

# Trapper education program approved, changes proposed

**HARRISBURG** — An educational program designed to produce knowledgeable, ethical and humane trappers in Pennsylvania will be inaugurated in the Keystone State this year by the Game Commission.

Approval for establishment of the course was given by the commission at its January meeting.

Since 1958 the Game Commission has administered a hunter education program, and the trapper training program will parallel the hunting course which has trained 800,000 youngsters in ethics and safety.

The thrust of the new trapper training program will be to take those with an interest in trapping and to instill in them proper attitudes on trapping methods and ethics, and to instruct them on the nature of animals which are being sought and principles of overall trapline management.

Emphasis will be placed on selective setting of traps to eliminate non-target species from being caught. Trappers will be taught how to avoid catching pets, raptors and other birds, and how to safely release non-target animals and birds from traps.

The new program will not be designed to recruit new trappers, nor will it be intended to teach would-be trappers how to be successful at taking furbearers.

The course is being developed by the Game Commission in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Trappers Association. Many of the instructors for the course are likely to come from the ranks of the trappers' organization.

District game protectors this spring will be going through a training course conducted by Jack Weaver, Game Commission trapper training coordinator. The course will be administered by the Game Commission's Division of Law Enforcement, in cooperation with the Division of Information and Education.

The district game protectors will be responsible for the recruitment, training and certification of instructors, and the trapper training courses will be given throughout the state starting this fall.

Trapper training will be parallel to, but separate from, hunter education. Trappers, like hunters, have a code of ethics, which will be a key feature of the trapping course. Courtesy and sportsmanship are as important for trappers as they are for hunters, and will receive heavy emphasis in the new course.

High fur prices have produced an all-time peak in trapping interest in Pennsylvania. It is believed that the number of trappers in the Keystone State is at a minimum of 135,000, and at times reaches more than 200,000.

Real furs come from furbearing animals, which are a renewable natural resource. Fake furs come from petroleum, which is finite in availability.

Demand for furs is expected to remain high in the future, despite a shift in fashion from long-haired to short-haired pelts. The large number of trappers afield has naturally led to conflicts between trappers, houndsmen, pet owners and landowners.

Many of these conflicts involve young, inexperienced trappers, who have not been properly trained in acceptable trapping methods.

While the Pennsylvania Trappers Association has been conducting trapper training courses on a limited basis, the need for statewide standards and program objectives necessitates involvement of the state agency. Educational aids for the course are now being developed.

The Game Commission, from experience in dealing successfully with hunter education, is in position to assume the leadership role in trapper training in the state and, indeed, the nation.

The trapper training program will be on a voluntary basis, as the hunter education program was initially. Hunter education is now mandatory for all first-time hunters under the age of 16.

Subjects to be covered in the trapper training course will include, but not be limited to, landowner relations, humane trapping, courtesy and sportsmanship, ethical code, matching traps to animals, care and storage of equipment, proper and acceptable methods of trapping on land and in the water, trap theft prevention, basic fur handling and law and regulations governing trapping.

In a further move to raise the standards of trapping in Pennsylvania, the Game Commission has directed its staff to seek changes in the Game Law on several trapping provisions.

An amendment will be sought which would prohibit the use of body-gripping traps on dry land. Body-

gripping traps function in a different way than leg-hold traps. Whereas a leg-hold trap merely restrains a captured live animal, a body-gripping trap produces sudden, intense pressure with kills the animal.

Many persons in the anti-trapping movement advocate the use of body-gripping traps, rather than leg-hold traps. However, a body-gripping trap is very unforgiving if a non-target

species, such as a pet dog or cat, is caught. Because of the danger that is associated with body-gripping traps, the Game Commission hopes to prohibit their use on dry land.

The Game Commission will also ask the Legislature to require that traps be checked at least once every 26 hours, instead of the present 36-hour requirement. And an increase in the penalty for

failure to check traps within the required time period will be sought; the present fine is \$10, and the Game Commission will ask that the penalty be increased to \$25 for each trap not checked.

Finally, the Game Commission will ask the Legislature to prohibit the use of snares and deadfalls, ancient capturing and killing devices which have no place in modern wildlife management.

## Beware of phoney phone pitches

**ANNAPOLIS, Md.** — David Shriver, Chief of the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Pesticide Applicator Law Section, says farmers should be leery of salesmen who offer pesticide deals over the telephone.

"Every year at this time we seem to have a few high pressure salesmen who get on the telephone offering special deals and bargain basement prices on pesticides.

"These salesmen, working from out-of-state offices,

make many promises, and those unfortunate enough to buy the materials often find the products to be highly diluted and therefore not too much of a bargain," Shriver says.

Farmers are urged to beware of calls from strangers offering such deals.

"It is far better for a farmer making such an outlay for pesticide materials to purchase them through a local supplier who is known in the community," Shriver added.

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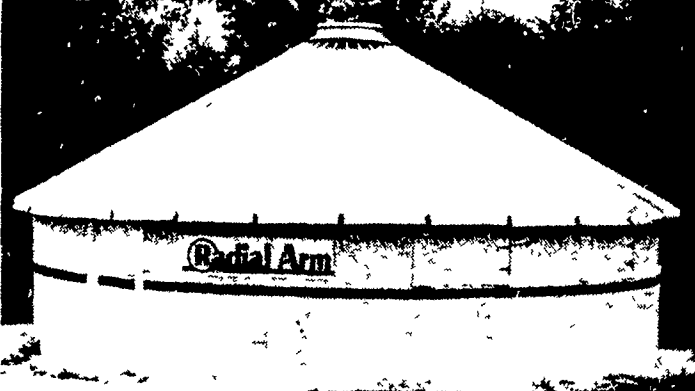
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