

SCWDS to Assist in Trap Evaluations

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A multi-state program has been initiated to develop Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping under the auspices of the Fur Resources Committee of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. BMPs are guidelines based on sound scientific information that are applied in a practical manner to complex situations often encountered in the field. They have been used with great success in water quality and forest management activities where they serve as an intermediate approach between strict regulations and unstructured, voluntary action. The objective of this 3-year program is to identify the combination of practices that are most effective and practical in preventing or reducing technical, economic, and social problems associated with trapping. Extensive field testing with new and existing traps and various trapping techniques will be conducted to obtain the best available information on animal welfare, trap efficiency, trap selectivity, and trap safety. Animals of highest priority for study are raccoon, coyote, red fox, nutria, muskrat, gray fox, mink, and pine marten.

SCWDS and the University of Wyoming have been chosen to evaluate an important aspect of the animal welfare component of the project, i.e., trap-related trauma. Frozen carcasses of animals caught in various traps will be submitted to pathologists at these two universities for a complete examination for trap-related injuries. The anticipated case load for SCWDS may reach 1,000 animals for the first year of the study. Each animal will be examined by a veterinarian and a team of technicians for evidence of injuries not only to the leg, but to the mouth and body as well. Information on the type of trap used and the leg that was held will not be known to the people conducting the examinations.

SCWDS pioneered the early evaluations on trap injuries during the development, in the 1980s, of the padded-jaw "Soft Catch" leghold trap made by Woodstream Corporation. From this experience, we learned that there can be significant reductions in the amount of injury to animals depending upon the type of trap and how it is set. We feel it is the continuing responsibility of wildlife managers to address animal welfare concerns, and we are hopeful that this new program will be a major influence on the future direction of the types of traps deployed under the BMPs.