

**Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Fur Hunting and Trapping**

**and what they mean to the
people and wildlife of Illinois**



To some people, trapping, hunting, and the use of fur are controversial issues. Often the debate is accompanied by misinformation and misunderstanding on both sides.

This brochure answers common questions about fur hunting and trapping in Illinois.

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Is it legal to hunt and trap animals in Illinois?

Hunting and trapping are legal in Illinois—but only for certain kinds of animals. Out of the 61 mammals in Illinois, 14 are classified as furbearers and only 12 of these may be legally trapped or hunted.

Badger • Beaver • Coyote • Muskrat • Mink • Opossum
Red Fox • Gray Fox • Long-tailed Weasel • Least Weasel
Striped Skunk • Raccoon

Note: Some species can only be trapped, others can be trapped or hunted.

For more information go to <http://dnr.state.il.us> for up-to-date hunting and trapping regulations.

The Wildlife Society endorses fur hunting and trapping

The Wildlife Society is an international organization of trained wildlife conservation professionals who dedicate their lives to ensuring the welfare of wildlife. These professionals believe that “regulated trapping is a safe, efficient, and

practical means of capturing individual animals without impairing the survival of furbearer populations or damaging the environment.” Harvest information from hunters and trappers also assists scientific research that helps wildlife biologists better understand and conserve wildlife.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources provides trapper education courses that teach people the proper techniques and equipment to use in order to trap safely and humanely. These courses emphasize laws, regulations, and responsible behavior.



Do fur hunting and trapping cause wildlife populations to become endangered?

Some people mistakenly believe that hunting and trapping cause animal populations to become endangered. Hunting and trapping are allowed only for animals that are abundant—hunting and trapping do not cause wildlife to become endangered. Since the advent of modern wildlife management, hunting and trapping have never caused a single animal population to become endangered or extinct.

Most of the hunted and trapped animals in Illinois are capable of having numerous offspring in a short time. For instance, each female muskrat is capable of having up to 3 litters of

young in a single year, and each litter may contain 5 to 10 young! However, because of predators, disease, and starvation, fewer than 1 out of every 4 young survives in a typical year.

The large number of muskrats born each year provides a renewable resource that people can use. There are more muskrats born than the habitat can support, so hunting and trapping simply remove some of the individuals that probably would have died anyway due to other causes.

Raccoons, raccoons, raccoons

Professional wildlife biologists with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources have found that populations of hunted and trapped wildlife commonly used for fur have remained stable for many years and that several populations have actually increased. The most striking example is the raccoon. Biologists estimate that there are more raccoons in the state of Illinois today than there have ever been.



© Bob Gross

Raccoons are more plentiful in Illinois than ever before, as witnessed by the increase in nuisance raccoon reports throughout the state.



© Bob Gress

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources was able to successfully restore river otter populations using trapping methods commonly used by Illinois trappers.

River otters rebound

River otters were once virtually gone from Illinois. However, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources began releasing otters in 1994 and has successfully restored them in the state's rivers and streams. These relocated otters were caught in Louisiana, where they are plentiful. They were caught using the very same foothold traps and methods that are commonly used by Illinois trappers. This successful reintroduction of a species shows that the techniques and equipment used by responsible trappers are safe, effective, and as humane as possible.

Are fur hunting and trapping regulated in any way?

Some people have the misconception that hunters and trappers are allowed to pursue these activities any way they choose—without restrictions. In Illinois, there are more than 75 laws and regulations that specifically regulate fur hunting and trapping, and federal laws and regulations apply as well.

Of the hundreds of different kinds of wildlife that live in Illinois, only a handful can be legally hunted or trapped, and these are plentiful. Since the advent of modern wildlife management, it has never been legal to hunt or trap rare or endangered wildlife, and there are severe penalties for violations.

Hunting and trapping are only allowed for a short time period each year, and the seasons are set to coincide with animal life cycles. For instance, trapping is not allowed during late spring and summer when

animals are giving birth to and raising their young. There also are restrictions on where traps can be placed. They are not allowed on roadways, rights of way, or near buildings without landowner's permission. Professional wildlife biologists from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources continually monitor wildlife populations and set seasons to ensure the health of the wildlife resources.

There are restrictions on the techniques and equipment that can be used to harvest furbearers, to make the methods as selective and humane as possible. The large bear traps with iron teeth seen in museums and antique shops have been illegal to use in Illinois for more than a quarter century. Modern traps have smooth surfaces and are sized to the animal being trapped.

Trapping is a serious commitment. When a trapper buys a license and sets a trap, he or she is bound by law to check that trap at least once each day. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources provides trapper education courses for the public, and encourages all trappers to participate. These courses teach people how to trap in the most selective and humane way possible, and they

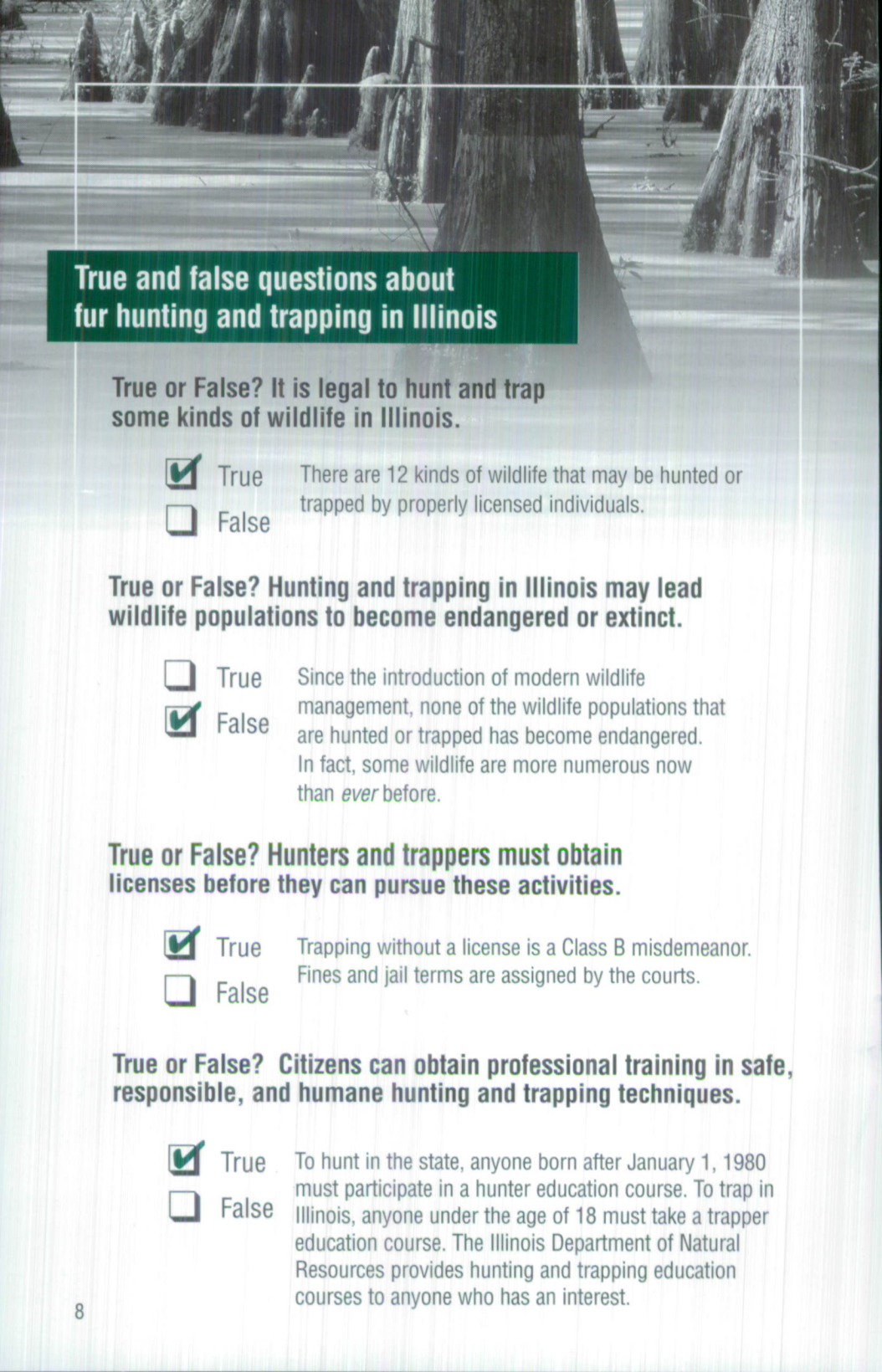
stress responsible trapper behavior. First time trappers under the age of 18 are required to pass one of these courses before they can buy licenses. The Department continually reviews rules, regulations and education programs and, as needed, makes changes to ensure the humaneness of trapping.



Monica Hardy / D.J. Case & Associates

Illinois Conservation Police Officers enforce the more than 75 laws and regulations that apply to fur hunting and trapping in Illinois.





True and false questions about fur hunting and trapping in Illinois

True or False? It is legal to hunt and trap some kinds of wildlife in Illinois.

- True There are 12 kinds of wildlife that may be hunted or trapped by properly licensed individuals.
- False

True or False? Hunting and trapping in Illinois may lead wildlife populations to become endangered or extinct.

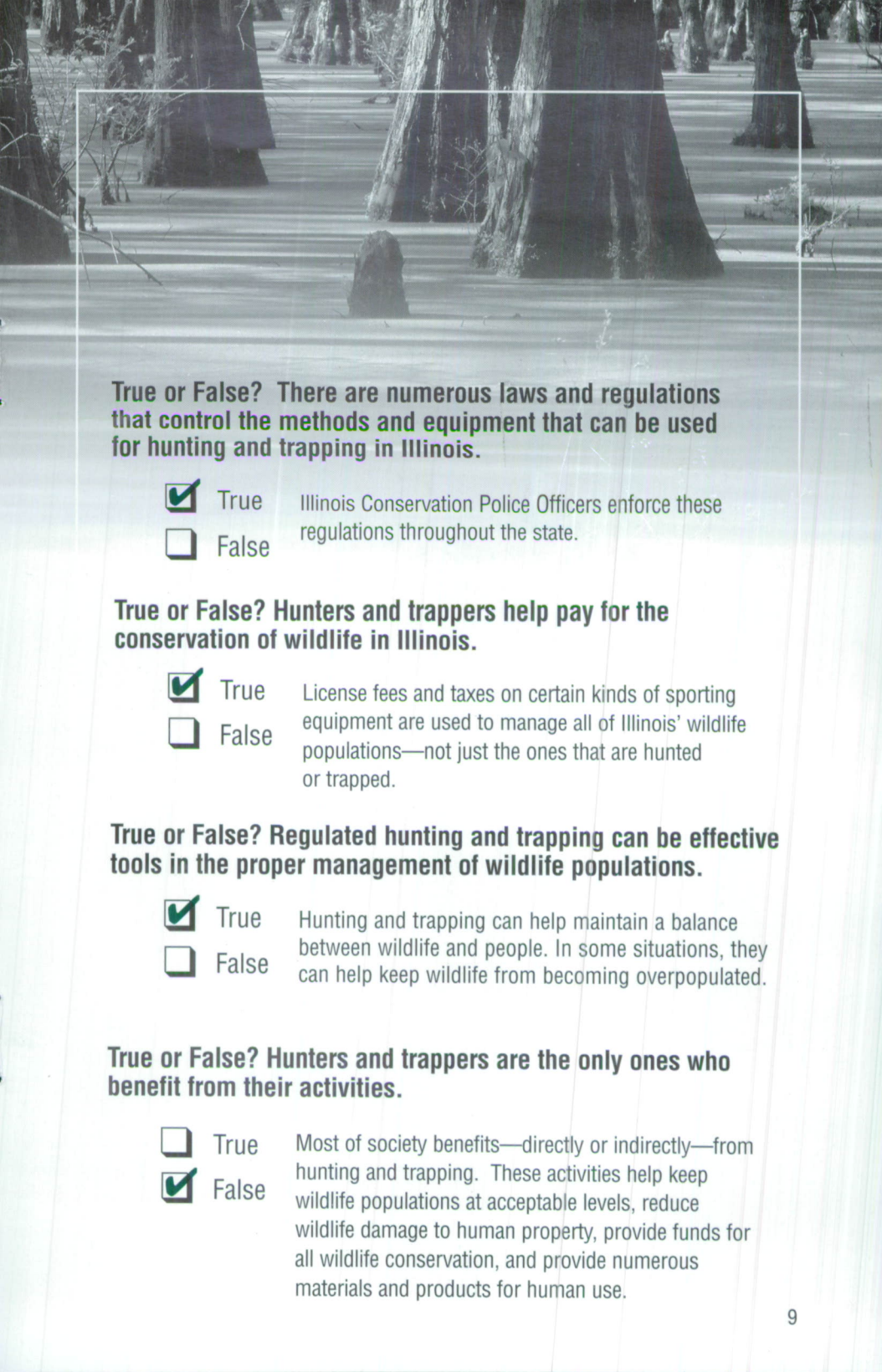
- True Since the introduction of modern wildlife management, none of the wildlife populations that are hunted or trapped has become endangered.
- False In fact, some wildlife are more numerous now than *ever* before.

True or False? Hunters and trappers must obtain licenses before they can pursue these activities.

- True Trapping without a license is a Class B misdemeanor. Fines and jail terms are assigned by the courts.
- False

True or False? Citizens can obtain professional training in safe, responsible, and humane hunting and trapping techniques.

- True To hunt in the state, anyone born after January 1, 1980 must participate in a hunter education course. To trap in Illinois, anyone under the age of 18 must take a trapper education course. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources provides hunting and trapping education courses to anyone who has an interest.
- False



True or False? There are numerous laws and regulations that control the methods and equipment that can be used for hunting and trapping in Illinois.



True

Illinois Conservation Police Officers enforce these regulations throughout the state.



False

True or False? Hunters and trappers help pay for the conservation of wildlife in Illinois.



True

License fees and taxes on certain kinds of sporting equipment are used to manage all of Illinois' wildlife populations—not just the ones that are hunted or trapped.



False

True or False? Regulated hunting and trapping can be effective tools in the proper management of wildlife populations.



True

Hunting and trapping can help maintain a balance between wildlife and people. In some situations, they can help keep wildlife from becoming overpopulated.



False

True or False? Hunters and trappers are the only ones who benefit from their activities.



True



False

Most of society benefits—directly or indirectly—from hunting and trapping. These activities help keep wildlife populations at acceptable levels, reduce wildlife damage to human property, provide funds for all wildlife conservation, and provide numerous materials and products for human use.

Do fur hunting and trapping keep wildlife from becoming overpopulated?

Regulated hunting and trapping provide many benefits to the wildlife and people in Illinois, especially in helping maintain a balance between wildlife and people. When wild animals become too numerous, they can cause problems for humans as well as their own populations. Take muskrats as an example. If left unchecked, muskrats will reproduce rapidly, eventually eating most of the available food in their wetland habitat. The habitat can only provide enough cattails and

other foods to support a limited number of muskrats. The inevitable result is extreme stress and competition within the population, possibly followed by mass starvation, in which only a few individuals survive.

Wildlife overpopulation may also lead to disease and parasitism. As animals become more and more crowded together, the incidence of disease often increases. Large die-offs due to disease are not uncommon under these circumstances.



George Hubert, Jr.

When a wildlife population gets too numerous, the incidence of disease and parasitism often increases.

Disease, parasitism, and starvation are nature's ways of keeping the population in check.

Starvation and disease are some examples of nature's ways of keeping a dynamic balance among the plants and animals in the natural world. The problem is that these peaks and valleys in wildlife populations may have far-reaching impacts. When muskrats strip a wetland area of its vegetation, that has a tremendous negative impact on all sorts of other wildlife that also depend on the wetland for survival.

In some situations, fur hunting and trapping can help maintain muskrat and other wildlife populations at levels that prevent boom and bust cycles. The desired result is to keep wildlife populations at levels that the habitat can support from year to year. Professional wildlife biologists constantly monitor these levels and establish appropriate regulations and restrictions to achieve those ends.



© Bob Gress

Fur hunting and trapping help keep muskrat populations at levels that the habitat can support.



Do fur hunting and trapping reduce wildlife damage to human property?

In some situations, fur hunting and trapping help keep wildlife populations in balance with their habitats, reducing human/wildlife interactions and minimizing damage to human property.


When wildlife populations become too large, the likelihood of interactions with humans increases. In Illinois there are more than 80,000 nuisance wildlife complaints every year. Common complaints include such things as raccoons damaging houses and

living in chimneys, deer eating crops, and beavers damaging ornamental trees and building dams that flood lawns, roads, and farm fields.

Overpopulation may also lead to outbreaks of disease among wildlife, creating the possibility that sick animals may spread disease to domestic animals and household pets. On the other side of the coin, wild animals can also pick up diseases from domestic animals that can decimate wild populations.



In some situations, fur hunting and trapping help keep wildlife populations in balance with their habitats, reducing human/wildlife interactions and minimizing damage to human property.



Hunting and trapping cannot completely eliminate wildlife damage problems for people. However, these activities can help solve localized problems and in some situations help stabilize wildlife populations on a broader scale—helping to maintain a healthy balance between wildlife and people.

Hunters and trappers help pay for wildlife conservation

Hunters and trappers help pay for conservation of the wildlife in Illinois through license fees and special taxes. This money goes toward the conservation of all of Illinois' wildlife, not just furbearers. Hunters and trappers contribute more than 16 million dollars every year for wildlife conservation in Illinois. These contributions benefit everyone who enjoys the natural resources of our state.



Illinois DNR

Through special taxes and license fees, hunters and trappers annually contribute more than \$16 million to wildlife conservation in Illinois.

Are the animals trapped only for their fur?

It is a common misconception that the pelt or fur is the only part of the animal used by fur hunters and trappers. Actually, nearly the entire animal is used. In some cases, the meat from animals such as raccoons and beavers is used for food. However, most of the animals caught by fur hunters and trappers are sold to fur buyers in rural communities across the state. These fur buyers commonly prepare the fur for resale, market other useful parts of the animals, and send the rest to animal by-products facilities.

Many people have no idea just how many products they use every day come from wild and domestic animals. In addition to the obvious things such as fur garments and coat linings, there are literally hundreds of other items that are made at least in part of animal products, including soap, pet food, livestock feed, paint, tires, textiles, construction materials, and mink oil, to name a few.

Why do some people want to ban fur hunting and trapping?

Some people believe that animals have the same rights as humans—that it's wrong to use animals for any purpose. Some people don't believe in eating meat or eggs, using animals for medical research, wearing leather or fur, owning pets, and in some cases, don't even believe in controlling insect pests in the home. The Illinois

Department of Natural Resources does not share this philosophy. Instead, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources believes that, with careful stewardship, the wildlife populations of Illinois can be conserved and used for the benefit of society.

Rendering: The invisible industry

Rendering is the name for the process by which animal fat or tallow is processed into a variety of products that are used everyday by

millions of people around the world. Many of the animals that are trapped are made available to the rendering industry, where they are used in the production of many products that benefit society, including soap, livestock feed, paint, tires, ice cream, textiles, and construction materials.



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Many commonly used household items such as soap and paint are made at least in part of animal products.

Facts about fur hunting and trapping in Illinois

- Of the 61 species of mammals in Illinois, 12 are legal to hunt or trap for fur
- Hunters and trappers must be properly licensed to legally hunt or trap
- About 300,000 people are licensed to hunt and trap in Illinois each year
- Many trappers sell the animals they catch to fur buyers who utilize the entire animal for products for human use
- Hunters and trappers contribute about \$16 million per year to wildlife conservation in Illinois through license fees and taxes on equipment
- Since the advent of scientifically based wildlife management, no hunted or trapped animal population in the United States has ever become endangered or extinct

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Fur Hunting and Trapping in Illinois

To some people, trapping, hunting, and the use of fur are controversial issues. Often the debate is accompanied by misinformation and misunderstanding on both sides.

This brochure takes a closer look at fur hunting and trapping and what they mean to the people—and the wildlife—of Illinois.

For more information on fur hunting and trapping in Illinois, contact:

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