



Cable Restraints

A safe, efficient, and humane alternative for Vermont trappers

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
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The principle goal of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's Furbearer Management Program is to maintain healthy and sustainable furbearer populations. To achieve this goal, the Department continually strives to provide trappers with the most up-to-date, safe, effective, and humane tools for capturing furbearers. Cable restraints have been tested in an ambitious, national trap testing effort and were proven to rank high in animal welfare, efficiency, and safety. Thus, the Department is pursuing the repeal of existing statute prohibiting the use of these devices in order to work through the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board (Board) to initiate a science-based evaluation of the feasibility of employing cable restraints as a safe alternative to existing trap choices in the future.

Highlights

- In 1923, in response to widespread habitat destruction and the overharvest of furbearer species, the Vermont legislature prohibited the use of snares.
- The construction and operation of snares has evolved dramatically over time, particularly with regard to cable restraints which are a modern type of snare.
- Cable restraints fundamentally differ from traditional snares in that they are designed and deployed specifically to *live restrain* an animal unharmed rather than kill it.
- Cable restraints have been scientifically proven to be a practical, safe, effective, and humane tool for capturing furbearers and have been shown to minimize harm to domestic animals and wildlife alike. Comprehensive studies on the use of cable restraints in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania concluded that, "cable restraint related injuries and mortalities were rare."
- Snares are currently prohibited by both statute and Board rules. Therefore, if the statutory ban on snares is repealed, the use of these devices would still be prohibited in Vermont. Legalization of cable restraints would require a change in both statute **and** Board regulation – a process that would examine the science and engage the public.
- In order for the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board to undertake a scientifically-based review of cable restraints, the legislature needs to give the Board the authority by repealing the statute that currently prohibits the use of all snares.
- The Department would recommend the implementation of cable restraints during an initial experimental period through which the use of these devices would be fully evaluated in order to ensure the safety and welfare of domestic animals and wildlife. The Department would only support changes to Vermont's trapping regulations if new methods were proven to be more safe, effective, and discriminating than current devices and techniques, and only if trappers were required to meet mandatory training and reporting obligations.

Background

In 1923, the Vermont State Legislature passed the “Snaring animals” statute (T.10 § 4706) which read, in its entirety, “A person shall not take an animal by snaring nor shall he possess a snare with the intent to use the same.” The passage of this law came on the heels of a century long era of unfettered fur trading and unregulated trapping. This time was also characterized by widespread habitat destruction resulting from extensive agricultural and industrial uses of the landscape. In addition, bounties were offered for any remaining predators. By the time the legislature debated this bill, species such as beaver, wolf, mountain lion, fisher and marten had already been extirpated or were nearly so. Undoubtedly, the unregulated use of snares played a key role in the decline of these species, and the legislature’s move to ban snares was probably a wise choice given the state of wildlife at the time.

Historically, snares were constructed of various plant or animal fibers. They lacked reliable locking mechanisms that allowed for proper loop formation and smooth closure while simultaneously preventing the snare loop from easily re-opening once the animal stopped applying pressure. As a result, in order to prevent captured animals from escaping from these rudimentary devices, traditional snares were typically deployed in a manner that would facilitate rapid mortality, such as via the use of a ‘spring pole’. Concerns that snares were highly effective, indiscriminate killing devices that could lead to the over-harvest of furbearer populations and negatively impact other game populations ultimately led to the prohibition of these traps in many states across the country.

In recognition of the state’s depleted wildlife resources, Vermont lawmakers were historically the primary authority establishing laws to protect and manage wildlife populations. However; with the onset of science-based wildlife management by wildlife professionals in the 1960’s in Vermont, more of the management authority has been transferred to the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board that promulgates rules based on scientific information and public input. As a result, a well-established rulemaking process and a complex set of regulations governing the take of game throughout the state are now in place. Suffice it to say, we are in a new era of wildlife management - one that is starkly different from that experienced by the lawmakers in 1923 as they adopted the snaring animals statute.

What is a cable restraint?

In the simplest terms, a cable restraint is a type of trap, and while often categorized as a “snare,” it is distinctly different in some important ways. Although the basic principles behind the use of traditional snares and cable restraints are very similar, cable restraints fundamentally differ from traditional snares in that they are designed and deployed specifically to *restrain* an animal rather than kill it. With the advent of metal components (e.g. braided wire, locks, swivels, etc.) both the efficiency and versatility of modern cable restraints have improved.

A variety of options are now available for cable restraints that greatly influence performance attributes such as selectivity, capture efficiency and injury reduction. These innovations have resulted in recognition among wildlife professionals of these devices as a viable alternative for

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trappers for capturing furbearers and have prompted a number of states in recent years to adopt the use of these modern traps in their furbearer management programs.

There are several attributes of the cable restraint which allow it to effectively function as a practical, selective, and humane trapping device. Highly flexible, larger diameter cables, for example, improve the trap's performance of restraining animals while preventing injury. Similarly, larger relaxing lock types also reduce the potential for injury. The length of cable deployed and the number of swivels used along with the anchoring method and location are all manipulated in order to minimize the likelihood of entanglement related injuries. The loop size and the height at which it is set above the ground as well as loop stops and breakaway devices can all be adjusted to increase the selectivity of these devices allowing trappers to effectively capture target animals. In each of the states where cable restraints are currently legal, regulations governing the use of these devices have been carefully crafted to address each of these factors in order to optimize performance and realize the highest level of animal welfare possible.

Are cable restraints safe and humane?

The recent legalization of cable restraints in a number of states was based on data collected during one of the most ambitious trap research projects in the history of wildlife management – the development of Best Management Practices for Trapping (BMPs) in the United States. Trapping BMPs identify techniques, traps and cable restraints that maximize the welfare of trapped animals and allow for the efficient, selective, safe and practical capture of furbearers. Cable restraints have been field tested by experienced trappers during legal land trapping seasons in Wisconsin, Missouri and Pennsylvania. Animals harvested during these studies were sent to wildlife veterinarians at the University of Wyoming who examined and evaluated them for capture-related injuries using international guidelines and standards. The animal welfare performance of cable restraints was outstanding.

There is a misperception that cable restraints pose a significant risk to non-target animals including domestic/hunting dogs, a sentiment that has been echoed in other states where cable restraints were being considered for legalization over the past decade. Therefore, in addition to evaluating animal welfare, the BMP research conducted to date has been designed to assess this perceived risk.

In Wisconsin's 2001 study which tested 7 different cable restraint configurations in 715 locations statewide, 61 canids (red fox, gray fox and coyote) were harvested and 7 domestic dogs were released unharmed. Furthermore, 5 coyotes, 3 deer and 1 wolf escaped via the breakaway devices. Similarly, in Pennsylvania's 2005 study, over 1300 canids were harvested and 391 non-target species were captured and subsequently released including 44 domestic dogs. In its study summary report, the Pennsylvania Game Commission concluded that, "Cable restraint related injuries and mortalities were rare."

Additional BMP testing has since been conducted and similar results have been observed. Although BMP testing aimed at further improving the performance of these devices is ongoing,

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at the very least, the now decade long collective experience of the states who utilize cable restraints indicates these traps pose little threat to non-target species and domestic/hunting dogs.

Should cable restraints be considered in Vermont?

Ultimately, the goal of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is to maintain healthy, sustainable furbearer populations and to provide trappers with the most practical, safe, effective, and humane tools for capturing furbearers. Having a variety of options available to them, trappers are better equipped to deploy traps for specific species in specific situations which may not otherwise be as suited to the traps currently legal for use in the state. Where cable restraints can be demonstrated as a better, more humane option than current trap choices, regulations can be revised to accommodate these new devices while potentially restricting the use of less effective options.

Beyond their use by recreational trappers, cable restraints are also widely recognized by wildlife professionals throughout the country as one of the most effective means of resolving animal damage complaints and for addressing nuisance wildlife behavior. In cases such as these, individual problem animals can be narrowly targeted using these devices in areas where the likelihood of capturing pets, livestock or other non-target animals is high. Also, because of the animal welfare values attributed to these devices and of their proven selectivity, present day wildlife researchers are more often turning to cable restraints as the tool of choice for capturing study animals. Having this tool available for the Department's use may prove very beneficial as the need to expand our knowledge of these species arises in the future.

How would cable restraints be used in Vermont?

Similar to the rules governing their use in other states, the legalization of cable restraints in Vermont would be accompanied by carefully crafted, enforceable regulations. These rules would be designed to ensure the use of the best available components (e.g. cable and lock types, breakaway devices, loop stops, etc.), the most appropriate set types (e.g. loop size and height above ground, length of cable, anchoring method, entanglement avoidance, etc.) and the use of these devices during specific seasons when conflicts with other resource users would be minimized. In addition to rules governing their use, regulations establishing a prerequisite training course for trappers would also be adopted. Through such training, trappers would need to demonstrate a high level of proficiency in the use of these devices including a sound understanding of all the applicable rules and regulations related to their use.

The Department would propose a requirement that all users of cable restraints in the state would have to furnish the Department with details of how these devices were deployed, what was caught, and what issues resulted from their use. This would be accomplished via a mandatory annual mail survey of all trappers endorsed to use these devices through the successful completion of required training. Analysis of survey data will allow the Department to identify issues resulting from cable restraint use in a timely manner and react accordingly with regulation changes as needed. The evolution of cable restraint use in the state will be guided by Vermont's

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own unique experience with the goal of continually improving the practicality, efficiency, selectivity, safety and humaneness of these devices.

The Department would propose that the evolution of a cable restraint regulation should be based on a very limited “experimental period” whereby the applicability of these devices in Vermont’s climate and the resulting issues related to their use could be closely monitored and evaluated. Under this scenario, the eventual implementation of cable restraint use in the state would be guided by the findings of this evaluation and the regulations adopted to govern their use would be crafted to resolve any issues brought to light during the experimental period. If such issues prove insurmountable, the long-term implementation of cable restraints in the state may not necessarily be pursued further. Similarly, under the current statutory ban the Department would not be able to participate in any cooperative research effort such as the BMPs thus limiting our ability to contribute to the advancement of furbearer management.

Summary

The Fish & Wildlife Department recognizes and understands the lingering belief that snares have evolved little over time. Despite this misperception, the Department believes the attributes of cable restraints with regard to animal welfare, practicality, selectivity and efficiency would not only offer trappers another versatile and humane tool, but would allow for an opportunity to revise current trapping regulations to incorporate these devices where they have been demonstrated to be more humane, selective, and effective. The implementation of cable restraints in the state would be a measured process through which their use would be carefully regulated, tested, monitored and adjusted as needed. Finally, the ability for Vermont’s trappers and the Department to participate in the continued study and evolution of these traps will again put Vermont at the forefront of contributing to the development of sound, ethical furbearer management practices.

