time. I still have a pile of traps mounded up on the shop floor waiting to be washed and taken care of.

We hosted a Fur Clinic, March 20th, Saturday starting at 9 at Saturday near Columbia Falls. Located at 287 Midnight Ln, from 9am-3pm. Across from Vandevaners Meats on HWY 206 south of town. We had a good turnout, students skinned squirrels to coyotes and many in between. Started the event with a half hour of talking about updates on legislative news. Skinning demos, saving glands, skunk essence extraction, fleshing, boarding and marketing were covered. Dave Wallace, Dan Helterline and Paul Antczak provided great insights.

I haven't heard much on the road setbacks and closure areas that was so contentious last fall. The commissioners requested from FWP personnel for the June Commissioners Meeting. With the new Commission Members, I am hoping that it will be a dead issue. In the mean time we still need to watch carefully how this is presented to the commissioners. As soon as more

information comes out, I will forward it on.

This is changing quickly. We had already met in Region One a couple of times and they have maps of that region showing designations already. We should be getting them around the first of April to review. The idea was to seek input from users of areas to determine public use in the winter trapping seasons. From what I understand, some areas may have no trapping, some with additional setbacks and some with no setbacks or some will stay the same.

Right now, Region 2 is also surveying trappers and houndsmen to come up with ideas of how many users we are seeing on roads and trails where we travel during trapping season. If you know of someone who uses the Lower Clark Fork areas let me know. I think the more information we have from our users the better we can counter the anti's. By **Tom Fieber** 🐾



PLEASE HELP US GET GOOD TRAPPING LEGISLATION PASSED

by Representative Paul C Fielder

HB367 is a bill that, if passed by the legislature, will allow the voters of Montana to decide if they want to amend the Montana Constitution to give Montana Citizens the right to hunt, fish, trap, and harvest wild fish and wildlife by current means and methods while still protecting all private property rights. It also provides for the Montana FWP to manage fish and wildlife under the statutes passed by and the authority delegated by the legislature to the Department.

This HB367 will need to be presented on the House Floor (2nd reading) by me next week. That will be debated by the 100 Representatives and voted on at that time (with no public comment). After it passes, it will be voted on at 3rd reading with no comments. After that it will be scheduled in a Senate committee for a hearing. I don't know when or which committee that will be. That Senate committee hearing is the one where supporters will need to show up.

As soon as I know about that Senate Committee hearing, I will blast out a call for support.

We're getting stuff done this session.

Bills I have sponsored include: HB138, HB144, HB162, HB163, HB224, HB225, HB367, HB468, HB506 which are all either still alive in the legislative process or ready for the governor to sign.

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My HB144 (to protect sheriffs from being removed from office by local health officials) is ready to be signed by the governor, AND

HB506 (to clean up some election laws for the Secretary of State) passed through the House and I had a good Senate State Government hearing on Friday and I expect that bill to easily get to the governor.

It has been a long and INTENSE first legislative session for me, but I'm happy with bills we've progressed, other bills I spoke on and voted for, and the bill that I spoke against and helped defeat. I think it has been time well spent.

Representative Paul C Fielder,
HD-13 Thompson Falls 🐾

Editors Note: By the time you read this most of it will have already happened. I ran this to highlight the work that Fielder and Brown have done to benefit the sportsmen and wildlife management here in Montana. Let's keep supporting them and give thanks for what they have done.



Montana Fur Harvesters
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Kalispell, MT 59903
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Charter Members

\$100 or more for 2020/2021

The following members have gone the extra mile to support MFH. Without this commitment, it would be hard to publish this and host the fur shows.

Tom Gilmore, Tom has donated more time and merchandise to trapping organizations than most. His Fur Handling Clinics in Libby are top notch.

Bill Boehme, Bill has been supporting us as a charter member for years. He is a great seminar instructor and a real member of the trapping community.

Linda Tutvedt, Linda not only joined as a charter member but offered muskrat trapping on her Property this fall. Her generosity was really appreciated by the kids and instructors as well.

Josh Jurek, Josh raised \$400 at the Palooza that he donated back to MFH. Josh is a dedicated trapper and a great artist.

Dan Thingelstad, Dan has donated several wolf pelts that he donated back the proceeds and helps run booths. His work on the Fisher denning Box project was above and beyond.

Volunteers, Larry Rattray, Rick Hawk, Mort Hill, Scott Smith, Victor Perez, Wyatt White have all donated countless hours that benefit the organization.

Raven Van Den Bosch

Raven came for the Squarehead Palooza last summer from Virginia. She is a true friend of the trapping community nation-wide and a joy to be with.

BONUS SETS ON THE WOLF LINE

PART 2

By Scott Ramsay

When a trapper is running a wolf trapping line and living for months in the high country, the daily grind of running nearly a hundred miles or more a day, can get mentally draining. Traveling the same trails, day after day, can get monotonous, if not flat out frustrating, when trying to trap an animal that is as elusive as the wolf. Not necessarily that a wolf is hard to trap, but because they cycle in and out of areas without a lot of predictability. I've heard so many guys state how wolves are the smartest and hardest furbearers to trap. I personally disagree with this statement.

I personally think the coyote is the toughest to trap. My critics usually come back with, "than why don't you catch more wolves?" The comeback is usually, "because there's a lot more coyotes per square mile and spread throughout the countryside". I don't know the exact proportions, but I'd bet that in an area that holds a wolf pack of six, the same area would hold ten times the number of coyotes of the same size area. I don't think coyotes are more intelligent than wolves or vice versa. Wolves are much more aggressive than coyotes, being at the top of the food chain. They're less cautious around traps making them an easier target.

Trail cameras bother coyotes where I trap. They don't seem to faze wolves. Coyotes have been chased and trapped since the good Lord knows, so their fear of anything human throws up a red flag to them. In short, the lack of wolf numbers in any given area, makes them a tough animal to trap or even see, and you've got to be lucky and smart enough to put the trap right in front of their face.

So, what does a guy do to help add excitement to a day on the wolf line?

In September, sprung traps due to deer, elk, and moose keeps one busy doing resets and adjustments to sets.



My sets that didn't contain bait, and / or sodium benzoate, didn't have issues with ungulates, so early in the season, I set more of those out. An example of one of these sets would be a pee post set. Using focal points near travel routes that wolves use to mark their territory, would be a good example. There are natural posts where they always check and mark when passing through, and artificial sets that a trapper can set up himself.

I cheat by using my male dog to find the natural marking posts. I let him lead the way while traveling by either foot or by ATV. When he comes to a natural pee post that a wolf uses, he always sniffs, starts drooling, and lifts his leg and marks the spot himself. That's a spot that I need to place a trap. If I come



to a meadow or an opening that has distinct trails that are used by wolves, and it doesn't have a natural focal point that a wolf might or might not notice, I make my own. I'll put a large rock, stump, or even plant a small tree somewhere next to a natural trail. I then spray the object I'm using as a focal point with some type of urine. I believe coyote, fox, bobcat, cougar, or even deer and elk urine work equally as well. I also encourage my dog to urinate in that spot too. The more smell, the better, in my opinion. Having the object stand out in the landscape is key here. It will attract all kinds of predators to come by and smell it. Once a predator knows a marking post is there, it will be checked every time they come by. Especially the ever-aggressive wolf that wants to know everything that's passing through and living in their territory. It's the calling card.

Another issue one might have on the line is nontarget predators, such as fox and coyotes, that are attracted to one's sets. When trapping wolves, one needs to have deep dirt holes. I usually make them about a foot deep. Putting the bait and lure clear to the bottom of the hole prevents the wolves from reaching and pulling it from the hole. They aren't necessarily interested in eating it, from my observations on camera, but they want to roll in everything they can find that stinks. If they roll in it at your set, they'll most likely set your trap off and all you'll catch is hair and educate the critter at the same time.

When a fox or coyote starts digging at your hole, they're eventually going to uncover your trap and dig at it out of curiosity. This will expose the pan cover and / or jaw. Game over! Now the trap needs remade. I occasionally catch coyotes in my wolf traps, but rarely get fox due to my pan tension being right at or near ten pounds. My solution is to put other sets on the approach, but not directly in what might be the wolf's direct trail. This usually catches the smaller, incoming thieves. A wolf will always kill and tear up any other predator that's it finds in a trap, but it's only when they

get to the trap before the trapper does. I can't put out fox sets till mid-October, so just have to put up with their frustration till then. Once the fox season opens, I start picking them up and eliminating the issue.

Running long lines creates voids in travel throughout each day. From mid-October through the first of November, when the snow starts falling,

I'm always looking for marten sign in the fresh snow. I mark every location on my GPS unit, and once I have some obvious areas mapped out, I start putting my marten boxes out. This is a solid two to three-week process. The bulk of room the marten boxes take up on an ATV, trapping trailer, or pickup truck bed, limits the number of boxes one can put out daily. Especially when you're putting out over a hundred boxes. I don't pre-bait or lure any of my boxes. I think a martens' curiosity is reversed once they've found the source of any smells. Once November came, I started setting and baiting the marten boxes, and my time on the wolf line would have some added bonuses.

I use three types of marten boxes. The wooden, horizontal box, the mail tube, and the wire, collapsible box. My favorite is the wooden horizontal wood box. They take up more room on your rig, but seem to have less refusals at the set. If they have one spring slot for a 110 conibear, I put it about chin high on a wide based tree. If the box has two slots for a 120 conibear, I have to put it on a narrower tree so the inside spring will clear the tree, or place it on a running pole, wired to the tree, at close to a 45-degree angle. These wooden boxes are easy to bait and the small square traps fit nicely right into the openings and the springs lock them in. I prefer using 120's for a quick kill, but the 110's are efficient. Using a conibear pan on your trap, pretty much guarantees a good suitcase catch. A foothold trap can also be used in the wooden horizontal boxes. I prefer a #1 ½ but a #1 will work. These traps also protect your traps from the snow.

The second box I use is the mail tube / newspaper boxes. These work



well on running poles with a 120 at the opening. Cutting slots in the box secures the springs. The bait is protected from the weather and the boxes are fairly cheap, and they last forever. The only negative besides their bulkiness, is that, occasionally, the springs don't always hold tight and slip out of the slots.

The collapsible wire cages are easy to carry. Many can be carried in a 4-wheeler box. I build 1" x 1" square wire cages that I put vertically on trees about chin high. They disperse scent well and are visual. The top needs covered to keep snow out of the set. I use evergreen branches and set a rock on top to secure them. The baits are more susceptible to the elements, but it works well. A 120-body gripper is placed in the opening at the bottom and secured by a stick through the jaw and pressuring the springs against the cage. I've found that the marten prefers the horizontal boxes and you'll have more refusals with the vertical cages.

Marten are a very selective reproducer and susceptible to human activity, especially logging. They prefer old growth timber with plenty of ground debris, such as logs and rocks where squirrels and rodents tend to live. They feed on rodents that are denned up in the winter. They also feed on grouse and other birds and will take on a snowshoe hare. Northern Idaho marten numbers have somewhat diminished due to logging activity, an increase in fisher populations, and some over trapping. A martens' litter is small (3-4) and due to their susceptibility, its good for even 1 or 2 kits to survive. They're a unique creature, part of the weasel family, and have very silky fur. I pursue them more for the wilderness experience, over the fur check. The prices have

been low in recent years, so it's best to take limited numbers, avoid females by keeping your sets at least 3 feet high and please, don't be greedy.

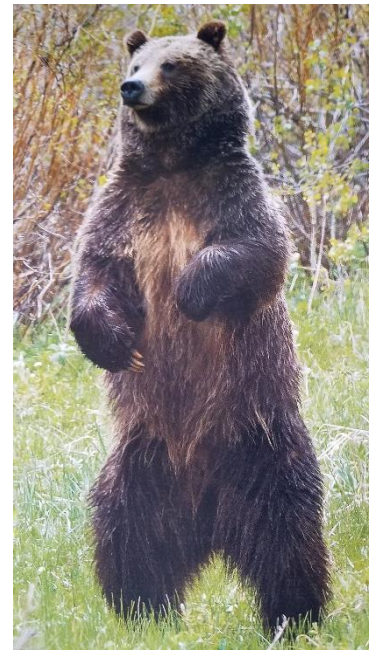
Whenever I crossed a bobcat track in the snow, it would be mapped on my GPS unit or even occasionally flagged on the route. Idaho's bobcat season doesn't open till mid-December, so building cubbies well before the season, makes putting out cat sets much more efficient once the season opens. Because of deep snow, I rarely use anything besides cubbies in mid-winter, unless I'm in Washington (cages only) or trapping in the desert, giving one the ability to use a variety of sets.



By combining activities to ones' wolf line, especially once snow hits, a trapper can create some variety on that line. The wolves are the gold, but coyotes, fox, marten, and bobcat are always great bonuses and a great way to overcome the time between your wolf sets. Also, if you know where there's beaver plugging up a creek and need some great bait, throw a set in for them too. If you're carrying a gun, take an occasional grouse home for dinner. Eliminate the dead time and the quality of your experience will turn into more great memories and a little bonus on your fur check. Tight chains.

By **Scott Ramsay** 

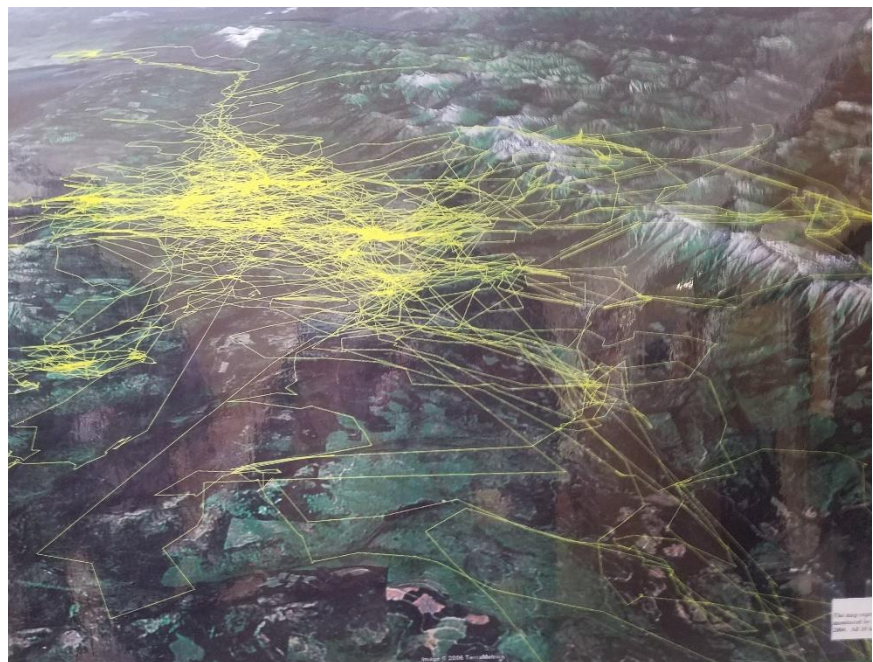




By Victor Perez

What is this? might be one of the questions you are asking, so let me tell you, for the past 3 years I have had the amazing opportunity to be a volunteer instructor for Montana Fur Harvesters alongside some great mentors in specific Tom Fieber who has thought me a lot throughout this past few years. Montana Fur Harvesters promotes and preserves fur harvesting and its heritage in Montana as both a sport and industry through education and activism like this weekend where we spend the weekend interacting with the public at the 2021 Montana Sportsman's Expo. One of my greatest takeaways from every event we attend is the reaction of kids and adults when they get to learn about their local wildlife and actually feel what the fur feels like. It brings me back to when I was in their shoes 4 years ago. I was completely fascinated and hungry to absorb anything that had to do with the outdoors and to this day I still get 100% excited when I get to learn something new or share the little that I know.

Grizzly Bears and trap lines may produce some interesting days, The grizzly bear population has really grown in the past few years here in Western Montana. From the northwest to the southwest there seems to be one everywhere. I have had lots of bear encounters over the years and have a lot of respect for them. We may be encountering more of them in the near future and we need to be aware of their presence. I recommend carrying bear spray at all times before they go into hibernation. Below is a photo of the Swan Valley, the yellow lines are the travel routes of ten collared griz over a three year-period. Very little time is spent out of the valley. So much for not crossing roads.





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Columbia Falls Fur Clinic 2021 is in the books. We had a good turnout and had some great conversations with the students. Shawn and Amber Meuli offer their shop for these events and are great hosts.

We processed flying squirrels, ermine, martin, fisher, muskrat, beavers, coyote and skunk. Glands and essence was saved and



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a catch-pole when releasing animals. Normal trapping regulations and procedures remain in place, but please take precautions to eliminate potential transmission. As always, FWP is available to assist in release when needed or in situations where the trapping regulations require notification of the department. Regional FWP office phone numbers are available [online](https://www.fwp.mt.gov) at [fwp.mt.gov](https://www.fwp.mt.gov).

Next time someone tells you that wolves only kill the weak and the sick, they are probably the same ones who say grizzly bears won't cross highways. They are also the ones that claim that kids and dogs are being killed by traps. Data shows that dogs killed by traps are a small fraction of the dogs killed by wolves. They claim that wolves don't impact our undulant herds.

Enough said.

Tom Fieber 🐾

This hooped beaver was donated by Taxidermist and member Scott Smith. The funds generated will go to protecting trapping rights and education. Thanks for all you do



Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is asking trappers, researchers, and others in close contact with live felids (cats) and mustelids (weasels) to be conscious of the potential to transmit COVID into wild populations with unknown consequences.

COVID has been documented being transmitted from humans to cats and weasels in captivity and the

consequences for wild populations is unknown.

Potential transmission would be most likely where researchers are live-capturing and releasing animals or in situations where a trapper might release an animal. Of particular note are lynx as they are designated as a federally threatened species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and FWP are asking trappers to carry with them and use gloves, a mask, and

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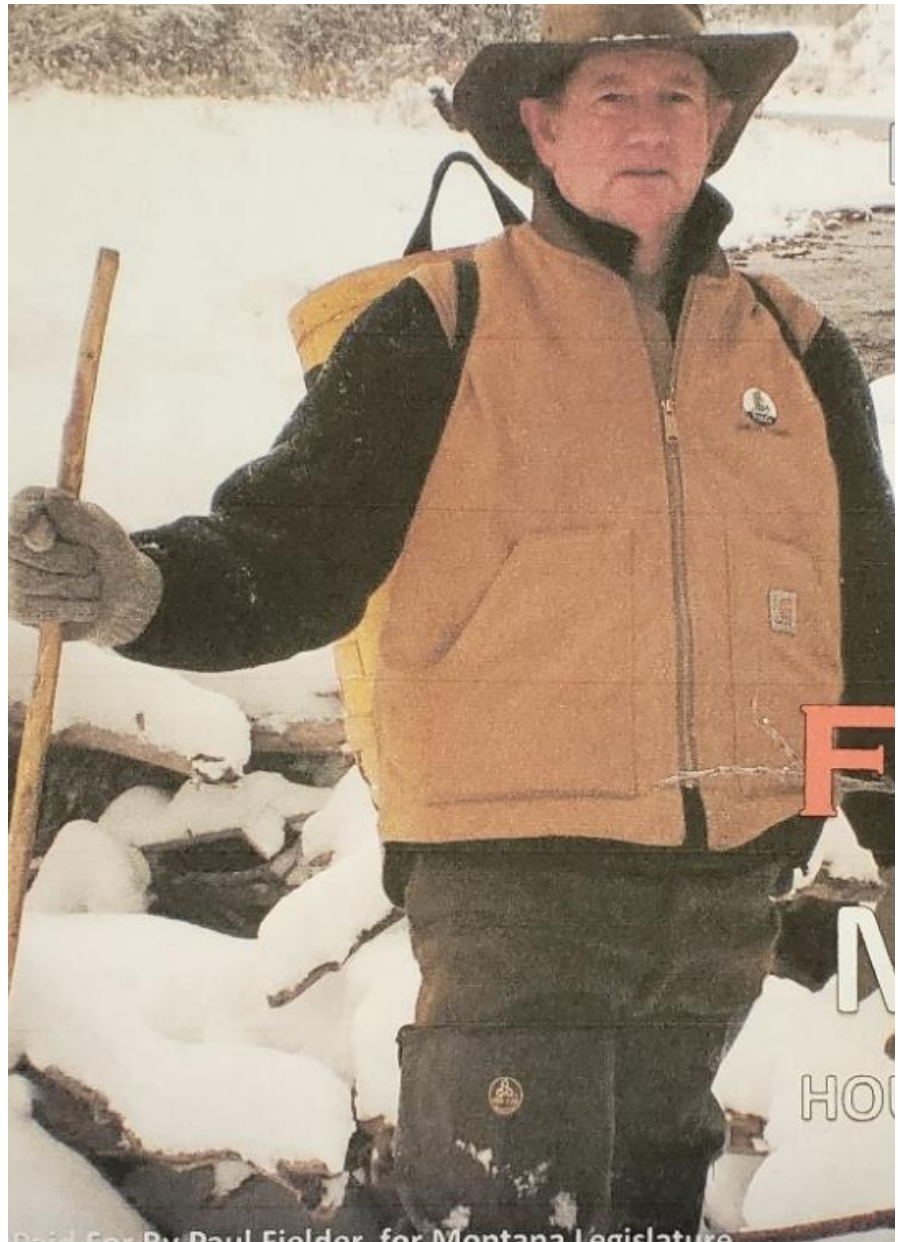
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I spoke against and helped defeat. I think it has been time well spent.

Representative Paul C Fielder, HD-13
SB 60 - Mandatory Trappers Ed - Passed the Senate FWP Committee: 7 to 0
HB 224 - Allow Snaring of Wolves - Passed the House FWP Committee: 12 to 6 - mostly on party lines, with one D voting yes and one R voting no
HB 225 - Set Wolf Trapping Dates of first Monday after hunting season to March 15: 12 to 6 - one D voting yes and one R voting no. Exactly the same as 224.





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In closing.

Things are happening so fast right now. Since I started putting together this issue my presidents report is already past history. Since then, we have completed three major events. The legislature has surpassed our wildest dreams and still going. I have brought many of these items to past commission meetings and to regional meetings over the years. It felt like most were never going anywhere but kept at it. The Republican party almost always passed bills for sportsmen but Democratic Governors would veto them. This current session has been a God send for sportsmen here in Montana. Thanks to Republican Governor Gianforte bills passed by legislators are being signed into law. Representative, Paul Fielder has been the driving force bringing these issues forward and deserves all our support.

It is early in the process on how and when this will all come into new regulations that will affect trappers and houndsmen. We will try to keep updating members as we learn more.

The other issue we are still working on is the threat of closing more roads and areas to trapping by the Anti's. Meetings are on going and hopefully the new FWP Commission will keep wildlife management in the hands of our local FWP department and not let outside interests dictate policy .

Otter Success for Feral Academy

By Rachel Doble 🐾

This was our second season getting into water trapping as an integral part of our homeschool routine. It had become a family favorite because we all got to contribute in some aspect or another. The previous season we had successfully trapped twenty-three beaver and several muskrats.

This season, we hoped to harvest our first otter; ambitiously setting our goal at 3. Three being the quota per person for our region.

We got right to scouting the local waterways for fresh activity before the season even started. Once we decided on an area, we would explore the terrain. Assessing it for the proper gear needed to trap our targets. We had an assortment of traps to choose from: drowning cables with weighted bags, homemade drowning rods with "T" stakes for the TS-85 footholds, a half dozen or so of 330 body grips as well as some snares.

The first location was along a narrow river on private property.

we discussed our checklist, making sure we had what we needed. Sage helped latch the shoulder straps on my waders and grab the container of homemade beaver lure while Sawyer grabbed the ax and started collecting guiding sticks for us to use.

As we navigated our way back down to the water the kids ran off to



My husband had worked for the gentleman who owned the land, which made getting permission easy. We were welcomed with enthusiasm and told that the anchored in the deep water on the other side. We got to work, working together as we made each set. After those were done, we set 3 more traps along the bank of the main river. There was a section where beaver were clearly entering and exiting the water. Here, we placed a foothold gang set with 2 drowning cables using our lure on a bright piece of natural wood as an attractant on a mock castor mound.

The last set for the evening was a fully submerged 330 in a natural travel corridor along the river bank. It took about an hour to set the area. The next morning, we eagerly returned to check our sets. The kids rushed out of the pickup and down the path toward the crossover. Once they realized the traps were undisturbed, they sighed with disappointment then headed off to the next spot.

Sure enough, the mountains were awakened by cheers and proclamations of a successful harvest. Sawyer discovered it first, but in his excitement, rushed to the conclusion it was another beaver. Sage however corrected him and pointed out the distinct difference in the tail. The

damage was becoming problematic and the fish population was dwindling from depredation.

After exploring the area more thoroughly we returned to the pickup to gather our gear and put waders on. There was obvious beaver activity and clearly defined channels indicative of otter. The kids felt right at home

knowing the essentials for what we would need. Dillyn found my long-sleeve yellow waterproof gloves for me while Josh got busy loading the traps into our beaver bag as otters' long, dense tail extended down the channel of water. The 330 performed flawlessly. It was our first otter, and we did it together! It was a memorable moment filled with adrenaline and gratitude.

This was only the beginning of a successful trapping season for Feral Academy.

Josh had to return to work in Sitka soon after. So we pulled our traps and planned a new area to target, that was closer to home and more conducive with our homeschool and domestic duties. Now it would be just the kids and I on the trapline for the next several weeks. The second location was one of my personal favorites from the previous year. We had taken nine or

ten beaver from this spot. Plus, the scenery was just breathtaking. Each morning I looked forward to the short hike in. And when the weather was nice, the sunlight would dance along on top of the current, stirring up the smell of beaver castor in the air.

This season, however, we discovered new & different sign there. Sage found an otter toilet that wasn't



play and explore further. There was a natural bend in the river where a distinct channel travelled through a little meadow. This was an ideal location for a 330 that wouldn't require much setup. Further up the channel, into the thick rush, a crossover offered another prime spot for a 330; along with a blind foothold on the dam that would be

there previously. The terrain and river



dynamics had changed so we adapted along with it. Now with obvious otter activity, we set the best pinch points on the outcropping they appeared to be using. Two footholds submerged in shallow water on each side, attached to drowning rods placed in the deepest area of water.

A little further upstream we set one more TS-85. We placed it at the base of an otter slide just a few inches below the surface. It was hooked on the third drowning rod the kids had packed in. They helped gather some branches to use for guiding sticks as I anchored it off and looked it over once more.

Satisfied with our sets we decided to head home to have lunch and continue our day.

The following morning brought renewed energy. We all enjoyed the anticipation and the thrill of trapping. The sense of accomplishment when our strategies paid off was very rewarding. Not only that, the fresh air and exercise was another positive perk that set the mood and gave us motivation for the day ahead.

The morning came quick with no complaints as we hurried out the door. The day was warming up with a bit of sun peeking through scattered clouds. Rain was in the forecast so we wanted to get home before we got too wet or cold. I knew we had good odds with the conditions and the sets we made so I

made sure to bring a pack frame and a .22 along with our trapping gear on our check. Like usual, the kids raced ahead, each wanting to be the first to declare “a hit” or “a miss.” To their surprise they discovered an alarmed otter. It was connected to a drowning rod with a solid front foot catch. Incidentally, the otter didn’t drown because it dislodged the end of the drowning rod from the river bed and was waiting in the shallow water when we got there. Once it knew we were there it got extremely agitated and aggressive. I knew I needed to dispatch it quickly and properly. Which is easier said than done sometimes! And this happened to be one of those times!

This otter was in “fight or flight” mode and he was wreaking havoc on the rod and “T” stake. I figured it would be best to get the otter pinned on land to get a clean shot. But naturally this otter wasn’t going to make it easy for us.

The kids were wide-eyed and impressed with this magnificent water

animal. They respected its strength and desire to live. They understood that they were witnessing an intense, very important event that had valuable life lessons for them.

I used the strength and agility of my right side to control the otter attached to the end of the rod then with my dominant side, I steadied my sights on my target. I took the shot when the opportunity presented itself. The moment was intense. It was another accomplishment and new experience on the Feral Academy Trapline.

We removed the otter from the trap. Then sat on the edge of the river admiring and examining it. Learning, hands-on about the special anatomical adaptations this unique animal has, as well as how ferocious it can be in survival mode.

Once we finished appreciating our luck with otter number two, we went to the next unchecked trap to discover a 40 plus pound beaver! It was a very rewarding day on the trapline for our little homeschool family. One that will be cherished & shared by each of us.

By Rachel Doble 🐾

Rachel and family teaching 4H kids some muskrat trapping lessons.



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