

Hunting and Trapping Wolves in Yukon

Wolves are listed as furbearers and big game under the Yukon *Wildlife Act*. They can be harvested under a big game hunting licence or a trapping licence.

Trapping in Yukon

Trapping in Yukon is managed under a registered trapping concession system. Over 400 Yukoners currently have trapping licenses, either as registered trapping concession holders or assistant trappers. There are 351 registered trapping concessions in Yukon including eighteen group areas held by families or groups of trappers.

The Yukon *Wildlife Act* requires trappers to obtain an annual licence. Assistant trappers also require a licence that must be signed by the concession holder. Concession holders pay a registration fee every 5 years. The conditions for issuing and holding an annual trapper or assistant trapper licence are described in the Yukon Trapping Regulations. A one-time completion of a recognized Trapper Training Program is required to obtain a licence. The Yukon *Wildlife Act* and the Trapping Regulations describe season dates, quotas, fur sealing and trap use restrictions. Environment Yukon monitors the annual fur harvest with trapping licences, export permits, fur dealer and taxidermist records, and fur sealing certificates.

Yukon's regulations pertaining to permitted trapping devices are guided by the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards, a trade agreement between Canada and European Union.

Approximately 50 percent of Yukon trappers are First Nations. First Nation trappers must comply with the Yukon *Wildlife Act* and Trapping Regulations when trapping for commercial purposes. They do not have to comply with this legislation if their purpose in trapping is to trade, barter or sell by-products to members of their First Nation or other Yukon First Nations.

Under the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement, the requirements and responsibilities for the regulation, administration and management of traplines and furbearers is shared by Yukon First Nations, Renewable Resources Councils (RRCs), the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB) and the Government of Yukon. Within their jurisdictions, the RRCs may establish guidelines to assess and review the use of traplines and make recommendations to the Minister and the First Nation government on the assignment of vacant or under-used traplines. RRCs may also establish bylaws for the management of furbearers and make recommendations to the Minister and First Nation on the management of furbearers. The YFWMB makes recommendations to the Minister on trapping-related issues as they apply to the territory as a whole.

Over the past 20 years, the trapping industry has changed in Yukon. Less than a third of Yukon's 351 trapping concessions are active in any given year. Low financial return compared to the cost of operating a trapline is a major factor in the decline. Remote traplines are particularly expensive to maintain. Nevertheless, trapping is still an important social and cultural activity in many small Yukon communities. Over the past two decades, Yukon's total fur harvest has ranged between \$250,000 to over \$1.5 million annually, with economic spin-offs worth two to three times that amount.

Trapping wolves as furbearers

Wolves are one of the fourteen species of furbearing mammals trapped in Yukon. The wolf trapping season is November 1 through March 31. Only neck snares can be used March 11 to 31. Restraint type devices for wolves are restricted according to the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards and listed in the Yukon Trapping Regulations. There is no limit to the number of wolves that can be trapped or snared.

Between 1988 and 2009, 1,798 wolves were harvested under trapping and *Wildlife Act* permit licences with a further 1106 taken under other license types (hunting control and other). The average annual wolf trapper harvest is 82 wolves a year. The average number of trappers requiring a Fur Sealing Certificate is 136 per year, with a low of 80 in 1995 and a high of 251 in 1988.

All harvested wolf pelts are required by law to be sealed with a government issued metal tag before they are transferred or sold by a trapper.

Export of a wolf pelt from the territory requires a Yukon permit. If it is being sent outside the country, a CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) permit is also required.

Hunting wolves as a big game species

The hunting season for wolves is August 1 through March 31. Residents must have a valid Yukon big game hunting licence (\$10) and can harvest seven wolves per year. Like trappers, hunters must have their wolf pelts sealed with a numbered metal tag. There is a fee of \$10 per tag. Non-resident hunters can harvest two wolves on their hunting licence. In addition to the seal fee, non-resident hunters must pay a harvest fee of \$75 on any wolf killed.

Trappers and assistant trappers can hunt wolves on their concession during the trapping season. There is no limit on the number of wolves hunted in this circumstance. Outside their trapping concession, a trapper or assistant trapper must have a big game hunting licence to hunt wolves and follow the requirements of the Yukon Hunting Regulations.

Trapping as a method for managing wolves

The current realities of the trapping industry present challenges to using trapping as a method for managing wolves. The low prices for fur returns over the last 40 years make trapping in general, and wolves in particular, a costly enterprise to sustain. Trapping wolves is hard, both physically and mentally. Wolves are intelligent, powerful, difficult to catch and labour intensive to skin and prepare for market. The low harvest rates displayed by the majority of long term Yukon trapline holders is a reflection of these realities.

A recent study by Environment Yukon concluded that for trapping to be an effective way to manage wolf populations, trappers need appropriate wolf-trapping skills, interest in harvesting wolves, and access to wolves across several adjacent traplines. With enough access, trappers can establish multi-year sites over areas large enough to affect several packs. In this way, it may be possible to increase harvest to the level where pack numbers could be held below natural levels. However, sustained success in any given area will lower the number of wolves, which increases the effort and expense of trapping.

The social complexity and high reproductive rates of wolf populations are significant factors in allowing wolves to maintain high numbers even in the face of increased harvest pressure. Wolf harvest rates large enough to cause declines are highly variable. Wolf harvest rates of between 35% and even 74% have been shown to be sustainable in various studies. What might be assumed to be a high harvest rate may have little effect on wolf population growth rates if productivity is high and the population in question is surrounded by other populations that can serve as a source of new wolves.