

# MONTANA FUR HARVESTERS

April 2023  
Spring issue

**Muskrats  
for  
beginning  
Trappers**

**Getting kids involved**

**Winters Grip**

**President's Message**

**Annual Spring Trapper/FWP Meetings**

**Safety and First Aid**



## Montana Fur Harvesters

### 2023 Winter Magazine

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Cover Photo, Muskrat  
Below: Larry Rattray with a  
Montana wolf. It was the wolf's  
second visit to the set.



*March 24<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> Kalispell*

Spend some quality time at the Gun Show. It will be a nice break from the trapline. If anyone would like to do a demo, let me know to schedule your time.



## Notes from the president.

News from the Northwest by Tom Fieber

Is spring really coming? March 15<sup>th</sup> and I pulled my final wolf lines. This was the first year that I had to use snowmobiles everyday on the lines. Started out with foot and a half on day one and that's about what was left on last day. Now comes all the cleanup and putting stuff back. Washing road salt off the snowmobiles and trailer, tools and equipment. Thanking all the landowners for letting us trap their lands and helping to keep access open.

Just finished up my wolf lines so hopefully I will be able to keep up better on all the upcoming events. Now that covid is pretty much over, everyone is getting back to all these in-person public events. Hunter/Bowhunter Education is moving back towards in-person classes and field days and Trapper Education will be offered around the state. MFH will be hosting FWP Advanced Skills events starting soon. Our fur shows at schools went really well, our presence at the **Foundation 4Wildlife Management Banquet** was productive and raised a lot of funding for their program. Now we are working with **Rockin WK Inc** for their Banquet coming up soon. By the time you read this it will be over. Both organization have been raising funds to help sportsmen cover some of the costs of harvesting wolves. For many of the wolf trappers, it is how we can recoup some of the fuel costs.

I want to express our gratitude to the **Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, Montana Trappers Association and the Montana Fur Harvesters** for trying to keep us up to date on what is happening over in Helena during the current Legislative Session. I was asked to testify in Helena on one occasion and have sent in dozens of emails. In my opinion, sportsmen are doing fairly well. Some of the bills I would have liked to see pass were dropped for various reasons.

**Local houndsmen** called for a meeting with the FWP Directors office to be held in Kalispell recently. The meeting was about change to a bill on hunting bears with hounds. Chief of Staff, Quentin Kujala, hosted and did a good job of moderating. He explained that a lot of what is going on is that Montana and Wyoming are trying to get Grizzly Bears delisted so they are being careful not to do anything to derail the ongoing process. Not all agreed, but the majority of those present did think that it was important to support

Governor Gianforte's efforts on that front. Gianforte has done so much for sportsmen already that we do need to do what is best in the long run.

Currently, the legislature has started the second half of the session. I am sure that we will be calling for more support and comments that will be beneficial to wildlife management.

## SPRING TRAPPER MEETINGS NEWS!

Important that trappers and sportsmen attend and let us know your thoughts. If you don't show up you can't complain later. As subjects come up, we discuss and comment then a vote is taken. All comments are heard but we can't act on all of them. Some will be 180' from someone else's. Don't be offended if the vote goes the other way, the majority rules. Many issues are covered, quotas and season dates can be affected.

As of now, our Spring Trapper Meetings with FWP are scheduled for; **Region One**, we have had to schedule an evening meeting due to other conflicts. The plan is to start at 6:00 PM at the FWP office on Meridian on April 11<sup>th</sup>. Jessy Coltrane should have all the data by then to present to us.

**Region Two** will be hosted at the FWP Office in Missoula on April 8<sup>th</sup> starting at 9:00 PM. Tyler Parks will be covering furbearers and wolf harvests. If nothing else, come and meet the FWP employee's that we work with. You will find that they are great to work with and get to know. We may not always agree with them on all issues but remember those in Helena are the ones that have the final say. **Here are final stats for the state**

### State Furbearer & Wolf Harvest 2022-23

- Bobcat-732
  - 5 year average (2018-2022) -1123.6
- Fisher-4
- Marten-482
  - 5 year average (2018-2022)- 508.6
- Otter-62 ( Season still open)
  - 5 year average (2018-2022)- 80
- Wolves-258 (139 trapped including 11 snared)
  - 5 year average (2018-2022)- 291



and **Region 2**, the season just ending. Comparing this year to last year in region 2, I see that Bobcat harvest was down by 24. Fisher was up by 2, Martin was up by 95, Otter was down by 18 and wolves was up by 21.

R2 2021-22 Furbearer & Wolf Harvest

- Bobcat-119
- Fisher-2
- Marten-134
- Otter-28
- Wolves-69

R2 2022-23 Furbearer & Wolf Harvest

- Bobcat-95
- Fisher-4
- Marten-229
- Otter-10
- Wolves-90

Even though region 2 wolf harvest increased, statewide it decreased from 273 in 2021 to 258 this season. From what I am seeing, wolves are getting tougher to harvest as they learn to adapt.

**Region 1 data**, final results have not yet been printed out but final harvest on Bobcats was 207, Martin 147 and otter 32. Data on wolf harvest listed on chart. There was concern that low harvest rates on bobcats may call for lowering the quota but that may have been addressed. Montana Wildlife Program Manager, Nathan Kluge, is planning to attend the meeting on April 8<sup>th</sup> in Missoula and 11<sup>th</sup> in Kalispell. He will address statewide issues. And if time allows, talk about upcoming studies planned.

I am concerned that we normally have these meetings running from 9am to 2pm, 5 hours, and that we will be trying to cover this in a couple of hours.

2022 License Year Wolf Harvest PRELIMINARY DATA*				
Types of Mortality	All Montana	% of total harvest	Region 1	% of total R1 harvest
Car/Train	7		1	
Livestock Protection or SB200	5		0	
Unknown	2		0	
Natural	1		1	
Illegal	4		2	
Hunter	122	46.7	33	35.9
Trapper	139	53.3	59	64.1
Wildlife Services Control	23		0	
Total	303		96	
Harvest Total	261		92	
*unofficial summary data as of 3/22/2023, results may change given new or adjusted information until annual report is finalized				

**Last year’s Raffle Winner.** Adam King, retired law enforcement officer and native Montanan, won the 2022



MFH raffle presented by MFH Treasurer Kim Davie.

## Outdoor Year-Round Safety

By Kim Davie

At the Trapper Education course this past fall, many experienced trappers told stories of being out on a trap line and the challenges they have faced. Bob Sheppard related an experience when he got both of his hands caught in a trap. I felt cold terror thinking about the situation if he had not had a trapping partner with him that day.

Having a trapping partner is the number 1 safety item you can have, but many folks go out alone, including me. The arctic temperatures we have seen this year have made the outdoor experience an even greater challenge. Spring can be deceiving with balmy temps one minute and a sudden blizzard the next. It is easy to get complacent and leave important safety items at home.

I thought it would be a good idea to review the top safety items to have year-round. In your backpack:

When I go out by myself, I take the gear I would need to survive a night in sub-freezing temperatures which includes a small metallic emergency poncho that could be used as a shelter and light-weight down bag. I also carry a very simple first aid kit that could treat a fairly severe wound.

According to lifeoutdoors.com the number one item you should carry is a UHF/VHF radio or SAT phone. I got certified as a ham radio operator, but I've been leaving my radio in my vehicle. When thinking about the worst case scenario, having something that can reliably call for help is your best chance at getting rescued and surviving. A good handheld radio is about \$120 and a decent SAT phone runs \$500. If nothing else, a cell phone.

The other item I tend to forget is a headlamp. I know what it feels like to be caught out in the dark when it takes longer to return to your car than planned. Having a light can help in an overnight situation or can help prevent needing to stay the night in the first place.

In your vehicle:

I have a jeep and it gives me confidence to get out in the back country- but since I am by myself, I could get into a situation where I need to spend the night. I carry a small inflatable sleeping pad and a large sleeping bag so that at least I am comfortable if I get stranded.

Extra food and water. I have a bag that is always packed with food and water that I can grab. After an outing, I bring it in and restock as needed so it is ready to go. Good sources of protein that keep well are nuts, tuna, jerky and packaged food bars. Quick

energy sources like chocolate, cookies and plantain chips come in handy. Pack your favorites and throw in a life straw, since water is even more important than food.

Ice scraper. I keep my vehicle in the garage, so I wasn't carrying an ice scraper with me. After a day of hiking, I came back to ice and snow on my windshield and didn't have anything to scrape it off. I used my glove and turned the defrost on high, but if I had an emergency this would have wasted precious minutes before I could get on the road. I also had a lot of snow and ice falling down from the roof blocking my view which could have caused an accident.

Use this checklist the next time you are planning an outing:

Backpack:

- ☐ Radio or SAT phone
- ☐ First Aid Kit
- ☐ Emergency blanket or bivi tarp
- ☐ Headlamp
- ☐ Down Jacket
- ☐ High calorie food and extra water or water purifier
- ☐ Pocket Knife/Multi-tool

Vehicle:

- ☐ Clothing layers, extra shoes/socks
- ☐ Blanket or sleeping bag
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Extra food and water
- ☐ Flashlight
- ☐ Road flares, Shovel
- ☐ Fire starters
- ☐ Ice scraper
- ☐ Jumper cables

Thanks, Kim Davie 🐾

## Marketing your furs.

Fur sales data is showing some improvement, see the report on Idaho's fur sales on page 8.



*MFH Member, Jim Nesladek of Polson donated this beautiful hand carved native Westslope Cutthroat Trout. This trout and our ungulates often share our native high elevation habitats. Jim has donated his works for the past two years to help cover reimbursement cost for several wolves.*

## Mandatory Trapper Education Classes

will be coming again this season. At present we have one class scheduled for June 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Region One FWP Office in Kalispell. Some trappers will be required to take them. Check with FWP Regulations. We are looking for trappers to get certified to teach classes. Contact FWP.

Tom Fieber 🦌

## 2023 Raffle Rifle

Our Rifle for this year's raffle is ready. We were able to get the ever-popular Smith&Wesson AR-15 Super Kit MOE. **Westland Seed of Ronan** has assisted in procuring these for us. The last two years they were not available so it's nice to have them again. We have sold out of tickets in the past years, we started with 600 then went to 700. I suggest that we go for 800 tickets this year. Tickets are \$10 each.

## Montana Beaver Working Group

is hosting another meeting in Butte on March 29 and 30<sup>th</sup> that I was invited to attend. This is sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation and the Clark Fork Coalition. I talked to Nathan Kluge today about this. He said that this is not a FWP sponsored event but FWP may use advice from this group in future plans for beaver management. Nathan said that he will talk about this at the trapper meetings in April. His advice is he would like to see some trappers at the meeting in Butte to provide input from our perspective. At this time I will attend. **Tom Fieber** 🦌







*Protecting, Preserving and Promoting Trapping*

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Become a Member at  
[idahotrappersassociation.com/join-us](http://idahotrappersassociation.com/join-us)



Greetings from Idaho,

February for me is usually cat trapping, high school basketball and banquet season. This year we pulled up our bobcat traps early so I haven't been trapping lately. My water job is not real busy right now either. That means high school basketball and banquets, and both have kept me busy! I have been watching my son play basketball for 8 years so to say I was happy for him to win district championship is an understatement. Dawson has worked so hard for so many years, lifting, shooting, summer camps. Three more games and he will be the first basketball state champ in 48 years at our tiny school!

Back to trapping, banquet season is a great time for us to promote the Idaho Trappers Association. In the last three weekends Missy and I drove over 2,500 miles to banquets. Feb 12th was F4WM banquet in Sandpoint, the next weekend was the North Idaho Whitetail banquet in Orofino and last weekend was F4WM banquet in Salmon. These banquets are critical

to getting ITA exposure into all different parts of the state. It is also critical to developing relationships with these other groups. I was lucky enough to speak at all three of these banquets and developed new relationships at all three.

By the time you read this the fur sale and banquet will have come and gone. My phone has been ringing nonstop lately about people coming to the sale. I can't tell you how much I appreciate the support and volunteer help we've received from everyone that helps with the sales and banquets. The 2<sup>nd</sup> ever United Trappers of Idaho Convention will be June 10-12th at Eastern Idaho State Fairgrounds in Blackfoot. We will have an amazing lineup of vendors and demos at the convention. If you are interested in tailgating, doing a demo, or buying a vendor spot please contact me.

Our fur sale commissions are down drastically with the low coyote prices. We defiantly need all your support for the banquet and the convention. I ask all of you to dig into your pockets and join up as a sustaining member or sign up a friend as an ITA member. We

need all the members we can get. As always please contact me with questions or concerns. The ITA is here to work for you to protect and promote about trapping in Idaho  
Thank you

**Rusty Kramer**  
Idaho Trappers Association President  
208-870-3217

**Idaho January fur sale results**

Badger	18	\$ 22.57	78%
Beaver	87	\$ 23.81	100%
Bobcat	101	\$ 272.83	82%
Coyote	334	\$ 27.52	84%
Ermine	46	\$ 4.62	100%
Fisher	18	\$ 45.34	100%
Fox Squirrel	9	\$ 5.05	100%
Marten	38	\$ 32.09	100%
Mink	71	\$ 9.78	100%
Muskrat	340	\$ 2.99	100%
Otter	18	\$ 56.48	100%
Raccoon	147	\$ 8.72	100%
Red Fox	194	\$ 17.86	100%
Skunk	23	\$ 14.93	100%
Wolf	2	\$ 411.25	100%

**Request from Tom Fieber**

**1/18/2022 48 Hour Check Time**

As president of the Fur Harvesters, I would like to bring this to your attention. Hopefully this could be brought up in this session or with the FWP Commission.

**Mandatory Trap Check Time.**

As a Montana wolf trapper since 2011, I have experienced many changes to regulations. Management of wolves is very important to maintain a balance on the landscape. Overabundance of wolves in areas has led to under objective ungulate populations. Montana has bent over backwards to make sure that wolf populations are maintained at levels that would avoid relisting as endangered. Of the three states, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, we have the most restrictive regulations.

Here in Regions 1 & 2 we have more than 900 wolves in 130 packs. The rest of the state holds the remaining 300 wolves. In 2011, when trapping was first allowed, the population was estimated at about 1250. In 2017 the population had dropped to 1100, since then it has slowly risen to about 1200, increasing each year. Even as regulations were relaxed, harvests have not increased, wolves have learned to cope.

Management of wolves is very expensive. Government agencies spend up to \$9000 per wolf removed. As trappers our cost are not as high but several thousand per wolf is common. At today’s fuel costs, that figure is rising. We are required to check wolf traps every twentyfour hours. Idaho and Wyoming require 72 hour check times. Changing that here would reduce our fuel costs by one third. For some dedicated wolf trappers that would save close to \$2400 per season. Not only saving fuel costs and cutting carbon emissions but also would allow more flexible schedule. At present, anytime we have another obligation to attend, we must check two days in a row to comply with the 48 hour rule.

Experience shows that excessive travel near sets is detrimental. Concern for domestic dogs is a common objection raised. Our experience is that most dogs caught in traps are those running free on their own not with owners. Lack of owner responsibility is the biggest problem we see.

The intent of the citizens of Montana has been to reduce the wolf populations to acceptable levels. This has proven out in past ballot initiatives and legislative bills.

Is it Montana’s goal to appease emotional desires or to follow science. Idaho and Wyoming’s seventy-two-hour check times for years resulted in little or no problems. Many trappers certainly would like to see this regulation changed.

Tom Fieber  
President, Montana Fur Harvesters

**FWP response: Molly Parks** *Carnivore Coordinator*

Thanks for reaching out in regard to our mandatory trap check time for wolves. While I agree that Montana’s 48-hour trap check is not consistent with Wyoming or Idaho's, we are currently facing litigation regarding wolf management and we are seeking to defend our regulations to the best of our ability. On January 12th, 2023, Governor Gianforte directed the agency to review our wolf management plan, and we will be considering many goals, strategies, and management approaches as we undertake that effort. As FWP initiates the wolf planning effort, please stay posted because public input will be an important part of that process. We will consider your input as we develop our wolf regulations this year, but it will be important to recognize that ongoing planning and litigation may influence our final outcomes. Thanks again for your input.

Thanks, Molly, for getting back to me. I agree that we don’t need to rock the boat too hard but it is good to get the discussion started. **Tom Fieber** 🐾



# Advanced Outdoor Skills

**Are you looking for an in-person, hands-on, learning experience to grow your outdoors skill set?**

Then come join us for a day to get experience on such topics as firearm handling, shooting techniques, survival, blood trailing, orienteering, archery skills, bear aware/bear spray, trapping and much more.

Advanced Skills days are a new program that

**Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks** started just last year. The intention of this is to offer free events to the public by

certified instructors that teach advanced outdoor skills.



Last Summer MFH, started with one of the first classes offered. FWP did a great job getting out press releases that even made it to local TV news. We were expecting around fifty students. People were asked to pre-register on the FWP website and we had over fifty sign up. To our surprise, counting kids under twelve years old. We ended up right at one hundred lunches served. A quick trip to Costco and everyone got a great lunch.

This year we plan on hosting several Skills events Starting with the Fur Handling Clinic in Columbia Falls on April 1<sup>st</sup>. Just got it posted and students are signing up. We are still in the planning stages for the next one but there are a lot of topics to cover such as: Land trapping, water trapping, equipment and tools, rules and regulations, ethics, supplies, lures and baits, trap prepping, safety and first aid, preserving pelts, where to set traps, avoiding by-catches, reporting and tagging catches, on and on. We need to make a plan.



**WE PROMOTE AND PRESERVE FUR HARVESTING AND ITS HERITAGE IN MONTANA AS BOTH A SPORT AND AN INDUSTRY THROUGH EDUCATION AND REGULATORY ACTIVISM. WE SUPPORT FUR HARVESTING AS A SUSTAINABLE USE TOOL FOR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT, AND FIGHT TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE WILDLIFE AND HABITAT. WE WORK WITH MT FWP TO SUPPORT THEIR MANAGEMENT GOALS.**

#### Activities\*\*\*\*\*

Active with FWP shaping regulations that shape our trapping.

Trapper Education

Booths at Family Forestry Expo

School Shows

Northwest Montana Expo

Newsletters

Local County Fairs

Fur Handling Clinics

Public events

✕ Montana Fur Harvesters represents Trapper, Houndsmen and Predator Hunters

✕ Consider becoming a member of The Montana Trappers Association and The National Trappers Association. Every dollar raised will help to fight for trappers across the nation. Go online to their websites to join.

## Memberships run from January 1 to December 31

Please Complete this form and send to: MFH, PO Box 3482, Kalispell MT 59903

Please Print Clearly

Date\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_

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Please check one ☐ New Member ☐ Renewal ☐ Pro-rate for 2020 balance.

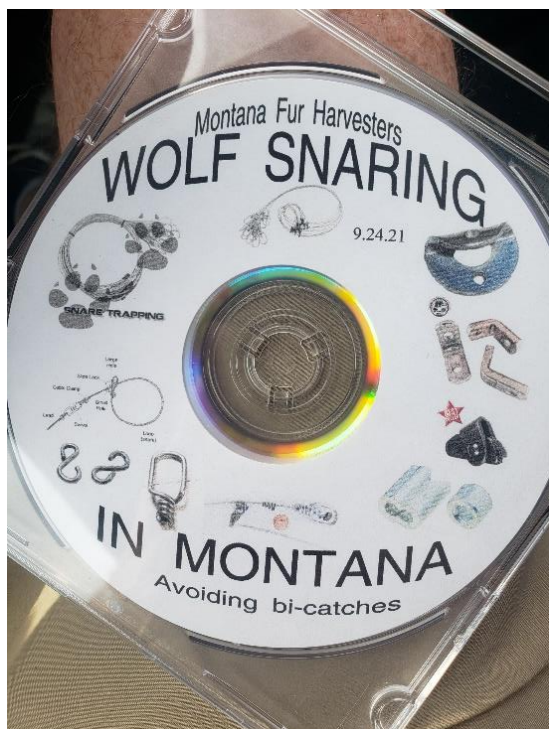
☐ Sustaining Membership \$20.00 annual dues ☐ Junior ( under 18) \$10.00 annual dues ☐ Family Membership

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This very popular video is a must see for anyone thinking of snaring in Montana. I have sent them out to Alaska, Idaho and Montana. If you can't make one of your local classes, at least take time to view this before you start buying or making snares. It could save you money from buying wrong supplies or worse making a bad set. **To purchase a video:** Pick one up at a local class for \$20 and save \$5 postage. Send a **check** for \$25 in the mail to, Tom Fieber, 507 Bayview Dr, Polson Mt 59860. For **Credit Card** sales at \$25. Send me your contact info then call me at 406-250-3386 Our Wolf Snaring Education Video on Avoiding By-catches has been shown to over 400 prospective wolf snaring trappers. The video has been sold in multiple states as well. Evening classes were held in a dozen local communities and in online FWP Wolf Certification Classes. The video is available to all. **Tom Fieber** 🐾

## Thanks to The Meuli's of Columbia Falls.

They are always willing to share their facility for our events. Shawn and Amber are great sportsmen!



## Charter Members

Donating \$100 or more !

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.

**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.

**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.

**Josh Jurek**, Josh raised \$400 at the Palooza that he donated back to MFH. Josh is a dedicated trapper and a great artist. Josh is now MTA District 1 Director.

**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.

**Idaho Trappers Association**, This Association is a real asset to the entire US Trapper Community. Thanks to Rusty Kramer for all he does.

**Ed Schweitzer**. Ed attended our booth at the Kalispell Gun Show and signed up as a charter member. This is deeply appreciated.

**Scott H Smith**, Director from Whitefish has been supporting the Fur Harvesters in many ways, manning booths as well.

**Kenneth Cordoza**, our past President still goes out of his way to support his organization.

**Rusty Kramer**, Idaho Trappers Association President has been a strong supporter here in Montana.

**Montana Fur Harvesters** works closely with local FWP personnel. Game warden, **Jon Obst**, is one of the first to work with trappers and is a valued asset to the trapping community. He knows trapping, regulations, how traps function, what trappers are dealing with.

Wildlife biologist, **Jessy Coltrane**, has been heading up the fisher denning box project in the Cabinet Mountains. She has been great to work with and is a hard worker herself. Wildlife manager for region one,

**Neil Anderson**, he has been another one that attends public meetings and sportsman events. He has been working to address road and trail issues as well as other issues that affect sportsman. Neil really listens to people's concerns and acts on them.

Biologist, **Tyler Parks** in Region Two is also very good to work with. Tyler runs the region 2 spring trapper meetings and is a member of the trapping education committee.

**Dillon Tabish** from Region 1 is always doing what he can to get things organized and get out press releases.

**Nathan Kluge** is our new Furbearer biologist for FWP in Helena. Nathan has been active at the Trapper Education Class and has been really good to work with and knowledgeable as a trapper.

These are just a few of the many local personnel that I work with and appreciate.

**Thanks to each and every one of them!**

**Tom Fieber** 

### Muskrat

huts or houses. You know you are in the right place if you see this. Normally you won't get to see this very often!



# Muskrat trapping for beginners.

Musk rats are common furbearers. They are very popular with trappers just getting started.

- They are easy to trap.
- They are clean to handle and have a sweet, musky smell.
- It doesn't cost much to get started.
- They occupy a limited home range that is easy to understand.

Coil-spring foothold traps, longspring foothold traps, colony and bodygrip traps are recommended for trapping muskrats. However, foothold traps should be used only in submersion systems. The following types of sets are effective with muskrats.



## Slide Set for Muskrats

Musk rats leave trails where they enter and leave the water. These trails are sometimes called slides. The slide set is very effective for capturing muskrats. No bait or lure is needed. Follow these steps to make the set.

- Place a foothold trap two or three inches deep where the muskrat's slide enters the water.
- Set the trap in line with the slide. This means the jaws, when released, should be parallel to the bank. With a longspring trap, rotate the end of the spring toward the trigger mechanism so that both jaws will lie flat.
- Wire the trap to a stake or a rock in deep water. A tangle stake or sliding wire may be used. The weight of a #1½ trap or the use of a tangle stake will ensure that a trapped animal is pulled underwater and dies quickly.
- Slide Set



## Bank Den Set (Bank Hole Set) for Muskrats

A bodygrip trap placed at the entrance of a muskrat bank den is another good set.

Use these clues to locate muskrat dens.

- If you see chewed-up plants floating on the water, a muskrat den may be nearby.
- If you spot a den, look for freshly dug dirt in front of the underwater opening to see if it is an active den.

### Bank Den Set

The following types of sets are effective with muskrats.

## Feed Bed Set for Muskrats

In marsh or swamp trapping, traps can be set at feed beds (piles of plant scraps where muskrats feed regularly).

- If the feed bed is large, more than one trap may be set.



- Place traps where the animal climbs onto the feed bed. Stake traps in opposite directions.
- If the feed bed is unused, use lure to draw the furbearers back to the bed.

Keep in mind that mink and raccoons also visit feed beds. Cover traps properly.

## Float Set for Muskrats

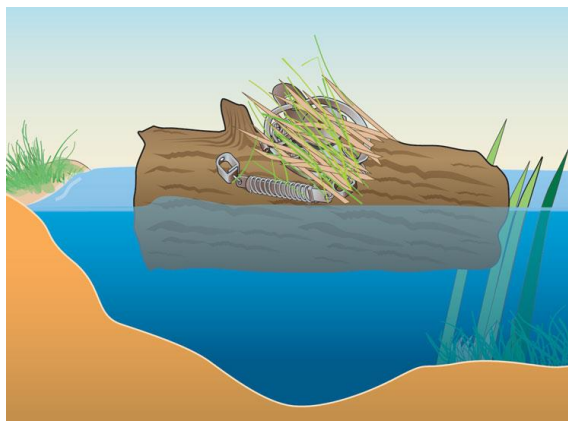
Muskrats often climb onto floating logs. Float sets make use of this habit.

Choose an area where the water is more than a foot deep.

Set a foothold trap on a floating log or a homemade platform.

When a muskrat is trapped, it will enter the water. The weight of the trap will pull it under.

Ducks and other birds also might land on floating logs or platforms. Cover traps with branches or sticks to prevent birds from stepping on these traps.



Float Set

## Runway Set for Muskrats

Muskrats travel back and forth in shallow water, creating a runway in the mud. A runway set takes advantage of this behavior.

- Place a bodygrip trap in the runway. Camouflage the trap with vegetation. Make sure the water is deep enough to prevent muskrats from breathing.
- Be aware that some water sources may freeze at night during cold weather, causing water levels to drop. In this case, place the trap a few inches below the daytime water level.

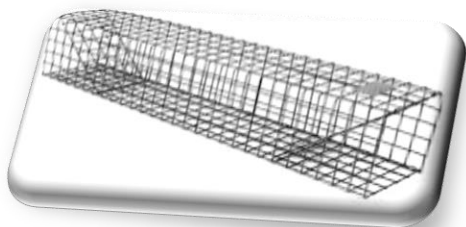
## Spring Run Set for Muskrats

A trap placed where a small stream enters a larger body of water is another good set for both muskrat and mink. Use a trap with a tangle stake or sliding wire.

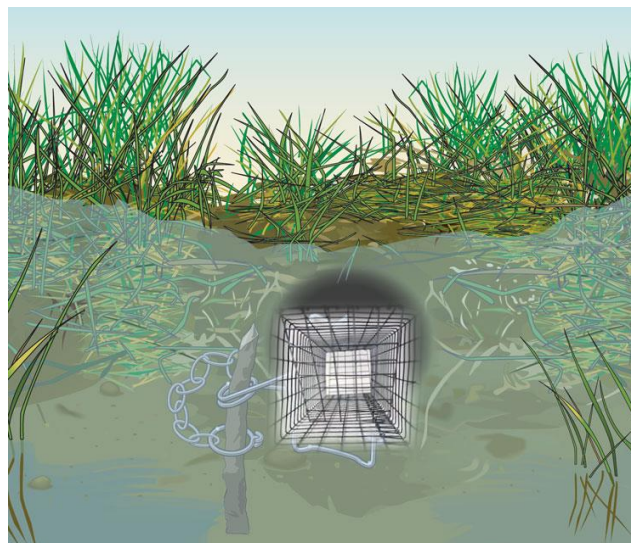
### Colony traps.

inexpensive to buy or  
Most are 24" long by  
travel routes, make  
sure trap is  
submerged

completely and placed in the  
entrance. Carefully stake in place, making sure not to block doors.  
On open routes, stake in place just below the surface. I like to place  
some vegetation on top over the ends to get the rats to dive under  
into the trap. You can have multiple catches at one time. Here in  
Northwest Montana, muskrats live in most ponds, lakes, and  
streams. Look for signs of active use. Clipped vegetation, feed  
mounds built up, large huts or houses, toilets, underwater den  
entrances, etc.



These traps work great in certain places. They are  
easy to make at home. Good project for families.  
5"x5" with drop down doors. Find den entrances or



## FWP opens public scoping on proposed new wolf management plan

A link to participate in the scheduled public scoping meetings will be included on FWP's Gray Wolf Management website at <https://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/wildlife-management/wolf>, as soon as the link has been established but no later than one day in advance of the scheduled meeting date.

The 30-day public scoping period begins with the publication of this Scoping Notice and will continue through Saturday, April 22, 2023. FWP will consider all applicable input provided during virtual public scoping meetings and all applicable input received or postmarked by Saturday, April 22, 2023, in defining the scope of the EIS.

Comments and suggestions on the content and scope of the EIS should be addressed to: Attention: 2023 Montana Wolf Management Plan EIS Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Wildlife Division 1420 East Sixth Avenue Helena, MT 59620

Or, via electronic mail at: [FWPWolfPlanEIS@mt.gov](mailto:FWPWolfPlanEIS@mt.gov) If you have any questions regarding the proposed project, please email FWP Wildlife: [FWPwld@mt.gov](mailto:FWPwld@mt.gov)

Thanks for your time and consideration of this proposed action.

Sincerely, Hank Worsech, Director Montana Fish, Wildlife & Park

**Not sure where this is headed but let's support the Governor on this one.**

## WINTERS GRIP AND GOOD FRIENDS

By Scott Smith

According to the calendar, spring is officially here. I am not quite sure if anyone bothered to tell old man winter? Here in the Swan our winter started around the first week of November. We had a few inches of snow and then a quick freeze. The first snow was followed by more snow and blowing winds. The high winds brought down trees, tree top and branches. By December we had around 40" total. I stopped marking the snow fall on the calendar after that. Not happy to report that all of that tree litter and snow is still frozen in our yard five months later.

The trapline was more work this year than most, due to the early start to winter. The snow kept piling up and the windstorms brought more downed trees. I spent several days with the chainsaw and winch pulling trees and branches off the trails. I always spend preseason clearing trails and prepping my line so I can get started when they drop the flag, in the GPZ, (grizzly go to den). I start the season out on my four-wheeler. I usually put the chains on mid to late December. This year it was mid-November. I was stuck in deep snow more times than ever. Several times I had to shovel and then winch the four-wheeler into a tree well just to get it turned around and facing back the way I came in. I then would step into my snowshoes and put on my pack and finish checking the line. The reward for this was to pack your catch out on your back or drag it. Now I know why the mountain men skinned their catch on site.



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I do not have to tell anyone who has snowshoed their line, this is a slow time-consuming endeavor, and hard work. I spoke with a friend about my predicament. He said that his son has two snowcats, and he will see if I could use one. Wow, now I could finish my season. And finish with it in a quarter of the time. This was a real-life saver and kept my spirits up. Believe it or not, I did manage to get the snowcat stuck several times. I was able to dig it out every time but the last time. By now we are in the second week of March and approaching the wolf closing date of March 15. The day started out as normal, the snowcat started right up and off I went. We had about 8 inches of fresh snow. By now I am riding on about two feet of packed trail. I know that if I get off my trail, I had the possibility of getting stuck. So, I was very aware of that.

The fresh snow covered my trail but I could still see the shadow of it. Things were going well and I was making good time. I had an upcoming hard left turn, switchback. I have been using this same trail for five month and, crap. Yap, I did it, took the corner to short. I should have removed the sled, genius. So, I shut the snowcat off and removed the sled. I grabbed the shovel and began to shovel. An hour later the snow I shoveled was above the machine.

So, I realized that this was not going to work. But my luck was about to change, the truck was parked at the bottom of the trail a mile downhill. I hiked out to the truck and grabbed the two tow lines, and hand wench. I also stepped into my snowshoes, and back up the hill. After a few hours the snowcat was in sight.

I hooked the gear up to the front of the machine and a tree, and, and, and moved it two inches. I could see this was not going to work. I grabbed the gear and snowshoed to the back. I shoveled some more and hooked up to a huge tree. I did manage to move it about a foot back, but nope, it was not going to happen.

I stood there, proud of myself, shaking my head. Well now what? This is mid-March and the bear will be out soon, including the long claws. I could just imagine what I was going to tell the young man that lent me his machine, the bear ate your machine. No really, they did. Before hiking back to the truck, I took everything out of the sled and put the sled over the machine, yes that should stop a hungry five-hundred-pound grizzly.

Now, again on the way back to the truck. Down the hill I went, mind racing with what to do? By the time I reached the truck I had a plan, possibility. I have a friend Dan that has the same check days I have, maybe just maybe he could help me. Dan lives more than an hour from me. I called Dan and told him what I had so foolishly did. I was waiting for him to start laughing, but I think he could hear the distress in my voice. Dan and I are about the same age and we know that sooner or later, fifty years playing in these mountains, stuff happens.

Dan agreed to meet me early the next morning. Thank you, Lord!! When we arrived to the scene, Dan walked around assessing the situation. Dan came up with a plan of attack, he said let us try to shovel some more and then he can pull me out. Sounds good, we shoveled and then he drove around me on the packed trail and hooked up to the front. REV- REV, nope. The machine was not going out the front. So, he said let us try to pull it from the back. We shoveled some more and he hooked up. REV-REV. More shoveling and pulling and lifting. On the third attempt, finally the machine was out. Hurray!! No kidding.

By this time the sun was up and the blue skies opened. We could not have asked for a more beautiful winter day. Dan asks if he should pull my sled, I smiled and said, yes sir. Dan offered to ride along and help pull my line. It was a relief to have the machine out and Dan to give me a hand.

Even though it was a physical year on the line, I was able to trap the full five-month season. The catch was good and the fur was very nice. I was surprised that the fur was not rubbed and that the guard hair was still very nice. I am guessing that all the fresh snow between the 10-20 below temps may have helped keep the fur from freezing down? This is only a guess.

I will say that the last few critters I skinned were on the skinny side. They had very little body fat. The wildlife had a long cold winter, and it will be interesting to see how much winter kill there is? I am very blessed to have a wife and so many good friends, for their help and support in my outdoor life style. I was glad I could trap the full season. Good Lord willing, this coming season will be the start of my 54<sup>th</sup> year trapping. Please remember to help mentor the youth and others, in trapping and the out-of-doors.

**Tail Dragger- Scott**





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**Is expanding Grizzly bear populations safe?**



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