

Leghold Trapping: A Cause of Serious Injuries to Fishers

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At the first symposium on the biology and management of martens (*Martes americana*) and fishers (*Martes pennanti*), Proulx and Barrett (1991) pointed out that fishers were seriously injured when captured in leghold traps (Nos. 1-1/2 and 3) and that animals escaping through self-mutilation may represent 15% of the known annual harvest. Of course, such a statement resulted in scepticism among members of the fur industry since it is believed that the leghold trap has been eliminated as a land-set for all species except canids and felids (Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development 1986).

Wildlife managers should pay attention to Proulx and Barrett's (1991) figures. Since 1990, we examined

762 carcasses of fishers harvested in Alberta. We were careful to differentiate trap injuries from post-mortem ones. Injuries included broken bones accompanied by swelling and hemorrhage, self-mutilation (toes or feet) and old wring-offs (missing toes and feet). A total of 141 (18.5%) out of 762 fishers had suffered one or more injuries noted above. Fresh mutilations were recorded in 93 (12%) fisher carcasses. Twenty-five (3%) others were re-captures that had apparently escaped by amputating the captured limb.

We know that fishers are easily captured in traps set for lynx (*Felis lynx*) and coyote (*Canis latrans*). Nevertheless, wring-offs are inhumane and may result in losses that can jeopardize fisher population management programs (Proulx and Barrett 1991). An effort should therefore be made to develop more selective sets for the capture of canids and felids. More studies should also be conducted to recognize habitat conditions and times of the year where fishers may be less vulnerable to leghold trapping.

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