

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR TRAPPING

What they don't tell you.



Photo: BMP approved Oneida-Victor™ Softcatch trap found by a Vermont resident

Steel-jaw leghold, a.k.a. foothold traps, body-gripping “quick kill” traps, and cage traps (including drowning sets) are legal in Vermont. Snares, a.k.a. cable restraints, are illegal. Each year, traps injure, maim and kill targeted and non-targeted animals. According to a 2017 survey conducted by the University of Vermont’s Center for Rural Studies, the majority of Vermonters would like to see trapping banned.¹

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, an organization that advocates on behalf of state fish and wildlife agencies, developed Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping.² The BMP process evolved in response to the public’s growing opposition to trapping and pressure from the European Union that threatened to prohibit the import of fur from countries, including the United States, using leghold traps. In an effort to assuage the EU’s concerns, BMPs were developed.³ BMPs, however, fail to achieve any meaningful welfare gains for animals.

BMPs allow for an unacceptable level of harm to wildlife

BMPs rely on scales of injury to attempt to assess and quantify animal welfare. These scales allow for severe suffering to individual animals, as long as an average amount of suffering across all animals trapped is below a certain threshold. For one of the scales, up to 30% of animals caught in leghold traps can suffer from severe trauma, including amputation and death. Animals caught in so-called quick kill traps are allowed to suffer for as long as five minutes before becoming permanently unconscious; up to 30% of those animals can suffer in agonizing pain for undetermined periods of time.

BMPs fail to consider a holistic understanding of welfare

The injury scales used to develop BMPs are flawed because they:

- fail to incorporate behavioral or physiological responses as measures of welfare, such as cortisol levels, which can have detrimental and long-lasting effects on trapped animals;
- assign low and moderate injury scores to injuries that are capable of causing severe pain (e.g. permanent tooth fractures and eye lacerations);
- allow for some injuries to go unidentified because radiography of trapped animals is not mandatory;
- do not consider the long-term impact of injuries in animals who escape, or in non-target animals who are released;
- do not provide guidelines on how trapped animals should be killed; bludgeoning, strangulation and other exceptionally cruel methods are legal.³

BMPs don't do enough to protect unintended victims

Traps are indiscriminate—BMPs for one target species will not protect other species. Non-target species can suffer greatly when trapped by devices not designed or intended for their species.⁴ For instance, traps set for coyotes also catch raptors, skunks, raccoons, and other non-targeted animals, including cats and dogs, and can cause severe trauma that is even greater than the intended target would have experienced.

BMPs are unenforceable

Currently, BMPs are recommendations, but even if they were mandatory, they’d be virtually impossible to enforce. Trapping regulations are already difficult to enforce. There is a chronic shortage of game wardens to ensure compliance with existing regulations. Enforcing BMPs, specifically, would be extremely difficult as it is challenging to differentiate a BMP-approved trap or set from a conventional trap.

REFERENCES

¹ Available at: https://www.protectourwildlifevt.org/_files/ugd/5073cd_c349fbfa0bfb4458b46919436a9afa8e.pdf

² Available at: https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/3515/1862/6191/Introduction_BMPs.pdf

³ Zuardo, Tara (2017) How the United States was Able to Dodge International Reforms Designed to Make Wildlife Trapping Less Cruel, *Journal of International Wildlife Law & Policy*, 20:1, 101-123

⁴ American Veterinary Medical Association Animal Welfare Division (2008). Welfare Implications of Leghold Trap Use in Conservation and Research. https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/resources/leghold_traps_bgnd.pdf

