

TRAPPING “BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES”

The industry’s “BMPs” aren’t what’s best for wildlife.



Trapping for fur pelts and trophies is an egregiously cruel practice that harms wildlife and pets, and imperiled species. Trapping laws and regulations vary by state, with the resulting patchwork threatening the welfare of millions of animals. The trapping industry’s limited effort to address welfare concerns is inadequate and insufficient.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), an organization that advocates on the behalf of state fish, game, and wildlife agencies, has developed Best Management Practices (BMPs)¹ for wildlife trapping, with a goal of documenting and improving the welfare of animals captured by traps. These BMPs, however, fail to achieve any meaningful welfare gains for animals.

BMPs allow for an unacceptable level of harm to wildlife

The BMPs rely on international scales of trauma and injury to assess animal welfare. These scales allow for some severe suffering to individual animals, as long as an average amount of suffering across all animals trapped is below a certain threshold. Notably, for one of the scales, up to 30% of animals caught in restraining traps, such as leghold traps, can suffer from severe trauma, up to and including death. Animals caught in so-called killing traps, such as body-crushing traps, are allowed to suffer for up to five minutes before becoming permanently unconscious; up to 30% of those animals can suffer even longer in agonizing pain.

BMPs fail to consider a holistic understanding of welfare

The trauma and injury scales used to develop the BMPs are flawed, because they:

- fail to incorporate behavioral or physiological responses as measures of welfare;
- fail to account for the compounding effect of multiple lesser injuries;

- assign low and moderate injury scores to some injuries that are capable of causing severe pain (e.g. permanent tooth fracture);
- allow for some injuries to be mis- or under-identified because radiography of trapped animals is not mandatory;
- do not consider how long an injury is present before the animal is killed;
- do not consider the long-term impact of some injuries in animals who escape, or in non-target animals who are released;
- do not provide guidelines on how animals, once caught, should be killed.²

BMPs don’t do enough to protect unintended victims

Though the BMPs suggest that specific trap types be used for specific animals, traps are indiscriminate and capture non-target animals like family pets and other wildlife. In particular, the BMPs fail to consider the suffering of other “furbearing” species when they are caught in the wrong trap type. For instance, while a specific type of leghold trap may effectively capture and cause less injury to foxes and coyotes, the same trap can just as easily capture raccoons and opossums, too, and cause much more severe injuries to those species.

Trappers rarely follow BMPs

The BMPs are relatively unknown among the trapping community and are rarely followed by trappers. A 2015 report³ indicated that only 42% of trappers had heard of the BMPs. Of those 42%, only 66% currently use and plan to continue using the BMPs when they trap. That means that only 28% of all trappers are following the only, and insufficient, guidelines that the trapping industry has established to address animal welfare concerns.

Photo: Fox trapped in Vermont | Source: Facebook

REFERENCES

¹Available at https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/3515/1862/6191/Introduction_BMPs.pdf

²Rochlitz, I. (2010). The impact of snares on animal welfare. In OneKind Report on Snaring. Cambridge University Animal Welfare Information Service: Cambridge, UK. Available at https://onekind.org/uploads/publications/onekind_report_on_snaring_chapter_1.pdf

³Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. (2015). Trap use, furbearers trapped, and trapper characteristics in the United States in 2015. Available at https://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/docs/AFWA_Trap_Use_Report_2015.pdf