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December 1977

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Riedel, Jerry , "An Extension Trapper Program" (1977). *Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop Proceedings*. 228.

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AN EXTENSION TRAPPER PROGRAM

by

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South Dakota's Extension Trapping Program originated in July 1971 when the Department of Game, Fish & Parks initiated this type of animal damage control program for the eastern one-half of South Dakota.

The funding for this program is derived by assessing a surtax on all farmers and ranchers at a rate of 1¢ per head on all cattle and 4¢ per head on all sheep. The monies gained here is then annually matched by the Game, Fish & Parks through hunting, fishing and trapping license revenue. Any expenditures over or above this combined total is paid by the Game, Fish & Parks. However, for the last two years a grant-in-aid for animal damage control through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has provided assistance with 60% of the total budget.

We presently have four Extension Trappers working east of the Missouri River. This represents 44 counties, totaling approximately 34,750 square miles. This is divided into four trapping regions with each trapper assigned an average of 11 counties or about 8,700 square miles.

As Extension Trappers it is our primary function to motivate and to teach the art of trapping. Occasionally we are called upon to assist with law enforcement duties, game & fish management or research projects, but our primary job is to teach people how to trap.

The Extension Trapper is available to the landowner to help teach him how to rid himself of any nuisance or complaint animal that he may have that is causing damage. We are also available to help teach the fur trapper more and better techniques for harvesting our furbearing animals as a nature resource.

Under the responsibilities of the Animal Damage Control portion, and let me repeat - Animal DAMAGE Control, for this is not an Animal POPULATION Control program, we try to teach landowners the proper techniques so they can successfully solve their own problems.

Landowners who are experiencing animal damage losses can contact the Extension Trapper directly or channel their requests for assistance through the County Conservation Officers, County Extension Agents or the Wildlife Extension Specialist at South Dakota State University in Brookings.

The Extension Trapper is responsible for assisting in control of damages caused by all furbearing animals so we do not handle such complaints as ground squirrels, pocket gophers, prairie dogs and alike, as these are handled by the County Extension Agent. Nor do we handle domestic dog complaints, as this is the responsibility of the County Sheriff's office. However, if the sheriff requests our assistance we are then legally covered to work on the complaint, but even with this, things can get pretty involved and I try very hard to keep my activity to a minimum on dog complaint cases.

We are fortunate that our Extension Trapping Program has enough flexibility to allow for the handling of each complaint on an individual basis. I feel this is one of the reasons the program is a great success.

On an average complaint we will usually use an approach that will first identify the animal responsible for the damage and then decide how to stop the damage. If a change in farm management practices can correct the situation without the destruction of the offending animal, I suggest it. If the situation warrants, we instruct the landowner on how to destroy the offending animal. Generally this is done by trapping but occasionally firearms can be used. For example, giving instructions on the use of the predator call for fox or coyote.

If traps are to be used on a complaint, we give the landowner the option of borrowing state traps or the chance to purchase traps through us that are made available by the Cooperative Extension Service at South Dakota State University. The Extension Trapper has six different sizes of traps available along with trap stakes, urine lures and predator calls to be sold only to landowners who have verified animal damage losses. In this way we can start work on the particular problem on our first visit to the complaint area. From this point we give the landowner information on animal habits and patterns, set locations, as well as showing him individual sets. In this way, he is then equipped to stop the current problem, and he is also in a position to stop any re-occurring damage if it arises in the future.

If for some individual reason the landowner is unable to care for the traps, we often try to get a neighbor to help out, or if there is a local trapper in the area, we will offer him the opportunity to do the trapping. Only as the last resort to stop the damage do the Extension Trappers do the actual control work.

Our second area of responsibility as Extension Trappers, is as I mentioned before, to teach fur trappers more and better techniques for the harvesting of the furbearing animals as a natural resource. Here we use four basic approaches to get the Extension Trapping Program out to the public.

One way is to set up public meetings or talks for special interest groups whereby we use a colored slide series showing step-by-step procedures

for fur trapping all the different furbearers in the state. Also included in the slide series is set locations, animal habits, skinning instructions, trapping ethics and other general trapping information.

The second way we get our program out to the public is by holding outdoor trapping clinics where we can take the group right outdoors and make the actual sets while the class looks on. This allows for more detailed information, especially on set construction and set location as well as an opportunity to work with baits and lures.

These public meetings and clinics are set-up by the Extension Trapper directly, or other employees from the Game, Fish & Parks. The meetings may also be requested and/or sponsored by special interest groups, such as 4-H clubs, FFA chapters, Sportsmen's clubs, Colleges, Scout groups, J. C.'s and Kiwanias.

The third way we get the Extension Trapping Program out to the public is by operating display booths, such as at the State Fair, Farm & Home Shows, Sports Equipment Shows or other civic activities. Our exhibits consist of traps, furs, set construction displays and free handouts on trapping.

The fourth way we get the Extension Trapping Program out to the public is by individual instructions. Here the Extension Trapper is available to go right out to the person's place and work with him or her on an individual basis showing them the sets or techniques that they are primarily interested in.

The natural resource harvest aspect of the Extension Trapping Program has good merits, although often times it is hard to show direct relationship of benefit from the program. However, in the last three years of exceptionally high fur prices and trapping pressure the number of animal damage complaints in my region have decreased accordingly. This program also provides for the needed harvest of a natural resource in a correct and ethical manner. Rather than having a beginning trapper in the field with no knowledge or ethics involving trapping, we are hopefully training a trapper that will do a good job with the harvest while doing so in the most humane manner possible. With the present anti-trapping pressure that has been put upon us, this portion of the trapper education, as well as the education of the non-trapping public will become even more important in the future if we want to continue to use the steel trap, or for that matter, the gun and the fishhook.

A third area of responsibility that has just recently been given the Extension Trapper concerns South Dakota's Pheasant Restoration Program. In order that you may understand the Extension Trappers' involvement with this project, I would like to just briefly explain the highlights of this program.

This Pheasant Restoration Program project was founded by an organization formed by Governor Kneip. This group is known as the South Dakota

Pheasant Congress. This group is made up of people in South Dakota from many walks of life, and represents many groups and organizations as well as individuals who have a sincere interest in South Dakota's Wildlife and in the State's economy. Governor Kneip gave the Pheasant Congress the task of identifying the reasons for the pheasant decline and the responsibility of formulating plans for the restoration of the state's pheasant population.

The Pheasant Congress proposed a bill in the last legislative session entitled the Pheasant Restoration Act, and they were successful in getting this bill signed into law. This law created the Pheasant Restoration Program and it also placed the responsibility for the administration of the program under the Game, Fish & Parks.

The program is supported financially by revenue from the sale of a special \$5.00 Pheasant Restoration Stamp for hunters hunting any small game species. This money is added to a \$125,000 state legislative appropriation and the combined total is used for the sole purpose of restoring the state's pheasant population.

The Pheasant Restoration Program is set-up on a three-pointed management program with 80% of the monies available being used for habitat improvement, 10% being used for raising stock of pheasants, and 10% being used for predator control.

In reference to habitat improvement, plans call for seeding down of small plots of private land into undisturbed dense nesting cover. This is to be accomplished by coordinating a three year lease-payment program with individual landowners. Payments will also be made for improvements on existing shelterbelts for the establishment of good winter cover areas.

The 10% of the funds that are appropriated for raising and stocking will be paid to anyone that raises, bands and releases pheasant chicks.

The remaining 10% of the Pheasant Restoration Program funds will be spent on predator control. The bulk of this money will be used to purchase live traps which will be given to interested youth groups.

The Department feels the skunk and raccoon are the predators that are the most damaging to pheasants, so these are the two animals the predator control program will be keying on. The skunks will be trapped by the agriculture youth groups on a year around basis due to the fact they are egg eaters, have little fur value and are known carriers of rabies.

The raccoons will be trapped during the months of May, June and July since this is the time the pheasant hens are nesting and is the only period the raccoons are detrimental to the pheasant population.

Hopefully most of our raccoon control along with fox and badger control can be achieved in the fall by an annual fur harvest.

Of course the providing of proper habitat is the key to the entire program and it is hoped the Pheasant Restoration Program will provide landowners with enough monetary incentive so that farming for wildlife will be an economical asset rather than a liability like it has been in the past.

The Extension Trapper involvement in the Pheasant Restoration Program is to provide technical assistance and information on the raising and stocking of pheasant chicks. We are also available to assist the Conservation Officers upon their request with the banding and releasing of the birds.

We, also, have at our disposal an excellent made slide series that is to be shown, to any rural or metropolitan group or organization within the state, for the sole purpose of selling the Pheasant Restoration Program to the public.

The main involvement the Extension Trapper has with Pheasant Restoration concerns the predator control portion of the program. We are responsible for the distribution of the live traps and the giving of instructions and technical assistance on how to use the traps for achieving the best results. We try to cover the best set locations, animal habits, how to handle the trapped animals, types of baits to be used, den identification and other useful trapping information.

In conclusion, the Extension Trapping Program is a unique program in that the Extension Trapper is responsible for teaching individual answers on individual questions concerning methods for animal damage control and for an annual fur harvest. It accomplishes a good success ratio on both, despite the large area each trapper has to cover.

Along with this, the Extension Trapper is responsible for assisting in other areas of work within the network of the Game, Fish & Parks.

However, the Extension Trapping Program provides something else too that is so desperately needed in the wildlife field today. With the many individual contacts and group meetings - the Extension Trapper is just one more voice telling the public the truth about wildlife management philosophy.