

United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Wildlife Services Directive

WS 2.450
7/29/2021

TRAPS AND TRAPPING DEVICES

1. PURPOSE

To establish guidelines for WS personnel for using certain types of animal capture devices in managing wildlife damage.

2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This Directive replaces WS Directive 2.450, Traps and Trapping Devices, date September 24, 2014.

3. AUTHORITY

7 U.S.C. 8351 to 8353, and 16 U.S.C. 667, authorizes officers, agents, and employees of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) to conduct a program of wildlife services and to enter into agreements with states, local jurisdictions, individuals, and public and private agencies, organizations, and institutions for the purpose of conducting such services.

4. BACKGROUND

WS recognizes the value and use of the trapping Best Management Practices (BMP) guidelines for private fur harvest and other trapping activities developed and promulgated by State wildlife management agencies and The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). WS recognizes that these guidelines for different regions of the United States for over 20 species of North American mammals will be periodically updated based on the availability and public use of commercial capture devices. WS intends to utilize these guidelines as a basis for policy formulation, recognizing that some devices used in wildlife damage management are not commercially available and that not all devices recommended in the BMP guidelines for general public use meet the more stringent performance requirements for efficiency and durability, for use in WS wildlife management activities.

5. POLICY

- a. The use of all traps, snares (cable device), and other animal capture devices by WS employees will comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations related to animal capture for managing wildlife damage (WS Directive 2.210, *Compliance with Federal, State, and Local Laws and Regulations*).
- b. Traps and trapping devices will not be used unless appropriate authorization is granted by landowner or designee (WS Form 12A, 12B, 12C, 12D or 12F).

- c. All exceptions to this operational policy must be authorized by the appropriate WS Regional/NWRC Director.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

- a. All traps and trapping devices are to be checked no less frequently than required by state law, unless specific exemptions are obtained.
- b. All traps used by WS will be labeled (Property of U.S. Government, Property of USDA, Property of Texas, etc., as appropriate), either with an attached tag or stamped directly on the trap.
- c. All traps and trapping devices will be set in a manner which minimizes the chances of capturing nontarget species. If possible, non-target animals that are captured will be released.
- d. If an animal that appears to be a licensed pet is captured; reasonable efforts will be made to notify the owner, to seek veterinary assistance if necessary, or deliver the animal to appropriate local authorities.
- e. Animals targeted for lethal control in direct control projects will be dispatched immediately, removed from capture devices, and properly disposed (WS Directive 2.505, Euthanizing Wildlife; WS Directive 2.510, Fur, Other Animal Parts, and Edible Meat; WS Directive 2.515, Disposal of Wildlife Carcasses).
- f. Captured animals intended for release, relocation, or captivity will be handled and transported appropriately to achieve project objectives (WS Directive 2.501, Translocation of Wildlife).
- g. Appropriate warning signs will be posted on main entrances or commonly used access points to areas where foot-hold traps, snares (cable device), or rotating jaw (body-grip or Conibear-type) traps are in use. Signs will be routinely checked to assure they are present, obvious, and readable. Signs must be removed when equipment is no longer in use.
- h. Foot-hold Traps and Snares (cable device). Foot-hold traps or snares (cable device) are not to be set closer than 30 feet from any exposed animal carcass or part thereof, having meat or viscera attached, including remains of animals previously removed from traps or snares (cable device) that may attract raptors or other nontarget animals. If an animal carcass could be dragged or moved by scavengers to within 30 feet of set foot-hold traps, snares (cable device), the carcass will be secured to restrict movement (WS Directive 2.455, Scents, Baits, and Attractants). These restrictions do not apply to animal carcasses used to attract bear or mountain lion to approved capture devices or to foot-hold traps set for the purpose of live-capturing birds, as approved by the WS State Director.
 - (1.) The use of foot-hold traps and spring activated leg snares (cable device) must incorporate pan-tension devices as appropriate to prevent or reduce the capture of nontarget animals, unless such use would preclude capture of the intended target

- animals.
- (2.) Foot-hold traps with an inside jaw spread greater than 5 ½ inches, when used in restraining sets, are limited to types with smooth, offset jaws that may or may not be laminated or to padded-type jaws. Foot-hold traps with teeth or spiked jaws are prohibited. WS Regional Director may authorize use of modified jaw protrusions on traps for the purpose of reducing injuries to target animals.
 - (3.) Unless specifically authorized by the WS State/NWRC Director, new traps/capture devices should be selected from the various commercially available devices or equivalents listed in regional Best Management Practices guidelines for each species.
 - (4.) If it is necessary to use foot-hold traps or snares (cable device) under fence lines, reasonable efforts should be taken to obtain the approval of adjacent landowners where applicable; judgment should be used to avoid capture of livestock and other domestic animals.
 - (5.) The use of break-away locks or stops is encouraged when livestock, deer, or other large animals may be exposed to snare (cable device) sets.
 - (6.) Capture devices should be set to minimize visibility of captured animals.
 - (7.) Appropriate notification signs must be posted with in the direct line of sight of bear and lion foot-snare (cable device) sets.
 - (8.) Foot-hold traps (long spring or coil spring) will not be used to take bear.
- i. Pole Traps. Foot-hold traps, leg snares (cable device), or tangle snares may be set on poles or roosting structures to capture birds. If such devices are authorized by the applicable depredation permit appropriate federal, state, and local special purpose permits shall be obtained and in the possession of the authorized WS person when performing the capture function.
- (1.) Traps should not have an inside jaw spread greater than 5” for most raptors. This limitation does not preclude the use of larger, modified traps to capture eagles. Trap springs should be modified to produce the lightest jaw closure sufficient to catch and hold the target raptor. Trap jaws should be sufficiently padded to reduce the possibility of injury to the birds.
 - (2.) To reduce unnecessary stress to the captured birds, traps will be checked at least twice daily, but not less than required by appropriate permit(s); a slide wire, or similar device, shall be used to allow the raptor to rest on the ground.
- j. Rotating Jaw Traps (body-grip trap). Rotating jaw (body-grip, Conibear-type) traps with a jaw spread greater than 8 inches, are restricted to water sets. Exemptions may be approved by the appropriate State Director on a case by case basis. Use of all rotating jaw (body grip) traps will comply with Federal, State, Tribal, or local laws and or authorizing permits.
- (1.) Exemptions may be approved by the appropriate State Director on a case by case basis for using rotating jaw (body-grip, Conibear-type) traps on sets other than water sets when;
 - i. the trapping location is not accessible to humans by road or by foot.
 - ii. the use of other trapping tools and techniques has proven to be ineffective, and the rotating jaw (body-grip, Conibear-type) trap has proven to be a safe and effective method to capture the species of concern.

- iii. Must be in compliance with state and local ordinances and BMP's.
- k. Cage Traps. Use and placement of cage traps by WS personnel will comply with applicable laws, regulations and authorizing permits. Cage traps loaned to cooperators or members of the public will be labeled as "Loaned Equipment." Cooperators will be responsible for replacing lost, damaged, or stolen equipment (WS Directive 4.165, Loaning Equipment).
- l. Decoy Traps. Decoy traps utilize live animals, typically birds, maintained within the trap to serve as an incentive for additional animals to enter the trap. WS personnel will maintain adequate food, water, and perching area in such traps.
- m. Where applicable and feasible, specific efforts will be made to reduce the probability of unintentional bald or golden eagle (or other non-target raptor) disturbance or capture when setting and baiting capture devices.
- n. Trapper Education. All employees whose duties involve animal capture should participate in a WS approved trapper education course as recommended by Best Management Practices guidelines. State Directors may provide for continuing trapping education for appropriate employees at district, state, or regional meetings.

7. SCOPE

This Directive is applicable to all WS personnel.

8. REFERENCES

- a. 50 CFR Part 21 - Migratory Bird Permits, Subpart D - Control of Depredating Birds
- b. 50 CFR Part 22 - Eagle Permits
- c. Best Management Practices for Trapping Furbearers in the United States, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- d. WS Directive 2.210, Compliance with Federal, State, and Local Laws and Regulations
- e. WS Directive 2.455, Scents, Baits, and Attractants
- f. WS Directive 2.501, Translocation of Wildlife
- g. WS Directive 2.505, Lethal Control of Animals
- h. WS Directive 2.510, Fur, Other Animal Parts, and Edible Meat
- i. WS Directive 2.515, Disposal of Wildlife Carcasses
- j. WS Directive 4.165, Loaning Equipment

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