



# **NORTH AMERICAN FUR AUCTIONS**

*Wild Fur Pelt Handling Manual*



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# REDUCING PELT DAMAGE CAUSED BY THE TRAPPER AND HUNTER

## *INTRODUCTION*

Since the implementation of trapper education programs, the quality of pelt handling has greatly improved. Listed below are comments and suggestions regarding the causes of pelt value reduction and how they may be reduced or eliminated.

## *HANDLING*

Even though the expertise in pelt handling varies regionally, it is a fact some pelts are handled better than others. Pelt handlers cannot increase the amount of fur on pelts, or repair damage that already exists, but they can certainly reduce pelt value through poor trapping and handling. Well-handled pelts are pleasing to the fur grader and the fur buyer. Clearly, it is to the fur harvester's advantage to trap and handle fur well.

## *TRAPPING METHODS*

Keeping a pelt in the best condition begins even before a trap or snare is set. Snares and traps should be de-greased, dyed, waxed (if preferred), tuned, and defective or weak trap springs repaired or replaced. Trap locations should be made to minimize pelt damage. Proper-sized traps and correct trigger and dog positions should also be used to further avoid pelt damage. Conibear traps that are too big or too small for the intended animal, weak springs, poorly-designed traps, or an incorrect trigger assembly will damage fur. Depending on the location and its severity, pelt value may be reduced significantly.

The use of lures, particularly when trapping Beaver, should be with caution, since there is a greater risk to the Beaver of being bitten by other Beavers unless completely under water. Select a trap location with plenty of water to submerge the Beaver, using plenty of wire, and securing the trap to allow the trapped Beaver to pull trap-securing stakes easily. Maintain a regular trapline time limit check to reduce pelt damage caused by other animals, adverse weather conditions and taint.

## *FIELD HANDLING OF FUR*

Fur that has been removed from foothold or cage traps generally do not pose a problem as far as the grading of pelts is concerned. Problems do arise when fur-bearers have been shot, or in the removal from snares and Conibears. Always remove snares and Conibears carefully from the animals. Careless removal will pull guard hairs and underfur. Remove the trap carefully and if the animal is frozen to the Conibear, take everything home to thaw and replace the set with a new trap. Carefully pull animals that are frozen to mud, snow or ice so guard hairs stay on the pelt. Careless pulling will pull guard hairs from the pelt and depending on the location and the amount of pulled fur, pelt value will be reduced.

If necessary wash dirt and blood from the pelt. Never leave Otter exposed to direct sunlight or let the fur become dry. Otter singe easily in the raw state and if singeing is bad, pelt value will be reduced. Keep the pelt moist until boarded.

## **TRANSPORTING THE FUR**

Most trapping activity takes place when temperatures are cold or below freezing. Carelessly placed fur, particularly if it is wet, may freeze to metal and other objects. Fur can be pulled from the bumping and jarring in trapline vehicles and trailers. Putting the animals into bags to protect them from metal or each other will greatly reduce pelt damage. Don't pile warm fur on each other. Body heat has to escape, and if pelting in the field let the leather side cool before turning fur out.

## **HANDLING FUR**

Fur should be skinned as soon as possible. Most fur handlers know this, but it is often neglected. Some types of fur skin better when the fat has set, others when still warm. Whatever the handlers preference, fur needs to be skinned before the skin taints and fur is easily pulled away.

With the exception of Beaver, all fur is cased-skinned. Freezing pelts rarely causes problems with hair-slip, but recognize that by putting too much fresh fur into a freezer, the exceptional insulating qualities of fur may prevent the centre of the pelt from quickly freezing.

Prior to fleshing, inspect and remove from the pelt any blood or dirt matts as well as burrs that may cause fleshing tools to cut into the skin. Blood is difficult to remove without washing but should be done, especially for long-haired furs. When blood has dried, it is difficult to remove during drumming. Burrs have to be carefully removed without taking guard hairs with them.

There are many different fleshing methods used. The desired result is to have a pelt that is saleable to the fur trade with all heavy flesh and fat removed. Some types of fur, such as Fisher, are prone to grease burn and every effort has to be made to avoid this. Some sections of wild Mink have saddles removed and other areas, saddles remain on the skin. Removing Mink saddles runs the risk of nicking the skin and opening up old scars. Saddles on Muskrats remain with only excess fat and flesh being removed.

Resin matts can be a concern particularly with Marten and to a lesser degree, Lynx and Fisher. It is best to leave them and let the fur grader decide. If you want to remove them, do so carefully and never cut them away. Remove Porcupine quills from Fishers. Graders do not appreciate finding them by accident!

## **SEWING HOLES**

With the exception of .22 calibre bullet holes, always carefully sew-up any holes. Depending on the location and the number of holes on the pelt, in most cases, neatly-sewn holes generally do not affect the grade of a pelt. Leaving unsewn holes does affect pelt grade. Neatly sew any holes and make sure all blood has been thoroughly removed around bullet holes. When the hole is being closed, guard hairs should be removed from under the thread. It is not recommended to sew holes in Muskrats because the grading line presently used regards a sewn hole and an unsewn hole as the same. Let the fur grader make the decision where a sewn pelt should go. Don't make the decision for him.

## **WASHING PELTS**

While washing is not needed for all pelts, it does improve their appearance. Mud, dirt, or blood that has been removed results in a clean pelt that will give the fur grader and buyer an accurate assessment of the pelt's true value. Washing also loosens matted fur that has been crushed by Conibears and snares that would have left obvious breaks in the fur and a lower pelt value. Washing in cool water with a little soap will not remove the pelt's natural oils. Too much soap will leave a dull "dead" appearance to the fur by removing the pelt's natural oils.

## **BOARDING PELTS**

All trappers have their preference when it comes to boarding fur. Whether it is wire frames, split stretchers or solid boards, they should be shaped to conform to the fur trade. Pelts are sold leather-out or fur-out and fur handlers must recognize what is preferred. Never over-stretch pelts, particularly fur harvested early in the season. Granted, it is tough to over-stretch fully-prime fur. Although the larger the pelt, the more money it is worth, overstretching can have the opposite effect by thinning the fur and creating a weak appearance.

## **CUTTING INSPECTION WINDOWS IN PELTS**

Pelts handled leather-out need a window or inspection area so fur graders can evaluate the pelt's quality. Cut the window when the pelt is still green. Cutting the window when the pelt is green will "seal" the edge making it tough to rip. Sometimes the window is cut too far into the flanks or high into the belly and can devalue a pelt. Usually this is done intentionally to cut away tainted areas of the pelt.

## **BOARD SIZES**

Unlike ranched Mink and Fox boards, there are no standard sizes. Each section or region of wild fur-bearers generally are different in size. NAFA requires the pelt handler to use stretchers that are generally acceptable throughout the trade. A ¼" or ½" or more in width variance generally doesn't matter. Most board sizes "fit" most fur-bearers. In other instances they do not. Because of its size, a coat Raccoon would not fit on Raccoon boards for the northern areas because the size differences are too great.

If there was one concern about boards, it would be that they are at times too wide in the shoulder and butt areas. The reverse is also true where boards, in order to gain length, become too narrow in these spots. Fur graders make adjustments to size when they are grading when they see pelts that are clearly too wide or narrow for the size they are grading. The "pencil" stretched pelts are usually dropped a size, while short, wide pelts are bumped into the next size up. Recommended board sizes are included in this manual.

## **DRYING PELTS**

Occasionally, pelts are dried too quickly. The leather looks and feels stiff and board-like. The leather is tough to bend and if dried too quickly at very high temperatures, the skin cooks. When bent, the leather actually cracks. Areas where the leather has burnt will not dress and will be greatly reduced in value.

Dry pelts relatively slowly between temperatures of 55°F–70°F and as the pelts dry, wipe off excess oils that appear. If drying at lower temperatures, a fan should be used to circulate the air. Failure to do this can result in tainted pelts. Do not direct air flow towards pelts since this may result in drying too quickly.

## **TURNING PELTS**

Fur-out pelts are initially dried leather-out until the head is still pliable, then turned fur-out. Be careful to avoid tearing the leather. The worst tearing occurs in the shoulder area of the pelt and the tear usually runs up and over the shoulders. Tearing in the butt usually runs in a straight line up the back of the pelt. Provided the armpits and the legs are dry, leave the legs inside the pelt when it is turned. This virtually eliminates tears in the shoulder and does not affect the grade of the pelt. Any moist spots, like in the armpit area, can be treated with a preservative like Borax.

## **STORING PELTS**

After pelts have been removed from the boards they should be hung in a cool place out of the reach of animals. Smaller pelts can be stored in the freezer to prevent the pelts from going stale as in the case with wild Mink which oxidize easily. Otter pelts must be kept in a cool location to prevent singeing. Pelts stored in areas that are too warm or in the light will turn stale. Pelts stored over the summer should also be kept in a cool, dark area or preferably wrapped and stored in a freezer.

## **TRANSPORTING PELTS**

Keep bags of fur dry. Rain or wet snow can damage pelts. Do not transport Otter in heated areas. They can singe, so avoid putting them in a vehicle with the heater on.

Do not fold tails of wild Mink into their inspection windows. The guard hairs have "memory" and will not straighten out when the grader inspects the fur.

Keep leather-out pelts separate from fur-out pelts. Pack Beaver flat, fur-to-fur, without rolling pelts. Make sure pelts have completely dried, particularly those which have been frost-dried. Beaver castor is shipped in bags, onion bag, or cardboard boxes, but never in plastic bags.

# REDUCING PELT DAMAGE CAUSED BY THE IMPROPER USE OF CONIBEAR TRAPS

## INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of fur-bearers trapped with Conibears show very little or no sign of pelt damage. Still, there are significant quantities of pelts that clearly show signs of Conibear damage. Some of this damage is minor and does not affect the grade, but at times the damage is extensive and will reduce the value of the pelt. The extent of the pelt's reduction will depend on the amount of damage to the fur or leather and the location of the strike on the pelt. This can represent a significant loss of money to the trapper.

## CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

### **1. The wrong-sized Conibear is used:**

Traps that are too big for the fur-bearer can cause pelt damage by allowing the fur-bearer to enter too far into the trap before it fires. What usually occurs, particularly on land sets, is significant rubbing of the guard hairs and underfur. On the leather side of the pelt there are usually obvious blood marks giving the fur grader indications of possible rubbing to the fur. To avoid this, use the correct sized Conibear for the target fur-bearer.

### **2. The trigger and dog assembly are not properly positioned:**

This is probably the most common factor causing pelt damage. Assuming the right size of Conibear is used, the trigger assembly must be set in a position that will quickly kill the fur-bearer and at the same time eliminate pelt damage. For most animals, strike location should be behind the head. Many fur-bearers such as Beaver and Otter get too far into the trap before firing the trigger.

Another important cause of pelt damage is the position and location of the trap dog, which can cause extensive damage to the pelt. Coupled with powerful springs, the trap dog can go right through the skin. If the pelt is handled leather-out there can be a problem. Even if the dog doesn't go through the skin, a very noticeable blood mark will remain. On fur-out pelts of Marten and Fisher, but primarily with Beaver, the dog can pull guard hairs from the pelt. This sometimes occurs with the trap frame too. The extent of this damaged area will determine the grade of the pelt.

Position the trigger assembly so pelt damage is reduced. Offset the dog to one side of the trap so when the fur-bearer trips the trigger the dog closes beside the animal. If the trigger cannot be set on the bottom of the trap, offset the trigger on the top of the trap. Wire trigger assemblies that are positioned on the top of the trap in the 'V' or 'T' shape will, at times, cause Beaver and Otter to enter too far into the trap. If possible, set the wire trigger assembly on the bottom so they will hit it with their chin or nose. This will reduce most pelt damage but will not eliminate it, particularly with Beaver. The most effective trigger assembly is two wires that are joined together with J clips into a single trip wire, centred on the jaws with the trigger assembly on the bottom of the trap.

### **3. The trap is poorly designed:**

Conibear traps that do not have bent corners to prevent the springs from coming around the trap frame can really damage a pelt, particularly if the animal is trapped on land. Springs moving around to the top or bottom of the trap greatly lose their clamping power. The result is rubbed guard hair and underfur. To avoid this problem, use Conibear traps that have a built-in bend to the trap frame.

### **4. The trap springs are too weak and/or the trap has only one spring when two are needed.**

Much like Conibears having no bend at the corners of the traps, weak springs or traps that have one spring instead of two can do extensive damage to pelts, particularly with land sets. The rubbing of the guard hairs and underfur in the neck area can be extensive. Prior to the trapping season, inspect and replace any traps that have weak springs or change the springs. Most fur-bearers are very strong animals and it takes a Conibear with strong springs to humanely kill them. This is especially important where land sets are used.

### **5. Improperly removing animals from traps:**

By carelessly removing fur-bearers from Conibears, the trapper will at times also remove underfur and guard hairs from the pelt. This is primarily a concern with Marten and Fisher, although it does happen to other fur-bearers, particularly with Beaver. This usually happens with partially-frozen or frozen fur-bearers, or when they are frozen in a curled position and the Conibear is pried away. Guard hairs and underfur can be pulled from the pelt. This can also occur during wet weather that has turned cold, where the Conibear frame may have frozen to the fur, or when trapping water animals, particularly Beaver and Otter, where the areas exposed to the air in freezing weather will bond the fur and trap. When the pelt is inspected by the fur grader, the missing areas of fur will be easily seen, and a resulting reduction in grade may result.

There are three ways to reduce this loss of fur:

- a) *If the animal is frozen to the ground or to the ice, careful chipping is in order. Along with the animal comes the frozen dirt, mud or ice. Careful transportation is needed to avoid the animal banging around loosely in a trailer or vehicle, pulling out fur.*
- b) *Don't pry the frozen animal from the Conibear. Remove the animal with the trap and replace with a new trap.*

- c) *Thoroughly thaw the animal before removing it from the trap. Don't wait so long that the animal may begin tainting in the belly area.*

### **6. Insufficient effort and attention by the trapper in removing Conibear marks from the skin or the fur:**

- a) *Failing to wash and then comb the affected area:*

Conibears are powerful traps and the guard hairs and underfur are clearly no match for the clamping force of the trap springs. Conibears do leave marks on the fur and skin and in the pelts of Fisher and Marten, these Conibear marks are carefully inspected by the graders. They leave a definite break in the fur and are of lesser value to the fur trade.

To correct the problem, simply wash and/or gently comb the affected area. Washing and then combing does a better job. A word of caution though: Be very careful when combing the fur, particularly if it is a delicate fur like Marten. The guard hairs are fine so don't be too aggressive with the comb.

- b) *Failing to remove the blood stain if the fur is handled leather-out:*

Leather-out pelts of Beaver, Otter and Wild Mink sometimes show extensive blood marks, particularly from the improper positioning of the trap dog. It is very common on Wild Mink. In most cases, there is nothing wrong with the pelt, but now that trappers have access to these extremely powerful Conibears, the blow to the animal can be so extensive that haemorrhaging will be great. The animal will have been killed very quickly but a blood mark will have been left. Graders know these kinds of blood marks will generally indicate no pelt damage, but the mark left on the skin will be unsightly to the fur buyer who will have concerns about purchasing pelts at their true value.

To avoid this, wash with cold water and with a dull object, scrape the affected area. If the blood mark is stubborn, ice cubes rubbed on the area along with scraping will draw most of the blood from the skin. Sometimes the dog will cut the skin and, after drawing as much blood from the area as possible, neatly sew the hole.



## **7. Pelt defects caused by conibears:**

What do these pelts look like when graders examine them? As indicated earlier, most pelts show little or no sign of defects when Conibears are used properly. When misused, the defect can be significant. Listed below is a brief summary of pelt defects that have been caused by Conibears.

### **1. Leather-Out Pelts**

Pelts that are marketed leather-out include Muskrats, Wild Mink, Beaver and Otter. Raccoon show very little pelt damage from Conibears.

- a) *Blood marks. These are caused by the Conibear frames and/or the trap dog. Blood and bruising will be very noticeable.*
- b) *Holes in the skins. These are caused by the wrong placement of the trap dog. Sometimes the trap dog will cut a small hole through the skin.*
- c) *White marks that have been left by the trap frame when the animal has been left too long in the trap. The marks are obvious, but usually don't affect the pelt's grade.*

### **2. Fur-Out Pelts**

Pelts marketed fur-out include Marten, Fisher and Beaver.

- a) *Conibear rubs. Guard hairs, and in a few instances the underfur, will be absent. The extent of rubbing can be minor to very extensive.*
- b) *Conibear marks. The underfur and guard hairs will have been flattened by the trap frame. A very clear mark can be seen and the "flow" of the fur has been interrupted.*
- c) *Frost burn. When the trap has been removed from the animal, a small bald spot can be seen on the pelt. This is caused by the trap dog coming into contact with the skin. The dog is so cold it "burns" the warm skin when contact is made.*
- d) *Missing guard hairs (Beaver). These are normally found behind the head and are usually minor in defect. Some Beaver will have extensive rubbing.*

## **CONCLUSION**

Improperly-set Conibears can cause more damage to pelts than many trappers realize. Being aware of how Conibears can cause damage, the trapper can take steps to lessen pelt damage. The invention of the trap by the late Frank Conibear of British Columbia was a major breakthrough towards the humane capture of fur-bearers and increased trapper efficiency. With the many trapper education courses that are being held each year in Canada and the United States, harvesting fur-bearers humanely with this valuable trap and greatly reducing the incidence of pelt damage will ensure the Conibear trap remains an important tool for trappers.

# WIRE STRETCHERS OR WOODEN BOARDS

## INTRODUCTION

From the largest fur buyers to the hobby trapper, both wire stretchers and wooden boards are used in great numbers. Relatively cheap and easy to use, they give excellent results in length and width. Many people ask, "Which is best? Should I use wood or wire? What are the differences between the two?" A wire stretcher stretches a pelt whereas a wooden "stretcher" is a frame, where the only stretch is what you put on the pelt yourself. The use of wire or wood is also a matter of personal preference, both for the use of and for the particular type of animal being dried.

Wire stretchers and wooden boards each have their advantages and disadvantages. Outlined here are the pros and cons of wire versus wood.

## WIRE STRETCHERS

### **Advantages:**

1. *They are relatively cheap.*
2. *When used for stretching Raccoon, Muskrat, Wild Mink, Fox, Coyote, etc., they are very quick and efficient.*
3. *They are very labour- and cost-effective and generally easier to handle than wood. The bigger operations use wire since hooking only into the tail and hind feet, wage costs are lower. In smaller operations, the handler who scrapes the animal will also stretch it. In bigger operations, the scraping and stretching is done separately. Scraping is piece work, stretching and hanging the pelt is usually done by the hour.*
4. *Wire stretchers are not as bulky as wood.*
5. *Wire stretchers are readily available in trap supply stores.*

### **Disadvantages:**

1. *Non-galvanized stretchers and those galvanized stretchers where the galvanizing wears off, particularly if they are cleaned too much, can get rusty once they are wet. This can result in rust stains in the fur or leather which will lead to dressing problems where the rust was formed, and a loss in value. This can be a significant problem on fur-out articles due to the contact of the wet leather with the metal if turned too quickly. Fur-out articles must be glazed over before turning. The addition of baking soda to the wire will help avoid bacteria and taint.*
2. *The stretcher in many instances is not uniform. Various companies have made them out of different materials and different shapes. This results in a variety of widths, from narrow to very wide.*
3. *Weak, low-quality steel can result in pelts that have "bowed" in or out as the pelt dries.*
4. *Size loss, e.g. a 30" Raccoon will shrink approx. 1" to 1½" without the use of clothes pins securing the pelt to the frame. A wire stretchers' pressure is outwards, therefore the pelt is forced to "shrink" up from the bottom, unless clothes pins or some other attachment is used to lessen this shrinkage. A size loss on Raccoon can result in significant reduction in pelt value.*
5. *If stretchers have not been correctly-shaped before being used, fur density can be affected. A further grade reduction may result, particularly if the stretch is too wide and the fur density becomes weak or thin.*
6. *Improperly-dried tails will sometimes rot because they have not been spread, and although a minor disadvantage, can be avoided with wood. Poor drying conditions can enhance tail drying problems.*
7. *Holes cannot be closed with pins as easily. Holes left unsewn or poorly-closed may affect the grade of the pelt.*

## **WOODEN FRAMES**

### **Advantages:**

1. *If properly nailed or pinned in the "skirt" or bottom of the pelt, excessive pelt shrinkage is eliminated.*
2. *Wood frames are much more uniform than wire, provided proper width measurements are followed for each variety of fur.*
3. *Holes can be pinned much more easily.*
4. *Tails can be spread open, nailed, pinned or screened for proper drying.*
5. *A wood-stretched pelt looks better. The pelt looks "fuller" without the "sharp edged" result when wire is used. If the pelt is properly stretched, appearance looks much better on wood. This will influence the buyer and the fur technician. It is easier to grade well-put-up fur and the uniformity makes sizing easier.*
6. *Some moisture and oils will be absorbed into the wood. It is not significant, but it does help.*
7. *Wood-stretched fur will generally retain more length in all sizes. Wooden frames do not have the outward pressure being exerted by the frame on the pelt, which occurs with wire stretchers. Pelts can be stretched longer and secured at the base of the pelt with ease.*

### **Disadvantages:**

1. *Wood boards do take up space, especially if large quantities are involved.*
2. *Added costs are incurred. Proper staple guns and staples are expensive and most dealers and trappers are not set up for this.*
3. *Over a period of time, split or shattered boards will result in board loss when too many nails or staples take their toll.*

*Personal preference will normally dictate the final choice.*

# HOW TO MODIFY A WIRE RACCOON STRETCHER TO INCLUDE A WOOD SKIRTING BOARD

## **EQUIPMENT REQUIRED:**

*Heavy-Duty Bolt Cutter*

*Wood Saw*

*¼" Drill*

*Screwdriver*

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

*1 16" Length of 1"×8" softwood*

*4 ½" wood screws*

*2 5" pieces of perforated pipe strapping*

*1 ¾" eye hook*

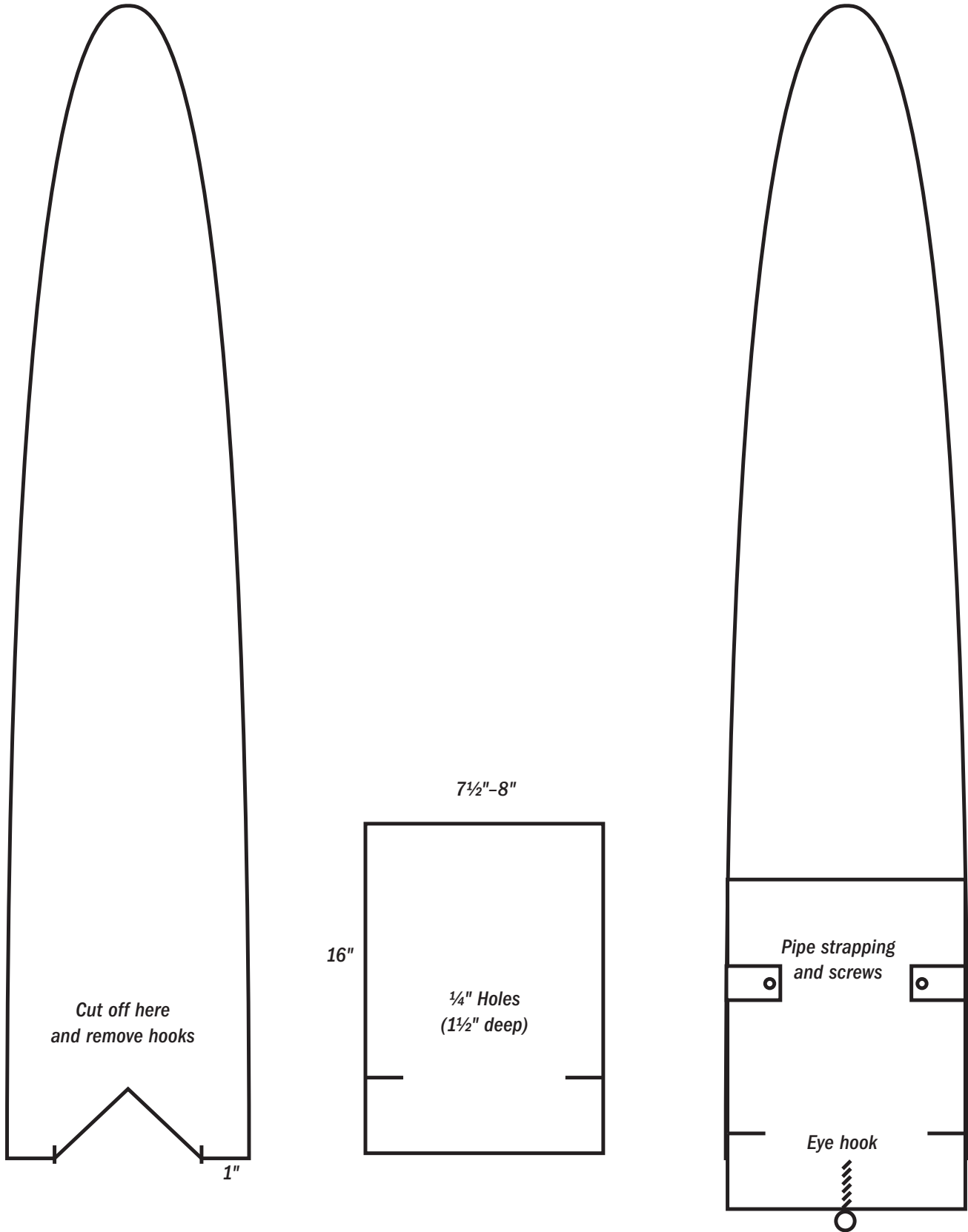
## **INSTRUCTIONS: (PLEASE REFER TO DIAGRAM ON OPPOSITE PAGE)**

- 1. Cut the base of the wire off on both sides approximately 1" in from the edge and remove hooks from frame*
- 2. Drill two ¼" holes in the 1×8 board, one on each edge, approximately 4" up from the bottom and across from each other.*
- 3. Insert the ends of the remaining base of the frame into the ¼" holes in the board and retain with the pipe and the 4 ½" screws. This should be done with the longest section of the board up inside the wire frame.*
- 4. The eye hook can be screwed into the centre of the bottom edge of the board for hanging the boarded pelt.*

### **\*Note:**

*Most wire frames are too wide at the shoulder and should be bent in slightly to conform with recommended dimensions.*

# HOW TO MODIFY A WIRE RACCOON STRETCHER TO INCLUDE A WOOD SKIRTING BOARD



# RACCOON

American Raccoon hunters and trappers generally market their Raccoon in the “round” or in the “grease” to fur dealers who prepare them for market. Most Canadian hunters and trappers prepare their own pelts for market. Generally speaking, the American Raccoon is more uniformly- and better-handled, primarily due to controlled processing by the dealers and pelting plants. Canadian Raccoon are generally overstretched, especially in the widths, thereby hair density is reduced.

It is acknowledged that most sections of American Raccoon are of better quality and colour than Canadian sections. This summary is intended to help Raccoon hunters and trappers to handle Raccoon in an acceptable manner to maximize dollar return.

## HANDLING RACCOON IN THE FIELD

1. *Conibear traps should be dyed or painted to prevent rust, which leaves stains on the fur. Iron oxide (rust) is very difficult to remove in the dressing process. Pelts with rust marks on the fur may be graded lower-quality, depending upon the severity of the rust stain.*
2. *Use Conibear traps in good repair with strong springs to ensure quick kills. Check traps on a regular basis to avoid taints and damage from predators.*
3. *Check live holding traps on a regular basis to minimize damage to fur.*

4. *Hunters should keep dogs away from their Raccoon as bite marks from dogs pull hair and underfur. They also leave unsightly stains on the leather. Where there is evidence of dog bite marks, the pelts are usually downgraded.*
5. *Do not pile freshly-killed Raccoon on top of each other. Separate them to allow proper cooling, thus avoiding taints and hair-slip. Pelt as soon as possible as fresh Raccoon are easier to pelt and, more importantly, to avoid taint in the belly region.*

## PELTING

The initial cut is made from one foot to the other passing under the anus about 1½" to 2" following a line separating the longer guard hair from the shorter belly fur. This will take advantage of the long guard hairs located in this area and easily add length to the pelt.

Freshly-pelted Raccoon should be left leather-out until sufficiently cooled. After cooling, the pelt can be turned fur-out until further processing.

## STORAGE OF PELTS PRIOR TO FLESHING

Turn the pelts fur-out, roll into a tight ball and place in a plastic bag for freezing. The head and tail are folded to the centre prior to rolling the pelt into a ball. Thus, Raccoon can be stored in a freezer without concern of freezer burning the pelt. Remove pelts from the plastic bag and separate prior to thawing.

## PELT PREPARATION

1. Brush out dirt, blood mats and burrs. Pelts, which are dirty and blood-stained should be washed. The removal of burrs and mats is important as the 'flow' of the fleshing tool must be uninterrupted. A mat or burr in the fur will cause a restriction under the leather when fleshing and possibly result in the fleshing tool cutting into the leather.
2. All fat, flesh and gristle must be removed starting behind the ears and working down the length. Some trappers remove the gristle from the head, although this is not absolutely necessary. Fat and flesh should be cool enough so the fleshing tool can 'bite' into it. Pelts not sufficiently cooled are difficult to flesh. The use of sawdust on the fat will help to keep the fur clean as well as absorbing fat and grease/oil.
3. The tail must be split and scraped. If sawdust is used, make sure it is scraped from the leather to give the leather a fresh appearance when dried. Sawdust does not affect grade, however, it can stain the leather.
4. Sew any holes that appear in the hide. Do not waste time sewing small holes such as .22 bullet holes.
5. Care must be taken not to over-scrape pelts, especially early pelts where the hair roots can be damaged. As the pelt primes up the chances of over-scraping are reduced.
5. If wire frames are used, stretch the pelt in the same manner as with wooden boards. Be sure you reshape your wire frames to conform with the diagram indicating recommended shape. The hooks are placed into the base of the tail and the legs. The edges of the pelt must be pulled down and 'pinned' with clothes pegs, so the skirt is straight across the line with the base of the tail.
6. Do not stretch the tail long—push it towards the inspection area. Wire or plastic screen may be used over top of the tail if desired. On wire pelt frames, a wooden insert may be used to tack the tail out or it can be left to hang loose to dry.
7. The legs are now tacked on the side of the board, or in the case of wire frames the legs are pulled down. Do not pull down tight on the legs as you will rob fur density from the inspection area. Keep the legs short but snug.
8. Remove any further bits of fat or sawdust. Sawdust allowed to dry on the pelt is unsightly and sometimes stains the leather.
9. Cut the front legs short ( $\frac{1}{2}$ " to  $\frac{3}{4}$ "). Do not cut flush with the pelt as too-big a hole results. If rosettes are made with the front legs, care must be taken not to roll them too much and impede proper dyeing. Trim off the lower lip.
10. Trim out the inspection window. The cut should be made no higher than the penis opening (or in the same vicinity on females), taking care not to extend the cut into the flanks. Never cut a window after the pelt dries. This will cause a weak edge, which is sharp and susceptible to tearing. A window cut out green will 'seal' at the edge and be strong when dried.

## BOARDING

1. Choose the correct-sized wire frames or wooden board for the Raccoon size as recommended in the board dimensions.
2. Pull the pelt snugly on the board by working the sides, especially in the neck and abdominal areas. It is important these areas are properly stretched so maximum length is achieved without overstretching.
3. To obtain more fur density in the inspection area, pull up on the tail toward the head and the pull back down toward the base of the board.
4. If using boards, gather (pleat) the fur 'skirt' and tail towards the base of the tail to the edge of the board (figure 1). This will ensure dense fur in the inspection area. If the skirt is pulled away from the tail it will give the fur a 'weak' appearance. This is particularly important with early Raccoon, which are already weak and lack cushion or strength. The skirt in a straight line with the base of the tail ensures maximum length measurement.

## STORING DRIED PELTS

Dried pelts may be wrapped in plastic garbage bags and held over in the freezer. However, it is desirable to market pelts as soon as possible. Pelts should be removed from plastic when taken out of the freezer and allowed to dry for a couple of days before shipping.

# RACCOON BOARDS

## INTRODUCTION

Generally, larger sizes of Raccoon bring more money than the smaller sizes of the same grade and colour. Because of this, it is important to be aware of the size measurements to obtain maximum dollar return for the pelt. A yardstick with the sizes marked on it will assist in boarding to proper length. (Borderline pelts requiring a little more stretching will bring them into a larger size. This can be done without jeopardizing the fur density). Pelts falling in the centre of a size range can be placed just snug on the board or wire frame insuring fur density is not affected.

There are two kinds of frames commonly used for Raccoon:

### 1. Wooden Boards

Solid, one-piece or split boards are commonly used in Canada, especially in Ontario. These boards are about 48"-50" in length and  $\frac{3}{8}$ "- $\frac{3}{4}$ " in thickness and are constructed from softer woods—white pine, cedar and basswood. They are adaptable to the use of push pins as well as having good moisture absorption capabilities.

By far the most common problem with the use of wooden pelt boards is the shape—incorrect shape of nose and shoulders, or too wide. The use of only one board also causes a problem in that smaller sizes are reduced in size and have weaker grades due to overstretch in width.

At least two sizes of boards are required. Do not use boards narrower than 7" or wider than 8½" at the point recommended on the diagram.

### 2. Wire Pelt Frames

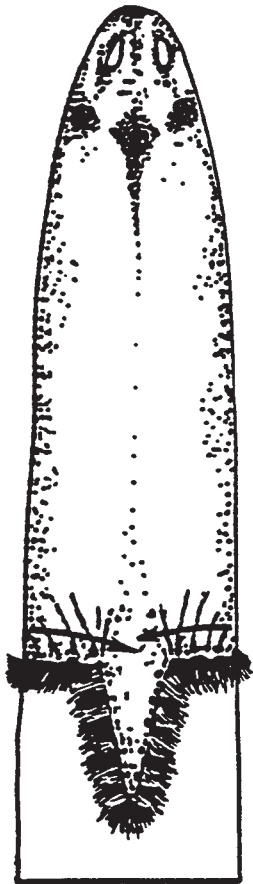
Galvanized wire frames are very-extensively used in the United States and the southern Ontario sections of Canada.

Wire pelt frames are easy to use and provide uniformity of the pelts. Under no circumstances should non-galvanized wire be used. Rust stains in the fur will result in reduced quality and grade of the pelt.

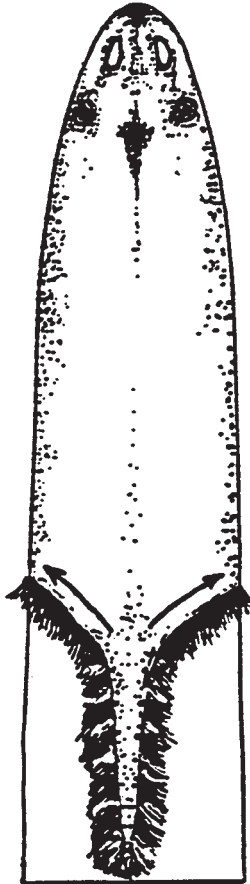
Wire pelt frames, when used for smaller sizes of Raccoon can be reshaped to conform with the diagram of recommended sizes.



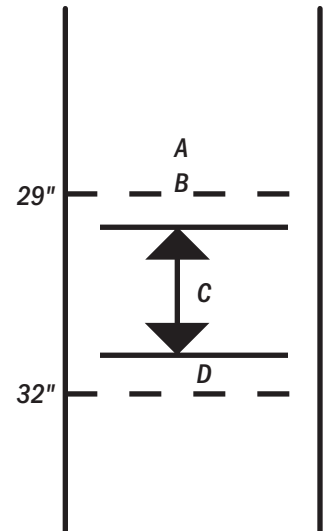
# RACCOON BOARDS



Correctly-boarded Raccoon



Incorrectly-boarded Raccoon



Boarding Raccoon for size

When boarding Raccoon, make certain they are stretched well into the required size. If they are exactly to the lower limit, shrinkage will result in the next lower size. If the pelt is too tight into the next size then back off to the upper limits of the lower size.

Examples of Size 1 (XXL 29"-32")

A. If pelt easily stretches to this point then pull the pelt into the next size (area C).

B. If the pelt is brought only to this point it will shrink back into the size smaller.

C. Preferred area of stretch to ensure good size and eliminate borderline sizes.

D. If a pelt reaches this area and is too tight into the next size, back off into area C for good heavy fur density.

A. Shoulder is stretched to maximize length.

B. Skin is tacked toward the inspection area to increase density.

C. Tail is pushed toward inspection area to increase density.

D. Maximum length obtained as the skirt is in a straight line to the base of the tail. Measurement taken at this point.

A. Shoulder not pulled tight.

B. Skin is pulled away from inspection area weakening the fur.

C. Tail is pulled too tight, taking fur density from the inspection area.

D. Length is lost from not bringing the edges down to the base of the tail. Measurement is taken at this point.

# FOX AND COYOTE

## *INTRODUCTION*

The quality of pelt preparation for Fox and Coyote varies regionally and since the implementation of trapper education programs throughout Canada and the United States the handling of this article has improved considerably. Because there are many books and manuals readily available to the trapper that describe proper pelt handling techniques, it is not the intention to go into specific details on pelting. Rather, it is to focus on several minor, but important items that collectively will result in a pelt that is suitable to the auction house.

## *HANDLING FOX AND COYOTE IN THE FIELD*

Care is taken by the trapper to ensure the fur does not become dirty or matted. Traps and snares should be set in locations that, if possible, are free of burrs. Dirt and especially blood in the fur should also be cleaned at the source. Trap sets and snares should be checked on a regular basis so the possibility of tainting is reduced, as well as other potential damages to the fur that can happen if trap sets are neglected.

Freshly killed animals should not be piled on top of each other. Lay separately so the body heat has a chance to escape and cool as quickly as possible. This greatly-reduces the potential of hair slip. After pelting, leave the pelt leather-out until it has noticeably cooled, then turn fur-out until boarding.

When removing from snares, caution is required to avoid pulling guard hairs, especially if the fur is frozen to the ground or wrapped around shrubs or trees.

If fur is wet or has to be washed to remove blood and dirt, be careful, especially if the temperatures are below freezing. Placing wet fur on metal such as in the back of a pickup truck may result in many guard hairs remaining with the metal. Placing in fur bags will greatly reduce the chance of damaging the fur.

## **TAINTING OR HAIR SLIPPAGE**

Tainting and hair slippage is one of the leading reasons for pelts being downgraded. There are many variations of taint. Whether the taint is small or large, the skin is rotting which cannot be reversed during the dressing process. There is no exact way to determine the extent of damage until the fur returns from the dresser.

By far the most important cause of tainting occurs when the animal has not been pelted soon enough after death, especially during warm weather. Other causes include neglect in checking snares on a regular time schedule, snaring in weather that is too warm or has suddenly turned warm and piling warm animals on top of each other.

Fox and Coyote are havens for fleas which can pose some concern to trappers who have pets or who find it necessary to pelt in areas where fleas may cause problems. Snared animals generally do not have fleas but if they have been recently snared they will still carry them. To rid animals of fleas, place the animal into a bag and then spray with "Raid". Tie the bag and let the spray kill the fleas.

## **PELTING**

Fox and Coyote are case-skinned and should be pelted as soon as possible to avoid taint. If animals cannot be pelted quickly, hang by the hind legs. This will result in the intestines "falling" into the chest cavity, which slows the belly taint process.

## **THE FRONT LEGS**

Many questions and comments have been raised when discussing the front legs. Should they be cut off at the paw? Can they be cut at the elbow or even close to the body? Should the claws be left on? What should be left on the pelt?

To the NAFA grader, all methods are acceptable. Cutting the legs too high may cause some problems, but it is rare to have a pelt downgraded for this. The most popular method is to leave the front legs inside the pelt when turning the pelt fur-out. Leaving claws on the legs is not recommended. Leaving the claws on the pelt runs the risk of tearing across the shoulder area of the pelt during the drumming and shaking process when the pelts are cleaned.

## **THE TAIL**

The tailbone must be pulled and the tail split to properly dry. If conditions are right, tails that have not been split may begin to rot and the hair may fall out.

The most commonly-asked question regarding tails is "what happens if part of the tail is missing?" The answer depends on the amount of tail that remains at the butt of the pelt. If there is a noticeable portion of tail extending from the butt, then the pelt will not be downgraded because of a missing tail. If however there is no evidence of a tail, then the pelt is graded as slight damage.

## **THE EARS, NOSE AND EYES**

Other than on the belly, if there is a potential for hair slip it will occur around the ears. Regions with particularly-high humidity or poor drying conditions may be prone to hair slippage.

Remove the ear cartilage completely or at least separate one side of the ear from the cartilage so the ear can then dry properly. Many pelt handlers will sprinkle borax in and around the ear to hasten drying.

Borax is a preservative used extensively in the taxidermy trade. Salt should not be used because it attracts moisture. If the fur is slipping around the ear, the grader has no alternative if he feels slippage will occur during dressing, but to place the pelt in a lower value category.

Another common question asked involves the nose and eyes and any cuts around the head. The pelt will not be graded slight-damaged, unless the cut is severe or extends below the ears or throat.

## **KNIFE CUTS AND BULLET HOLES**

Accidental knife cuts occasionally happen and the only way to avoid them is by paying closer attention during pelting. Competent long-haired-fur graders possess an ability to catch defects such as bullet holes and knife cuts. Each variety of wild fur has its own unique set of pelt defects which graders instinctively look for. When grading Fox and Coyote, graders know that snares, tainting, bullet holes, knife cuts and failure to clean the fur are the major source of problems caused by the pelt handler. Cleaning dirt and dried mud or blood from the pelt and sewing knife cuts or bullet holes will often avoid the pelt being graded into a slightly-damaged or damaged category.

## FLESHING

With the exception of gray Foxes and some Coyote, there is very little in the way of fat or flesh to remove. Before fleshing, look at the fur and, if necessary, remove the burrs or dried mud or blood so the fleshing tool will not cut through the leather when hitting it. When removing burrs, be very careful to leave the guard hairs with the pelt and not with your comb. If necessary, tease or break apart the burrs. After fleshing, carefully sew up any holes caused by tearing or bullets.

## BOARDING AND STORAGE

Two of the biggest concerns with boarding are using boards that are too wide and pulling too hard on the hind legs when pinning them. Both have the tendency to weaken hair density, particularly average or weak quality pelts. Correct board measurements are crucial in the pelt handling of these animals.

Use wooden boards. They are far superior than wire stretchers to maximize size and to improve the appearance of the pelts. Whether using split or solid boards, make sure they are not too wide. See the size chart for specific measurements.

Coyote and Fox are placed on a wooden board, leather-out, and dried until the head is almost dry, then turned fur-out and put back onto the board until thoroughly dry. Pay close attention to the drying, especially the ears. The front legs can remain inside the pelt when turning, provided they are thoroughly dried. Leaving the legs inside the pelt greatly reduces the chance of the front legs tearing across the shoulder area during drumming and shaking.

When the pelt has been removed from the board, wipe any excess oil from the leather and brush the fur. If there are any remaining burrs, try and remove them without pulling underfur or guard hairs. Resin and pitch matts should not be removed, unless it can be done without damaging the fur. Make certain that ears, legs and armpits are completely dry. Pelts should be stored in a cool location to avoid possible damage by small rodents.

## RED FOX



*Proper removal of ear cartilage to avoid taint.*

**1. Proper Handling**  
*Lower lip removed  
and front legs inside*

**2. Improper Handling**  
*Front legs and left out,  
rear legs too long,  
lower lip not removed.*



## TRAPPING

Damage to pelts often results from the use of unsuitable equipment, poor set methods and the use of lure in certain set locations. Beaver are strong animals and must be killed quickly to avoid damage to fur caused by the equipment.

330 Conibears and snares should not be used on land. Extensive rubbing of the fur and leather can result due to the animal working the trap or snare. Similar results can occur if the animal can get oxygen. Traps should be equipped with springs sufficiently strong to render the animal unconscious quickly and set in locations which allow the trapped Beaver to reach deep water.

If using lure containing castor, choose a location which allows the trapped Beaver to reach deep enough water to be out of sight of other Beaver. Use of longer wire and loose staking of traps is advisable. Beaver left visible or floating at a scented location are often bitten severely by other approaching Beaver, resulting in damage to the pelt. Shallow water channels can also result in similar occurrences due to other approaching Beaver attempting to use the channel and move the trapped Beaver out of the way.

Trigger and dog position are a large factor in resulting strike location and possible damage with Conibears. When possible, the trigger rather than the dog should face the approaching Beaver. The narrow edge of the dog can damage the pelt at the strike location. It is advisable to use a single trigger wire by joining the trigger wires with wire or "J" clips with the trigger and dog centred on the jaws and the trap set with the trigger assembly on the bottom. This will result in the trigger or dog striking the belly side rather than the back or neck where most damage occurs.

Some damage results from use of Conibears which are not painted or dyed, from rust marks left on the fur. This is most important on pelts of paler colours or if pelts are to be sheared. Many trappers spray a light mist of liquid floor wax on dyed Conibears which makes handling of traps cleaner and results in dye remaining on traps longer without affecting trap performance. Wax normally used with Fox and Coyote equipment can make Conibears extremely dangerous.

## FIELD CARE

Beaver should be removed carefully from body gripping traps to avoid pelt damage. Handle Beaver by a leg rather than pulling on the trap or chain. Under no circumstances should the Beaver be carried by the trap.

In under-ice trapping, especially in shallow water, care must be taken to avoid puncture of the animal by chopping equipment. Check to ensure that the Beaver is not frozen to the ice. In cold temperatures, Beaver must be removed quickly from snares or Conibears to avoid fur freezing to equipment. Do not lay Beaver on bare ice surfaces. Wet fur and cold steel or ice will result in pulling out of guard hair. A burlap or plastic bag will greatly reduce risk during transportation. Do not drag Beaver behind snow machines or ATV equipment, since this may result in wearing of guard hair and underfur, reducing value.

If the fur is dirty, Beaver should be rolled in snow or rinsed or washed in cold water to clean the fur prior to pelting. If rough skinned on the trapline for transportation, it is advisable to fold pelts leather to leather to avoid contact of fur with grease or blood.

If pelts are to be frozen for later fleshing it is necessary to protect the leather from frost burn. A layer of plastic coated freezer paper placed over flesh side of pelt prior to folding will assist in preventing this. Pelts should be folded fur-out, tail to head, flanks to centre and then rolled and placed in plastic bags. Avoid placing too many pelts on top of each other in freezers since the insulating properties of the fur may slow the freezing process in the centre.

## PELTING

If fleas are present, a small amount of "Raid" sprayed on the animal will remove this problem in minutes. Beaver are pelted open, with a centre cut on the belly running from the lower lip to the base of the tail. Care must be taken to avoid cutting through the abdominal wall or damaging the castor glands. Many trappers use a curved shingle ripping knife for this purpose which allows a single long cut to be made. The tail and feet are removed prior to commencing skinning. A cut around the leg joints and the tail joint allows these to be twisted off easily.

Whether clean or rough skinning the pelt should be kept taut by rolling over the fingers from the fur side. This will assist in avoiding accidental cuts during pelting. Most handlers skin to the backbone on one side and then repeat the procedure from the opposite side. Avoid contact of the fur with the carcass during pelting. Be careful of false cuts during skinning to avoid leather damage.

## FLESHING

Pelts should be hung or laid leather up in a cool, dry location to stiffen grease, making fleshing easier. Beams, hoop frames and boards are all used by various handlers and are basically a matter of preference. The objective is to remove all the fat and tissue without leather damage in the process.

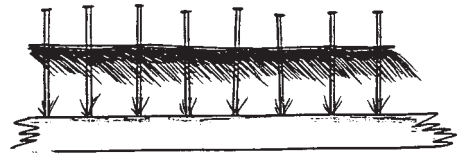
If necessary, both fur and leather may be washed after fleshing to remove soil, grease or blood. Cool water and mild detergent should be used. A strong detergent or hot water will result in removal of too many of the natural oils and leave fur flat and lifeless in appearance. If the fur is relatively clean, a simple brushing prior to pelting, followed by a light washing of leather after boarding is sufficient.

## BOARDING

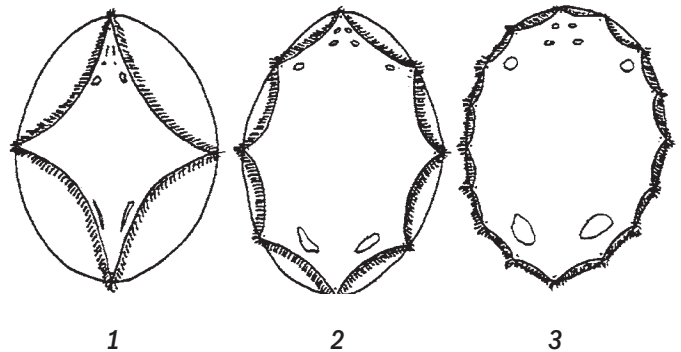
All Beaver pelts should be boarded in an **oval** shape which conforms to the Beaver's natural shape. Other shapes can result in loss of natural contours causing lack of uniformity, possible size loss and especially the occurrence of overstretching in the back area resulting in loss of density and possible grade reduction, especially in fall Beaver. The use of plywood boards marked with an oval Beaver pattern provides the best results.

To determine proper size, gently shake pelt while holding by nose and let hang naturally against a board or hoop marked with proper pattern guide marks. The base of the pelt should drop approximately 2"-4" over the line marking the appropriate size oval shape.

Pelts are nailed leather up with spacing  $\frac{1}{2}$ "- $\frac{3}{4}$ " apart. Use nails sufficiently long to allow the pelt to be raised approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$ " off the board to allow fur side to dry. 2" box nails are commonly used.



Nailing should be started with a single nail at the head, tail, and midpoint on each side. Additional nails are added midway between the initial nails, progressively cutting the distance in half around the pelt until complete. This will result in an even shape following the oval pattern on the board. It should be noted that these lines are intended as a guide. Individual pelts may require nailing between guide lines to avoid overstretching.



Leg holes should be closed to give a neat, complete appearance. Leg holes can be nailed or sewn. Nailing is faster, however, the overlapping of skin can cause taint. A little borax spread over the area to be nailed will avoid this problem. Any holes should be sewn at this time to limit grade reduction. After nailing, raise the pelt on the nails a minimum of ½" to allow air circulation during drying.

Boarded pelts should be dried slowly in a cool, dry area at approximately 18°–20°C (approximately. 65°F). Drying too quickly results in stiff, board-like leather. Do not dry in direct sunlight or heat, which can result in burnt leather. Hang head up to allow any water to drop from fur. A small fan to circulate air will assist the drying process. However, do not direct air flow directly towards pelts. Pelts should be wiped occasionally to remove oil from the leather during drying. It is not recommended that frost drying be attempted unless climatic conditions are favorable to the method.

Removal should be done only after pelts are completely dry. Nails must be removed carefully to avoid splitting leather. Pelts should be stored flat, leather to leather and fur to fur. Do not roll or fold for shipping.

## **IMPROPERLY-BOARDED BEAVER PELTS**

**(See diagram reference on page 22)**

### **Round:**

Pelt is pulled too much in the leg area. On fall Beaver, the centre of the back will be weaker with lower fur density, and a size loss may also result.

### **Oblong:**

Pelt is pulled too much in leg area. On fall Beaver the back area is weaker with lower fur density.

### **Diamond:**

Not pulled enough in the leg area.

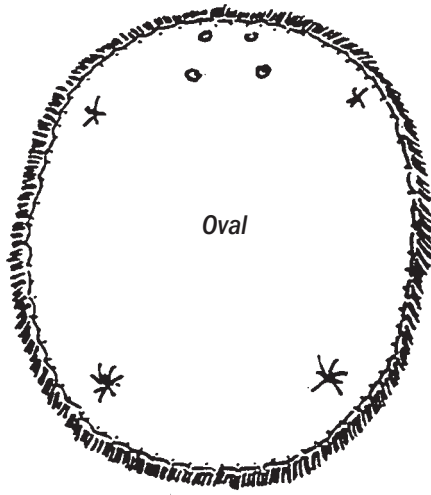
### **Fishtail:**

Results from pulling too much on the tail area, usually caused in attempting to gain size or length.

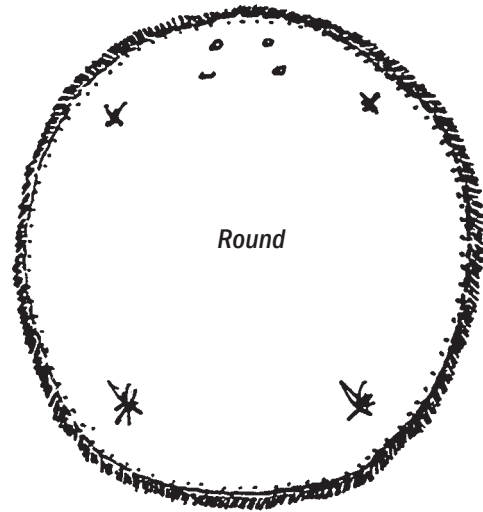
### **Scallop:**

Results from use of insufficient nails. Measurement for size will be taken on the inside of scallop and may result in size loss.

# BEAVER SHAPES

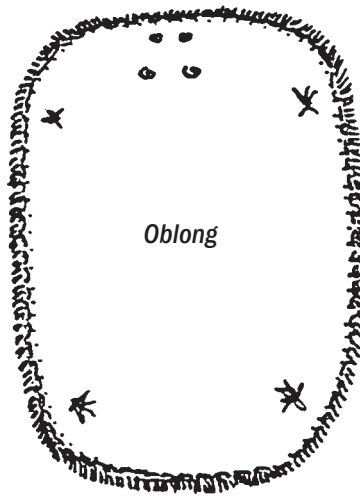


Oval

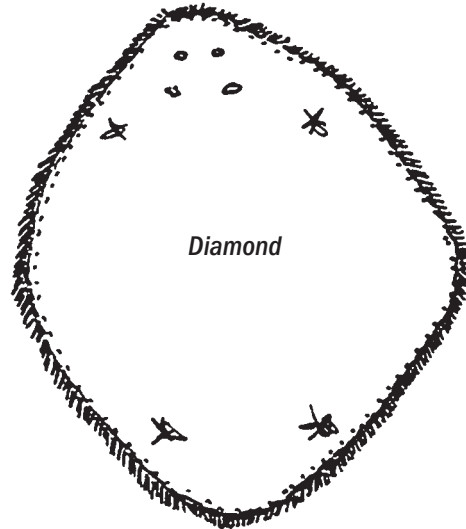


Round

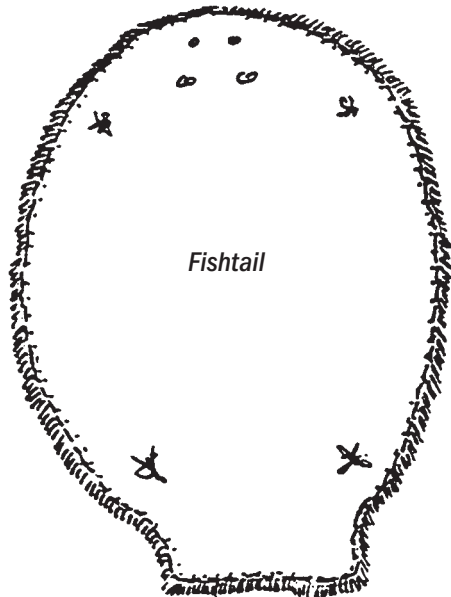
\* Proper Shape Is Oval.



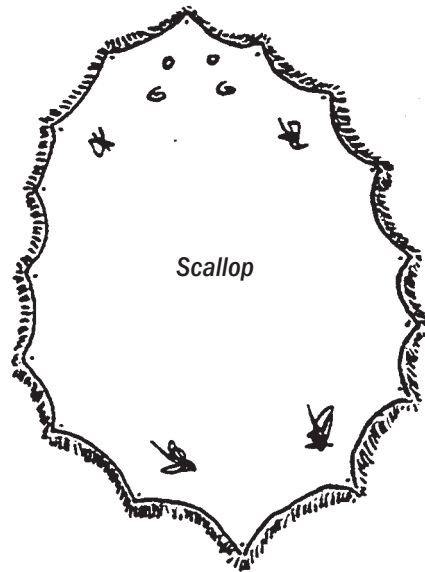
Oblong



Diamond



Fishtail



Scallop



# BEAVER CASTOREUM

## REMOVAL

Castoreum is removed from the Beaver by carefully making a cut between the castors, then using your fingers, peeling the meat and fat from around them. Cut them loose so they are together, being very careful not to cut a hole or tear them. Be sure they are clean of all meat and fat. They are now ready for drying. **Never** tie string or wire on them.

## DRYING

Castoreum should be hung over a wire, or spread on wire mesh to dry. Drying takes 6-10 days in a cool, not freezing, well ventilated area. Be sure to spread them apart after a couple of days of hanging, or turn them if drying on wire mesh. After drying, they can be packed loosely in an air tight container and placed in the freezer. If they are stored without freezing store in a mesh bag and be sure to check them periodically to see they are not getting mouldy. Frozen Castoreum must be thawed and dried for a couple of days before shipping.

## SHIPPING

Castoreum should be packed in a mesh bag (onion sack) or burlap, then wrapped in newspaper in a cardboard box. **Never** pack in plastic. Ensure that your Castoreum has been well dried before shipping.

## RECEIVING

Castoreum is weighed at the time of receipt. As Castoreum continues to dry and shrink, an automatic percentage deduction is taken. No. 1 Castoreum will always have moisture inside; it will continue to shrink until it is no longer pliable, over-dry, and will become a No. 2 (ordinary).

If it continues to dry hard it will then be graded No. 3 (poor and shells). Remember, if you have good Castoreum, it will continue to shrink; only No. 3's, which are bone-dry and shells, will not shrink.

The Castoreum is then identified as to the owner, placed in a wire cubical which is well ventilated or hung up in a mesh bag until it is graded. As there is a time delay between receiving and selling, shrinkage must be judged so the actual weight paid to the shipper balances with the actual weight received by the buyer. Remember, the auction houses are not buying your Castoreum, they weigh, grade, lot and then sell your Castoreum in larger quantities on a commission basis.

## GRADING

### No. 1

This is good clean Castoreum, without any holes and the pods must be full.

### No. 2

Castors with holes will go into this grade as will large Castoreum with only a small amount of Castoreum in the pods.

Also good castors which are too dry for No. 1.

### No. 3 (Poor and shells)

This is small castors with nothing in them, No. 2 and other castors which are too poor or dry for No. 2.

# CASTOREUM

## GRADING CLASSIFICATION



*Clean*



*Ordinary*



*Poor And Shells*

# RIVER OTTER

Possessing a coat made from the pelts of River Otters is desired by many persons wishing for a garment that is very durable, warm, unique and beautiful. Dressed Otter fur is strong and wears extremely well. However, the fur of Otters while in the raw or undressed state present a real concern to trappers, graders, buyers, dressers and manufacturers. Raw Otter fur is very delicate and the guard hair is susceptible to singe. Most of the singe experienced in Otter pelts is avoidable with understanding and care by the trapper or pelt handler.

## *WHAT IS SINGE?*

We have all heard of singed Otter, but what is it? How can trappers avoid singeing Otters? What causes it? At times trappers lay blame for singed Otter and poor prices on the fur graders, yet in virtually all cases, except for naturally singed Otters, it is the trapper/pelt handler who sings the Otter. Simply explained, singe is the curling of the tips of the guard hair. It is caused by excessive dry heat, strong direct sunlight, artificial heat sources, stroking of dry fur, fur coming into contact with sub-zero metal and lastly by the Otter itself in late season.

Singed guard hair reflects different wavelengths of light compared with straight hair. Singed Otter hair cannot be removed during the dressing process, effectively eliminating the pelt from being used naturally. Singed Otter pelts are plucked and sheared for other uses. Because of this, singed Otters are reduced in value upwards of 70% depending on the amount of singe and utilization of the pelt.

The problem of trappers singeing their Otters bears repeating again. Otter fur singes very easily in the raw state and therefore it is extremely important that utmost care is taken by trappers/pelt handlers in preparing the fur for sale.

## STEPS TO BE TAKEN TO AVOID SINGE TO OTTERS

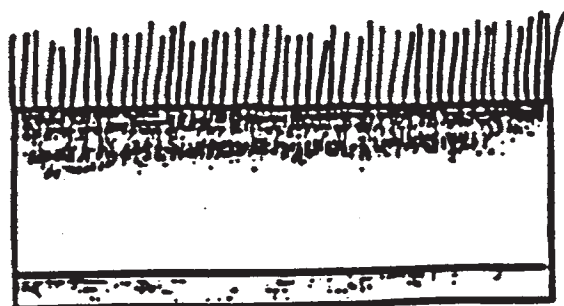
1. Protect the Otters from coming into contact with subzero freezing metal. Subzero freezing metal can singe Otter fur. Wet fur can also freeze to the metal and when the Otter is moved, hair can be pulled from the pelt. Protect Otters by placing them in canvas or burlap bags. This also keeps the fur clean.
2. Protect the fur from completely drying out. Under no circumstances should moisture on Otter fur evaporate in a hot, dry room. Drying Otters prior to pelting is best done away from direct sources of heat or sunlight, preferably where there is good air circulation. Pelt the Otter as soon as the fur has dried to a point of being damp/moist. **Do not let the fur dry completely prior to pelting and preparation.** Dry Otter fur is very susceptible to singe.
3. Do not stroke dry Otter fur, this can cause singe. Brushing or stroking Otter fur that is wet will not singe the fur.
4. Do not flesh Otters when the fur is dry. The fur should be slightly damp/moist. Fleshing beams or stretchers used to flesh Otters should also be kept moist. Twisting or turning dry Otters on dry fleshing beams can cause singe, especially in hot, dry rooms.
5. If using boards to flesh Otters, another board will be required because moisture from the damp Otter pelt has penetrated the board when fleshing. Do not use this same board for drying, as the long time required to dry Otters correctly coupled with the damp board may induce mildew to appear in the fur. By the time the Otter is ready for boarding there will be little moisture in the fur that will be of any harm.
6. Dry Otters slowly in an area that is away from heat. Proper drying temperatures range from 40°F–60°F (4°C–16°C) depending on the amount of humidity that is in the air. The generally accepted range is around 50°F (10°C). A note of caution though. Drying Otter pelts too slowly can promote rot and drying too quickly will result in a pelt that is stiff and boardy. The use of fans to dry Otter pelts is acceptable provided the flow of air is not directed at the pelt.
7. Store Otters in a cool, dry location away from any source of heat, including sunlight. Avoid storing Otters in areas that are prone to fluctuating temperatures. It is acceptable to store Otters in freezers.
8. Do not transport Otters in the front seat area of vehicles when the heater/defroster is on. You will singe your Otter. When transporting Otters to a fur stamping location or a fur pickup location, store the Otters in a cold place. In the case of a car, place it in the trunk. If it is a pickup truck, then place it in the back.

### IN SUMMARY:

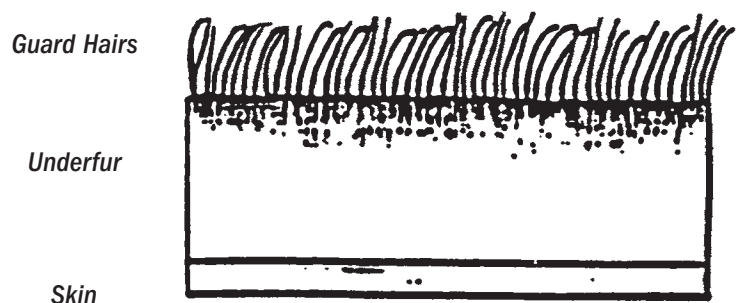
1. Keep Otters away from all direct sources of heat.
2. Never let the fur of the Otter completely dry out prior to pelting and fleshing. Keep the fur damp or moist at all times.
3. Dry the pelt slowly in a cool spot with good air circulation.

## PROFILES OF STRAIGHT AND SINGED GUARD HAIRS OF RIVER OTTERS

Guard Hairs Are Straight:  
The Otter Is Not Singed



Tips Of The Guard Hairs Are Curled:  
The Otter Is Singed



# SKUNK

Most trappers do not bother to put up incidental catches of Skunks. It seems that the risk of smelling up vehicles and fur sheds as well as clothing is perceived as too great for the potential reward in fur value. With the fashion in fur currently very receptive to natural black and white there is a reasonable demand and price for well-handled prime Skunks for those trappers who wish to put them up.

The initial cut on a Skunk is very similar to Mink due to the presence of the scent glands. Make the initial cut from heel to heel going well below the scent gland and then make two cuts towards the tail, one on each side of the gland. This will create a triangle shape of fur over the gland area. Split the fur part way down the tail and skin out the hind legs and around the base of the tail. At this point remove the scent gland by cutting as close to the body as possible under the gland before attempting to remove the tail bone. The front feet can be cut off part way up the forearm and the skinning process completed.

Skunks are best fleshed on a beam with a two-handled Raccoon scraper or knife. The leather should be completely clean of grease and fat the same as a Raccoon. Skunks should be boarded and dried leather-out. Depending on the size of the Skunk, you can use a small Raccoon board, or a Fox or Fisher board. Once on the board, the pelt should just fit nicely without buckling at the neck from using too-wide a board, or be too loose at the butt from too-narrow a board.



*Well-handled Skunk Pelts*

# OPOSSUM

Opossum are a tough critter with a thin hide. They are skinned in the same manner as Raccoons with the exception of the tail which in the case of Opossum is left on the carcass. Care must be taken in the skinning to avoid cutting the thin leather. Fleshing is best done on a beam with a dull fleshing knife after the fat has cooled. These pelts rip easily under pressure during the fleshing process. Earlier-caught skins which are not yet prime usually result in hair pulling through the leather during fleshing and often result in poor grades and prices.

Opossums are boarded leather-out. A vent or inspection window should be cut in the belly similar to Raccoons. In the case of female Opossums, the pouch should be cut out as part of forming the window. Opossums can be boarded on the smaller Raccoon boards.



*BELLY*

*BACK*

*Well-Handled Opossums*

# BADGER

## *Cased Badgers*

### *AUCTION PREFERENCE: FUR-OUT CASED*

The most common problem with Badger fur is the presence of dirt and mud. It is not recommended that you over-comb since the fur will pull out easily. If the Badger is really dirty or muddy, wash the whole animal in cold water and hang head up to dry for a few hours before skinning. Badgers should be skinned and scraped exactly like Raccoons. The leather must be free of all fat and grease.

Badgers can be dried open, or cased fur-out. The preference is cased and fur-out. Badgers should be boarded on the large Raccoon board with wedges to hold the leather from tightening on the board and assist in drying. Once removed from the board make sure that all areas of the leather are dry before storing.



*Open Badger*

# MUSKRAT, SQUIRREL AND WEASEL

Muskrats are the most common fur-bearer across North America and, for the most part, likely the most consistently handled in pelt preparation. Muskrats should be case skinned and dried leather-out. Most trappers use wire drying frames rather than wood. Either is acceptable and largely a matter of personal preference.

It is strongly recommended that Muskrats are dry prior to pelting. The fur tends to get matted when boarded wet and makes it very difficult to determine fur quality during the grading process. A light brushing once dry will fluff up and clean the fur prior to skinning. The front feet should be cut off at the wrist with a pair of small garden shears.

First cut around both ankles of the rear legs and then make two opening cuts, one on each side running from the heel to the tail along the back and belly hair line. Once the rear legs are skinned out the pelt can be worked off by hand to the front shoulders. Pull the front legs free, cut around the ears and eyes while pulling and cut free at the nose.

A dull scraper or other suitable object is used to remove all fat and grease as well as excess meat. Do not remove the red membrane covering the leather. This will dry and protect the leather from exposing hair roots or becoming too dry and papery. Muskrats should be dry in about 48 hours at 55° or 60° F.

The fall harvest of Muskrats will include a greater percentage of small skins compared to the spring harvest. Muskrat leather changes significantly from fall through spring going from pliable to board-like and finally very papery in texture. The biting that results from the spring mating season severely reduces pelt value. A second sign of pelt value reduction is the appearance of light or yellow-coloured egg-sized patches on the back area just below the shoulders over the kidney area as the pelts dry. This is a sign of shedding and as the spots grow darker the pelt is reduced further in value. Signs of biting and shedding are indicators that the Muskrats would be best left until fall or next season as breeders.

Squirrel and Weasel are skinned cased and dried leather-out, the same as wild Mink. Any small amount of grease or fat on the leather can be rubbed off with a small piece of dry burlap after boarding. The front feet should be cut off close to the body, leaving just enough to tuck in to the fur side. The tail must be split. Not doing this can result in taint due to the lack of exposure to the air. Weasels and Squirrels dry quickly and can be removed from the boards after a few hours.



## *TRAPPING*

The 120 Conibear is the most commonly-used trap for Marten. Traps should be placed to avoid contact of captured Marten with resin from coniferous trees and to reduce possibility of fur damage from small rodents chewing on fur. Traps should be placed with the dog firing away from the Marten to avoid contact of the dog with the neck of the animal. This will avoid a frost-burn spot or hole in the pelt. It is recommended that traps be painted or dyed to avoid rust marks on pelts. Frozen animals must be carefully removed to avoid hair pulling out during removal. If the Marten has frozen to the trap, remove the animal and trap until they can be thawed slowly prior to removal. Marten are highly susceptible to taint, therefore traps should be visited more frequently in warmer weather and pelting should take place as quickly as possible. If Marten are hung to dry or thaw prior to pelting, hanging by the hind feet will allow the abdominal contents to fall into the chest cavity and assist in delaying the tainting of the belly area.

## *PELTING AND BOARDING*

Marten are case-skinned. The fur should be dried and lightly combed prior to pelting. The initial cut should extend from the centre of the foot, below the anus, and to the opposite foot. This places all of the long guard hair found on the back legs onto the back of the pelt, maximizing pelt length. Claws should be removed on both front and hind legs to avoid ripping of pelts during drumming. The lower lip should also be removed to facilitate ticketing at NAFA. Tails should be split to allow for proper drying. Marten pelts dry quickly and require turning fur out relatively soon after boarding. Front feet should be left inside when turned to avoid catching in drumming machines.

Proper board sizes should be used to avoid density and sizing problems caused by narrow or wide boards. Conibears can crush guard hair and underfur which should be carefully brushed out. If necessary, cool water and a mild detergent can be used to assist in removing trap marks in fur.

Sewing of holes is recommended. Resin matts and clips should not be cut out. Do not decide for the grader if damage is relevant with regard to resin matts. If the matt can be removed without removal of guard hair or underfur, go ahead. If uncertain, leave alone and allow the grader to decide. Resin matts will usually result in reduced value only if both guard hair and underfur are affected and cannot be safely removed during the dressing process.

# WILD MINK

## *INTRODUCTION*

The handling of Wild Mink, especially boarding, continues to be controversial and a problem to many. Of primary concern is the shape of the Mink board being used. Too many trappers are using Mink boards that are too wide in the neck and body areas. The use of wide Mink boards in relation to the Mink decreases the density of the fur, thereby making it weak and often resulting in loss of length. The short wide pelt ultimately costs the trapper money as the larger size Mink normally fetch higher prices. There should be two boards used; a smaller size for female and a larger size for male. In addition to the boarding issue, many trappers inadvertently overstretch their fur. This occurs when the hind legs are pulled too tight, even if correctly-shaped and sized Mink boards are used. This results in a drastic thinning of the fur in the flanks and inspection area.

The commercial Mink rancher's methods for producing well-handled top value pelts and expertise in the proper boarding methods of leather-out Mink can certainly be adopted by trappers. All the credit for this technique must go to Canada Mink Breeders Association and those individuals involved in Mink management research and marketing. Use of proper-sized Mink boards and correct placement of the hind legs beside the butt of the tail accomplishes a very definite purpose, and that is to produce a good, dense area of fur for the grader and buyer to examine. Adapting the rancher's Mink method of boarding leather-out Mink to Wild Mink will again be another step in the improved handling of our valuable fur resources.

## *HANDLING THE WILD MINK*

Care in removing Mink from traps is important to avoid damage to the leather and pelt. Rinse your Mink at the trap site, if possible, to clean sand, silt or clay from the fur. Dirt gives the fur a flat or matted appearance which makes it difficult for buyers to correctly evaluate. If the Mink is wet, dry overnight before pelting; however, skin the Mink as soon as conveniently possible to avoid tainting or hair slippage. Do not dry too close to a heat source as this may damage the fur, singeing the top hair or burning the leather.

## *PELTING*

The importance of the initial cut is vital in maximizing pelt length. The cut must extend from the centre of the foot, below the anus, and to the opposite foot. This places all of the long guard hair found on the back legs onto the back of the pelt, thereby increasing the length of the pelt.

## *AVOIDING GREASY FUR WHEN PELTING*

Under no circumstances should the top hair and especially the underfur come in contact with the fat or oil of the Mink. Mink have a delicate fur and any fat/oil getting on the fur makes it look very flat. It is imperative that some form of absorbent be used during the fleshing in order to keep this to a bare minimum. Mink ranchers use liberal amounts of fine, hardwood sawdust or ground corn cob grit during pelting, fleshing, and boarding. This absorbs the grease and oil from the leather and fur leaving the pelt virtually grease free. Trappers can use fine sawdust with excellent results.

## FLESHING

Make sure the Mink pelt has sufficiently cooled before fleshing (10 minutes). This makes fleshing easier. If several Mink are to be stored or set aside after pelting, before the fleshing process, cool them fur-in, before turning fur-out and rolling them up individually. When putting several together, be sure the fat of one does not touch the fur of the others. Use liberal amounts of fine sawdust in the fleshing process to keep the fat out of the fur around the skirt. Flesh away from the rear of the Mink first to keep the fur at the skirt clean, then fleshing from the head to the rear.

## THE MINK SADDLE

The saddle is the fleshy membrane that remains on the back of the Mink when the pelt has been removed from the carcass. Female Mink usually have very little fat underneath the saddle, whereas male Mink have substantial quantities. Due to excessive fat under the saddle, western and northern sections of Wild Mink are clean-scraped, whereas north-central and southern Mink with less fat have saddles left on. However, it is important if saddles are to remain on the pelt that all fat under the saddle is removed. If the saddle is to be removed, remember that Mink leather is delicate and care must be taken not to over-scrape or damage the leather with false knife-cuts or nicks.

## BOARDING THE MINK

It is important to consider the boarding procedure used by Mink ranchers when boarding leather-out Wild Mink. Their expertise in this area has proven this method to be the most acceptable and appealing to the fur trade. Wild Mink are marketed leather-out, not fur-out. Two Mink boards are used—one for males and the other for females. One board for each gender results in uniform width, thus simplifying the sizing procedure. The first step in the grading process of Wild Mink is to divide them into two groups—male and female. They will generally remain separated right to the point of auction. The main reason for this breakdown is size, but quality difference is a major factor. Females are usually silkier and smoother in texture. Although there are four sizes, there are really two for males (XL-L and LM) and two for females (MED and SM). If a female measures LM, it is not combined with the males, but is left in MED size. However, should it measure XL-L, it is then combined with LM size males for appearance.

## THE BOARDING PROCESS

1. *With the pelt leather out, place the Mink onto the proper board.*
2. *Centre the eyes, ears and tail on the board. Work the pelt firmly down the board being careful not to twist the pelt—keep it straight.*
3. *Grab the tail firmly with one hand and with the other hand, stroke the pelt from the head toward the tail. This will give you added length to the pelt without overstretching.*
4. *Next, pull up on the tail. This pulls the fur from the belly up onto the inspection area and makes the pinning of the hind legs easier. Place the tail back down on the board, pull snugly, and then pin directly in the centre of the tail butt.*
5. *At this point be sure all sawdust is gently scraped off of the leather side of the pelt.*
6. *Take each of the hind legs and diagonally spread the leg fur-out. This shortens the leg for a denser fur. Pin each hind leg beside the tail butt. Do not pull the legs.*
7. *Pin the remaining fur between the legs and tail down in pleats so the inspection area becomes evident, thereby producing a dense area of fur easily visible to the graders and buyers. At first, this will seem awkward, but when completely tacked down will present a good inspection area with much denser fur.*
8. *Split the tail lengthwise if not previously done. Lay it flat and spread the tail out and at the same time push the tail up towards the butt. The idea is to have a wide, short, stubby tail.*
9. *You may pin the tail out with pins, tacks, or nails, but the best way is to place a piece of plastic or galvanized wire screening over the tail and tack down the screening.*
10. *If desired, a thin edge of fur ( $\frac{1}{16}$ " ) in the inspection area can be cut away, in order to make a clean border.*
11. *A belly board should be inserted. Alternatively by setting the board outside in the cold or in the freezer for about an hour, the pelt will loosen up on the board, allowing for easy removal. If the pelt sticks, a sharp rap on the nose of the board should be all that is necessary to remove the dried pelt.*

## DRYING

Do not dry too quickly. 50°–60° Fahrenheit is preferable with good air circulation. If you dry the pelt too quickly with too-warm a temperature, you run the risk of burning the pelt or singeing the hair. During drying, beads of grease will rise to the surface. Take a cloth or paper towel and periodically wipe this excess off. After three or four days remove the finished pelt from the board.

## IN SUMMARY

1. *Keep the fur clean of fat and grease.*
2. *The initial cut will run straight from hind foot to hind foot. NOT hind foot to the anus—and anus to the opposite foot.*
3. *Keep ample amounts of sawdust in the exposed cuts during pelting and fleshing.*
4. *If there is fat under the saddle, remove the fat or remove the saddle completely without making nicks/cuts in the leather.*
5. *Board the Mink correctly. Male Mink on male board; female Mink on female board.*
6. *Place the hind feet on the same side as the tail and do not overstretch the hind feet or the tail.*

## A WELL-HANDLED MINK

1. *Lower lip removed*
2. *Front legs removed or tucked in*
3. *A good inspection window 1-1½" above base of the tail*
4. *Saddle removed where fat or grease is present*
5. *Back legs boarded on the back or side of the board*



*Good Inspection Window*

*Shortened tail increases hair density.*

*Pleating increases hair density*

*Hind legs are on same side as tail.*



*Initial Cut for Pelting*

# LYNX AND LYNX CAT

Lynx and Lynx Cats (Bobcats) are currently very fashionable in the fur trade and selling for very high values as compared to some of the other wild fur species. Both are thin-leathered pelts so care must be taken in the skinning and fleshing to avoid cuts and ripping. Both species have very sharp claws that can rip pelts in the drumming process at the auction so these pelts are put up with the feet removed. The front and hind feet on Bobcats are cut off at the ankle while the front and hind legs on Lynx are cut off at the elbow. The black and white pattern on the legs of the Bobcats is of value to the trade.

Cats are skinned cased similar to Fox and Coyote. To assist in pelt removal, a cut should be made on the back side of the front legs towards the belly to within two inches. Cutting too close to the belly can result in ripping during the turning or drumming process. The lower lip should be removed during boarding. All grease and fat must be removed prior to boarding. These pelts are boarded leather-out until partially dry and then turned fur out and re-boarded to complete the drying process. The front legs should be spread out and pinned to cardboard while drying leather side out. Make sure there are no creases or wet spots before turning fur out since taint will result. Be certain that the neck area is almost dry before turning. If Cat pelts are turned too soon, the neck will wrinkle severely during final drying. The front legs should be left inside when re-boarded fur-out.

# FISHER

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, the majority of Fishers harvested are handled fur-out. In certain areas, notably Ontario and the New England states, Fishers were in the past predominantly handled leather-out. The following are reasons offered to trappers and dealers to maximize their dollar return for this valuable fur bearer.

## REASONS FOR HANDLING FISHERS FUR-OUT

1. Buyers filling Fisher orders for their clients are more confident in their purchases of fur-out Fishers, since the grades, colours (X-Pale to Dark) and particularly clarities (Clear to Very Red) can be examined with confidence. Leather-out Fishers can be difficult and frustrating for some buyers who are trying to properly evaluate shades and particularly clarities.
2. For the Fisher grader, the grading and colouring is much easier to evaluate. Defects to the fur (clips, rubs, trap and snare marks, resin matts, etc.) are readily recognized. The colouring and finally, the determination of the clarities within each colour is far easier and more accurate. The result is an offering of Fishers the buyer will have confidence in purchasing.
3. Fur defects found in leather-out Fishers are difficult to reliably inspect. Some buyers who in the past have purchased leather-out Fishers have found unwanted surprises when the pelts have returned from the dressers. Understandably, they are wary or reluctant to continue purchasing leather-out Fishers.
4. Leather-out Fishers are graded and evaluated like other varieties of fur bearers that are handled leather-out. Primeness, taints, tick marks, sews, cuts, trap and snare marks are examined to determine the grade. In many cases leather-out Fishers which have minor defects after dressing become insignificant when the pelts are manufactured into a garment.

## HANDLING TIPS

1. Fishers, especially the males, are strong animals. Make **absolutely** certain Conibears that are used for trapping Fishers have powerful springs to render the Fisher immediately unconscious when the trigger is released.
2. Make certain Conibear traps are dyed or painted. Rusty Conibears may leave a rust mark on the fur that will be difficult to remove during the dressing process.
3. Remove Fishers carefully from Conibear traps so guard hair and underfur are not pulled or torn by the trap.
4. Transport Fishers with care and make every effort to keep the fur from coming into contact with freezing metal, especially if the fur is damp. Placing Fishers in canvas or burlap bags will alleviate this as well as keep the fur clean.
5. Pelt Fishers as soon as possible. Fishers taint quickly, especially in the abdominal regions.

6. When fleshing Fishers, thoroughly remove **all** fat, grease and flesh because Fishers grease-burn very easily. Fishers found to be grease-burnt lose their value dramatically.
7. If wishing to wash Fishers, care is required. Use only mild soap and cold water. Strong soap and warm water will remove the natural oils from the leather and fur. The removal of the oils from the fur will result in a fur that looks “dead” and lifeless.
8. Remove all claws and porcupine quills.
9. Board Fishers on the proper-sized boards. Most Fishers are boarded on Fox boards. When the pelt is partially dry, turn the Fisher fur-out. **Do not leave Fishers leather-out.**
10. Resin matts—if they cannot be successfully removed from the fur without pulling out guard hair and underfur, it is **strongly recommended to leave the resin matts alone**. Under no circumstances cut or trim matts.
11. When turning Fishers leave the front legs inside the pelt. This greatly reduces the chances of the front legs tearing during the drumming process.
12. Do not dry Fisher pelts too quickly or where it is too warm. Pelts that have dried too quickly become very boardy, especially the males. It is recommended to dry them relatively slowly in temperatures 50°–60°F (10°–16°C). When lower temperatures are used for drying fur, a circulation of air is necessary. A fan can be used to circulate air but do not direct airflow onto the pelt.



Well-handled Fisher

# WOLVES, BEARS AND WOLVERINES

## USES

Wolves, Bears, and Wolverines are used in the fur trade for trim and for fur garments. Wolf and Wolverine trim is primarily used for parka hood, collar and sleeves. In the far north the Wolverine is of primary importance due to its frost-free capabilities. The Inuit parka trim utilizes the front and back paws of the Wolverine. The mens' parkas use the back legs and paws in a continuous strip over the back, the paws hang down below the parka hood. The ladies' use the front feet and legs, cuffs and childrens' parkas use the rest of the remaining pelt. Some high-quality Bear pelts find their way to the manufacture of the Busby (the military full-dress fur hat worn by the British Guardsman) for the Queen's Guard in England. These three species also find a use in the Taxidermy Trade. Rug and full mounts require high-quality, complete pelts, prepared with extra care and to high specifications. Pelts suitable for taxidermy are often referred to as specimens. It is this special care and preparation we will concentrate on for suitable specimens.

Even though some high-quality select pelts are handled properly for the taxidermy trade, the fur trade may consume these. It will depend on the demands at the time of sale.

Smaller, off-coloured, damaged or lesser-grade pelts will very seldom be sold for taxidermy purposes and will be used for fur trim and garments. You need to assess your pelt before you process it for market. The fur trade does not use ears, toes, and lips, thus some of the extra care described in the foregoing would be a lot of extra work which will not benefit you in any way. This lesser-grade of pelt, even though complete, may be graded in with like incomplete pelts suitable only for trim purposes.

## HARVESTING

The quality and care of pelts begins with the harvesting of the animal. A poor-quality pelt can never get better, however a high-quality prime pelt can be downgraded through poor harvesting techniques, care of the animal in transportation, thawing if frozen, and poor pelt preparation. In any case the pelt should be removed and processed as expeditiously as possible.

Animals should be harvested as humanly as possible, using up-to-date trapping systems in compliance with Provincial or State Regulations. Wolves are harvested primarily in locking or power snares and padded jaw traps designed for trapping wolves. Wolverines are easily harvested in quick kill Conibear type traps or power snares. Foothold traps are not recommended for this species. Bears are best harvested by shooting, however some jurisdictions do allow the use of foot snares. In all cases it is recommended that traps be checked daily for live holding devices and at least every three days for killing devices. In temperatures above freezing killing traps should be checked daily to avoid fur damage and taints.

## PRE-PELTING CARE

Some special care is required, as with all pelts, prior to pelting and fur preparation. All animals that are frozen should be thawed out where the temperature is suitable to thaw it properly. A light fan in the room for air circulation will speed up the drying and thawing process. A warm or hot environment is **not** desirable. Thawing and drying out of wet pelts is best achieved by hanging the specimen with the head towards the top. All dirt and any blood on the pelt should be removed by washing with cold water. Washing of the pelt can be done before or after the pelting



process, a very mild detergent can be used (without bleach or any other added cleaning agents). Brushing the fur with a fur brush or fur comb prior to pelting will help to remove any dirt, blood or loose hair.

## **PELT REMOVAL**

Although some Wolves and Wolverine are handled open, (particularly in the West Arctic) cased is the preferred method for these two species. Bears are handled open. Special care must be taken in the cuts around the eyes, ears, feet, lips and nose to ensure the pelt is useable for taxidermy purposes.

## **FEET**

Cuts should be made around one side of the footpads leaving the pad intact in one whole piece. The rest of the paw is skinned out glove-like. The toes are skinned down to the last knuckle and then cut off at that point. This leaves the claws on with all of the meat and bone that may cause taint damage to be removed. Do not split down each individual toe to the nail.

## **EARS**

Special care must be taken that the ear is cut close to the head ensuring all of the inside ear cartilage remains with the ear. The ears are then turned. This is the process whereby you case skin the ear so to speak, turn it inside out skinning between the cartilage and the outside ear. Some use a blunt object such as a dull rounded putty knife and work it gently between the cartilage and the skin, others us a small pointed knife to achieve this chore, or a combination of both. Excess pieces of meat, fat or cartilage are to be trimmed off. Ears are especially subject to taint.

## **EYES**

When cutting around the eyes ensure the entire eyelid (the black skin around the eyes) is left intact on the pelt. No other special care is required, as they will dry properly in the pelt drying process.

## **LIPS**

All of the inside lip should be left intact. On Bears, which are skinned open, the initial cut should leave the bottom lip to one side of the pelt. Do not split the bottom lip up the middle. The lips of wolf, Wolverine, and Bear must then be split. This involves cutting between the inner lip and the outer skin and will allow for proper drying.

## **NOSE**

The nose, when cut from the carcass, should be cut in a manner so as to leave about a half inch of cartilage attached to the pelt. This ensures all of the visible inside nose channel remains for taxidermy purposes.

## **TAIL**

The tailbone must be removed and the tail split right to the tip.

## **FLESHING**

All fat and excess meat left on the pelt from the skinning process must be removed to avoid taint and grease burn. This is best done with a two-handed fleshing tool and a fleshing beam, scraping from the head end towards the rear. Fine sawdust (do not use plywood sawdust) on the pelt will help to keep grease out of the fur. Care must be taken to remove all of the fat and meat but not to over-scrape and expose hair roots. Some prefer to do the scraping with a one-hand scraper or dull knife directly on the pelt board, or with bears, as they tack it out. A final scraping with a one-handed tool when the pelt is boarded will remove any small bits of fat and meat missed or any sawdust that may have been used in the fleshing process. Yes, please do remove all that sawdust you used when fleshing on your fleshing beam.

Trim any excess bits of meat and cartilage from around the head, ears, eyes, nose, and feet that may have been missed in the skinning process.

## **BOARDING AND DRYING**

Bears are best tacked out on a wall or on two sheets of plywood on the floor. Nails are spaced about 2" apart all the way around the Bear pelt. Place a nail at the side of the nose, one at the base of the tail, and one in each foot so as to get a rough size and shape. Now start at the head and tack out evenly, working your way down each side and around the legs and feet, following the natural shape of the pelt. Once the pelt is tacked out, raise it a bit on the nails to give some circulation under the fur.

Cased Wolf and Wolverine are placed on a pelt board fur-in and tacked with push-pins around the base and down each side if the tail. The split lips should also be tacked out to properly dry. Ears are turned inside out. Drying boards are placed up inside the front legs and tacked out. A Mink or Marten drying board will work well to tack the front legs out. A belly wedge board is used so the pelt can be easily removed from the board.

Care should be taken to properly dry the inside of the paws. A loose wad of newspaper can be stuffed inside the paw to hold it open in the initial part of the drying process, however remove this once the paw has started to dry and holds its shape. Coarse salt can be used in the paws, ears, and around the lips to insure no hair slip occurs in these areas. However, any salt used should be removed within two days so these parts will properly dry. A vacuum cleaner works well to remove the coarse salt. And yes, even the little handheld battery ones work for this.

Dry the pelt in a cool, well-ventilated room. The use of a fan for air circulation will greatly improve drying conditions. After two or three days, but while the pelt is still pliable, it is removed from the board and turned fur-out. Setting the pelt outside for a couple of hours, not in the sun, will make it more pliable and easier to turn. Place it back on the board fur out, leave the front legs tucked inside, ears can be turned back fur out or left inside out on the inside of the pelt. The pelt can be removed after about three more days and then hung up till ready to ship. Bears are left tacked out until completely dry.

### **SHIPPING**

Wolves can be lightly folded in three, Wolverines folded in half for shipping. For Bears, fold the legs in, then fold one side in, then the other overtop, now roll it up loosely and tie a string around it.



*Open, Pale Colour, Good Pattern*



*Cased, Medium Colour, Average Pattern*

# PELT PREPARATION OF BEAR AND TIMBERWOLF



*Proper Handling of Bears' Feet*



*Poor Handling of Bears' Feet*



*Proper Handling of Bears' Ears*



*Poor Handling of Bears' Ears*



*Proper Handling of Timberwolves' Feet*



*Poor Handling of Timberwolves' Feet*

# PROPER HANDLING OF BEAR PELT AND FEET



*Preparation of Bear Feet Without Distorting the Claw Cushions, Very Good Drying Process*



*The Bone of the Claw Has Been Taken Out Until the Last Joint*



*Preparation and Drying of the Head, and the Lips Have Been Split*



*Preparation of Bear Ears, Cartilage Taken Out and Dried*

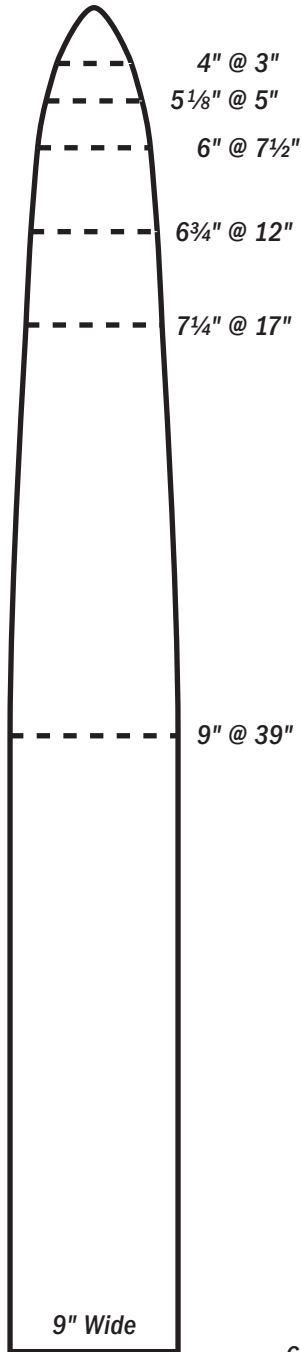


*Feet – Left: Leather Side and Right: Fur Side.*

*Pictures by  
Pierre Yves Collin,  
NAFA collector*

# COYOTE, LYNX, LYNX CAT & WOLVERINE BOARDS

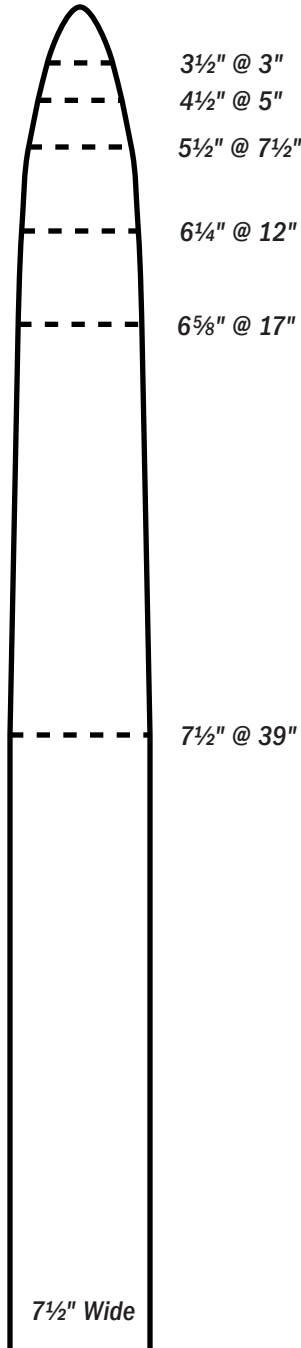
# TIMBERWOLF BOARDS



9" Wide

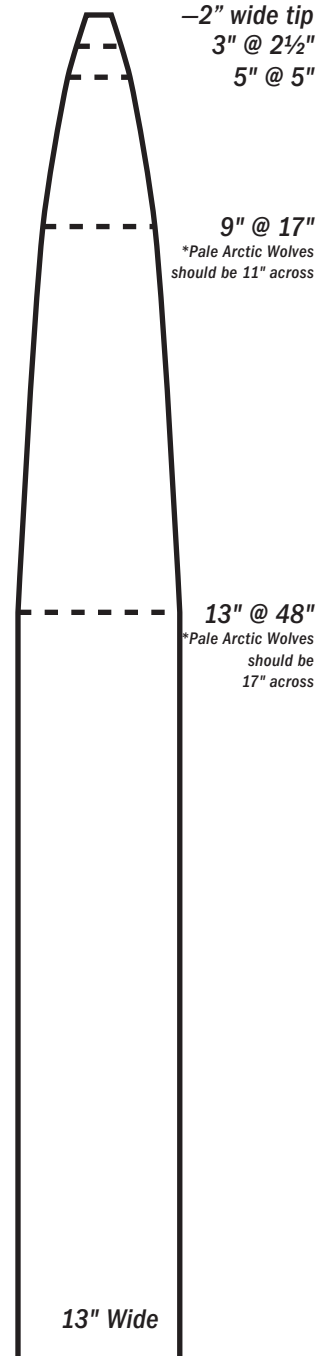
Large

6' Long



7 1/2" Wide

Small



13" Wide

8'-10' Long

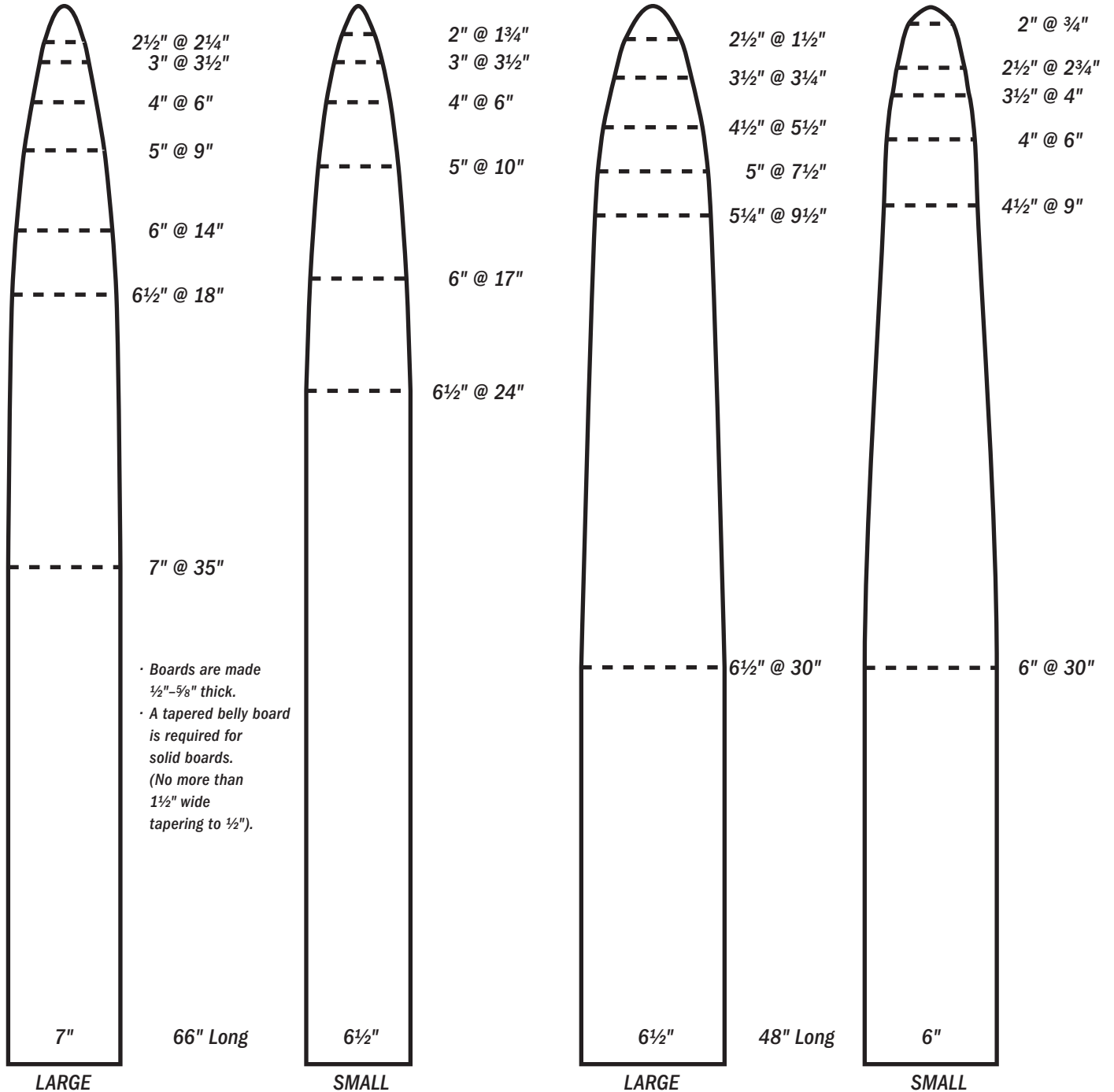
*\*Pale Arctic Wolves should be 17" across*

Coyote, Lynx, Lynx Cat and Wolverine boards are made 1/2" or 5/8" thick.  
A tapered belly board is required for solid boards  
(no more than 1 1/2" wide, tapering to 1/2", about 42" long).

Boards should be made from 3/4" softwood with rounded edges.  
These may be split boards that open up no more than the measurements shown.

# FOX BOARDS

# FISHER BOARDS



Two sizes of Fox boards will fit most red or coloured Foxes.

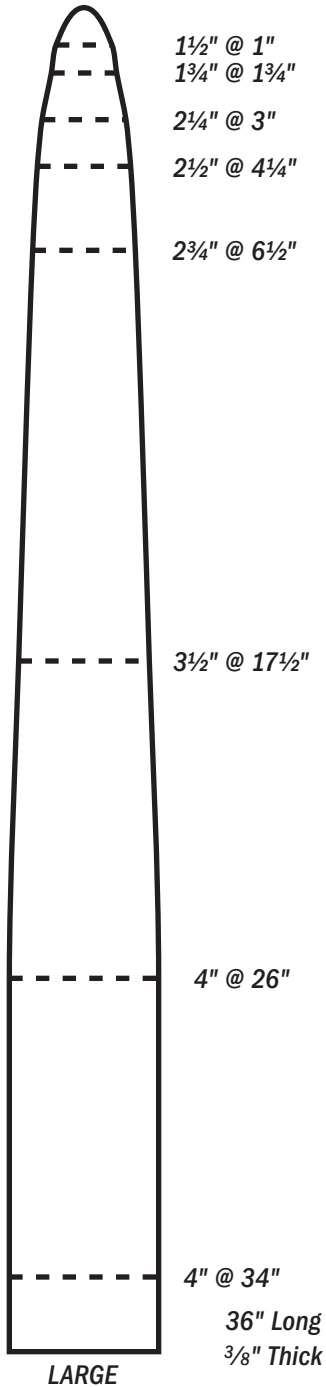
Fox boards are narrow at the nose and neck to accommodate the pointed nose of the Fox. If boards are made too wide at the head and neck, Fox will be too short and wide.

Small and Medium Fisher are both boarded on the small boards.

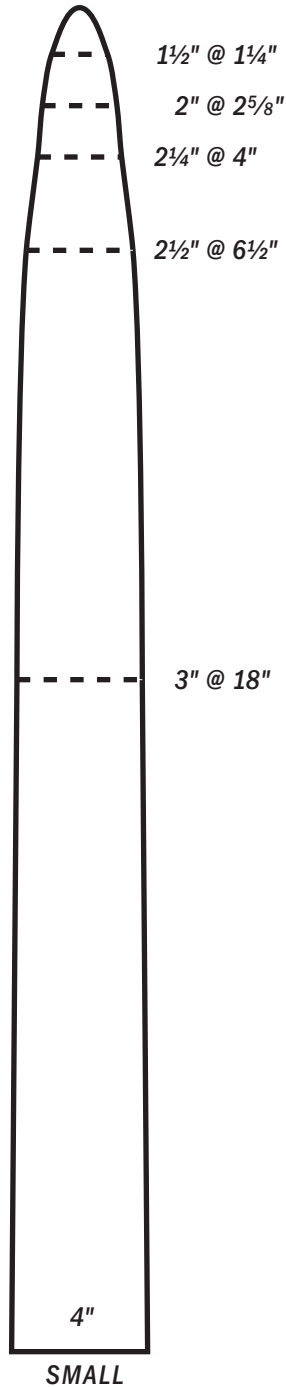
A tapered belly board is required for solid boards (no more than ¾" wide tapering to ¼").

# MARTEN BOARDS

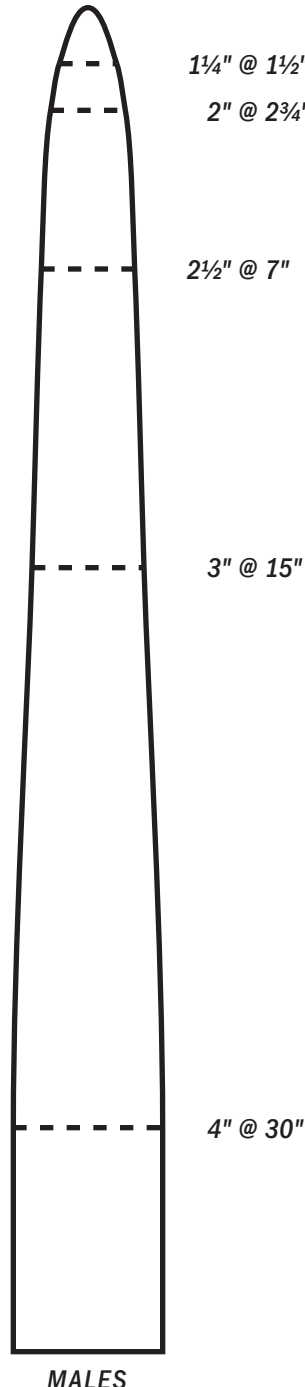
# WILD MINK BOARDS



LARGE

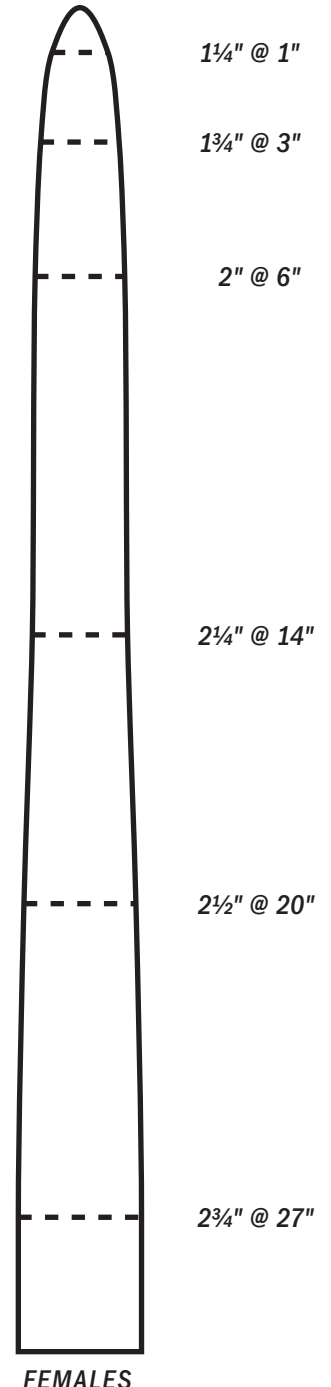


SMALL



MALES

36" Long  
 $\frac{3}{8}"$  Thick



FEMALES

30" Long  
 $\frac{3}{8}"$  Thick

If there is fat under the saddle, remove the fat or remove the saddle completely without making nicks/cuts in the leather.

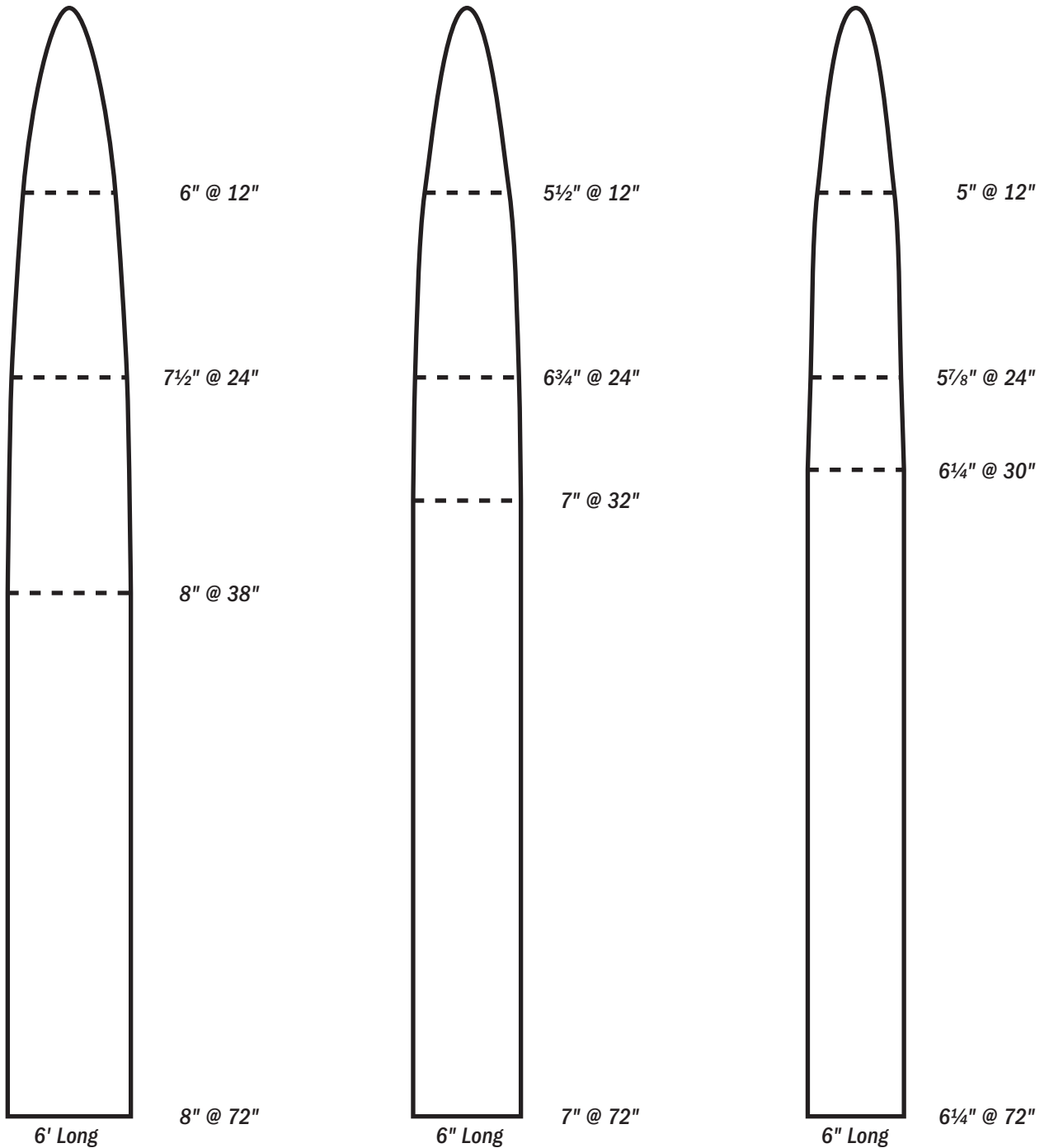
Board the Mink correctly—Male Mink on male board, Female on Female board.

Place the hind feet on the same side as the tail and do not overstretch the hind feet or the tail.

XXL boards may be made using a  $4\frac{1}{2}"$  base.

A tapered belly board is required for solid boards (no more than  $\frac{3}{4}"$  wide tapering to  $\frac{1}{4}"$ ).

# OTTER BOARDS

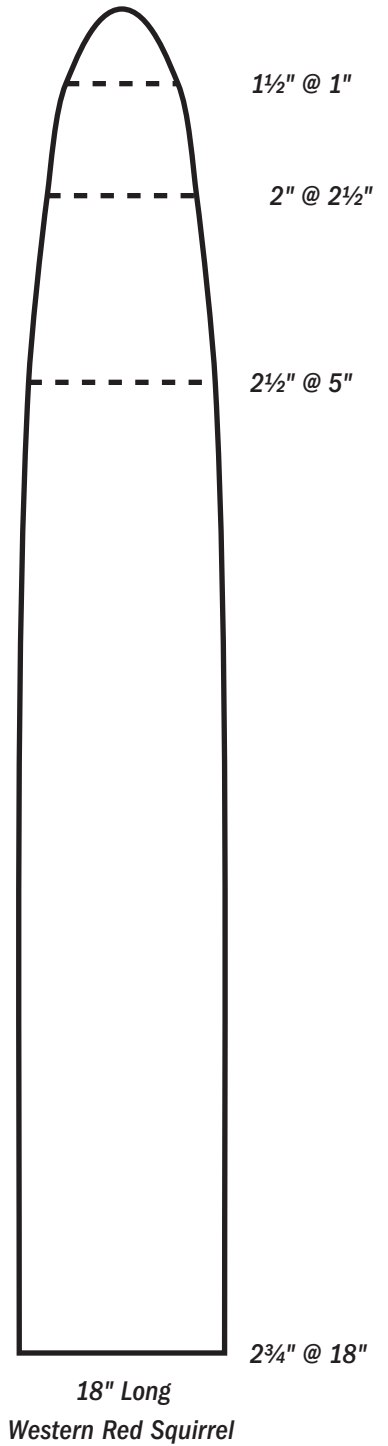
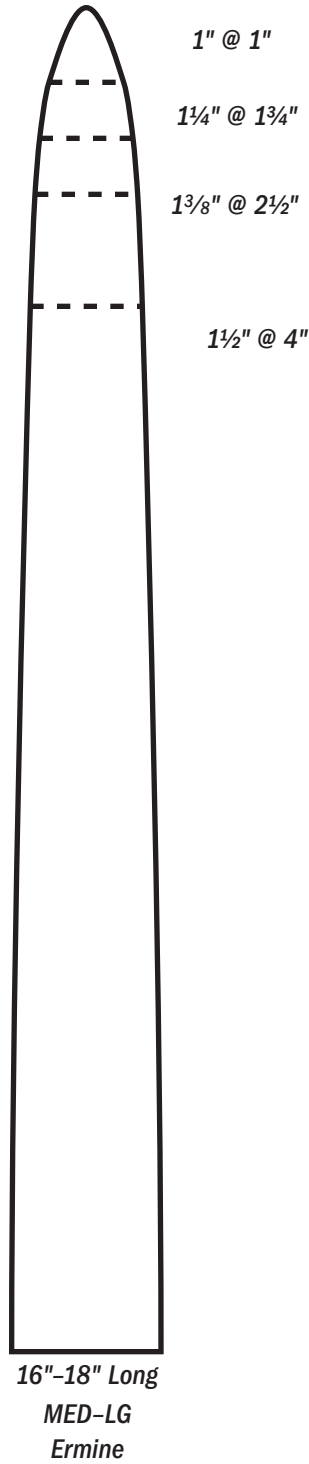
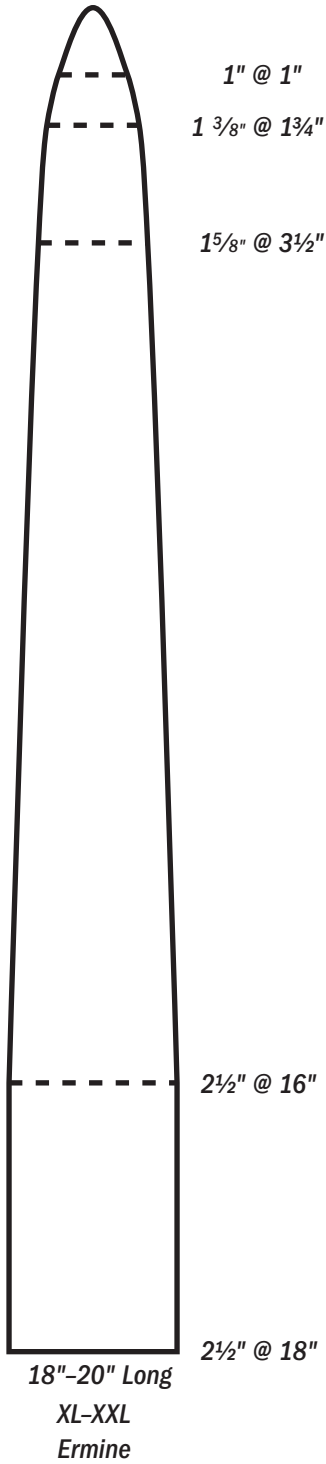


Boards are made ½"-¾" thick.

A tapered board is required for solid boards. (No more than 1½" wide tapering to ½")



# ERMINE & SQUIRREL BOARDS

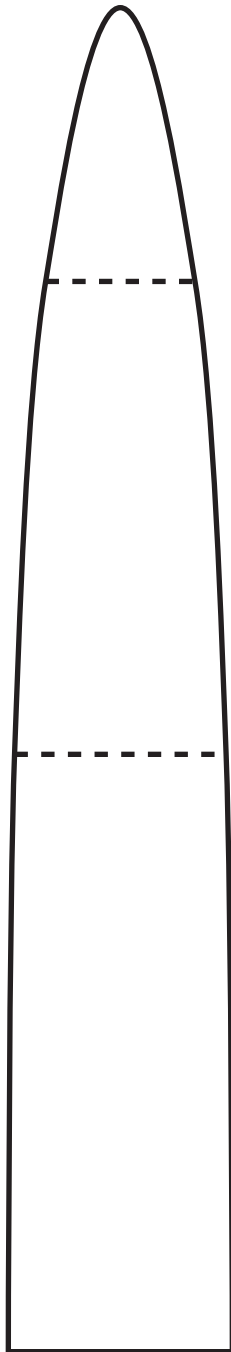


A smaller Squirrel board is reduced by 1/8" each side from 2 1/2" point to the base.

All boards 3/16" thick

Ermine boards may be made smaller or larger from 1 3/4" to the base.

# RACCOON BOARDS

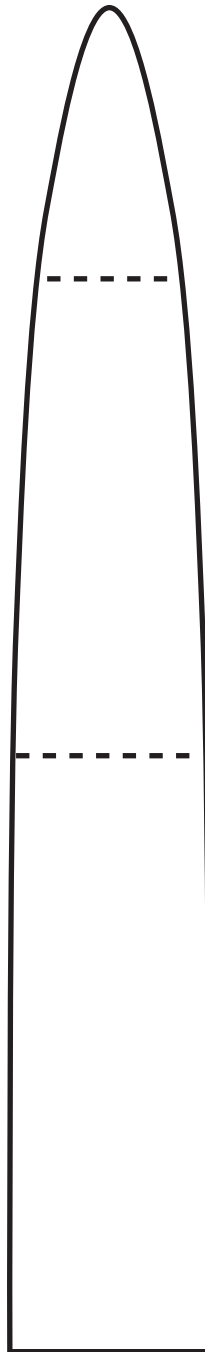


48"-54" Long  
Canadian Section

6"-6½" @ 11"

8"-8½" @ 30"

9" @ 54"

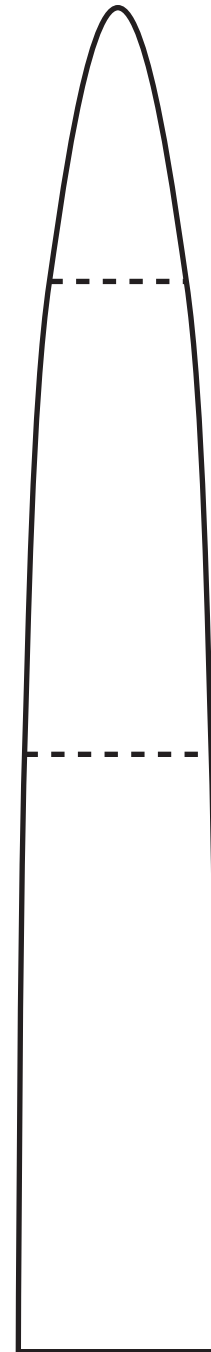


48"-54" Long  
Western, Northern  
and North Central US  
Section

5½"-6" @ 11"

7½"-8" @ 30"

8" @ 54"



48"-54" Long  
Eastern US and  
Semi-Heavy Section

5" @ 11"

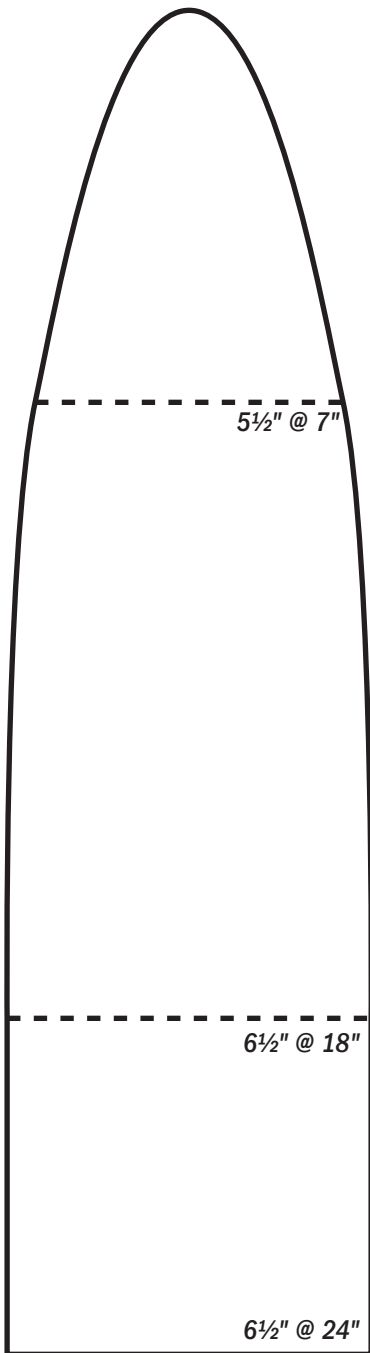
7"-7½" @ 30"

8" @ 54"

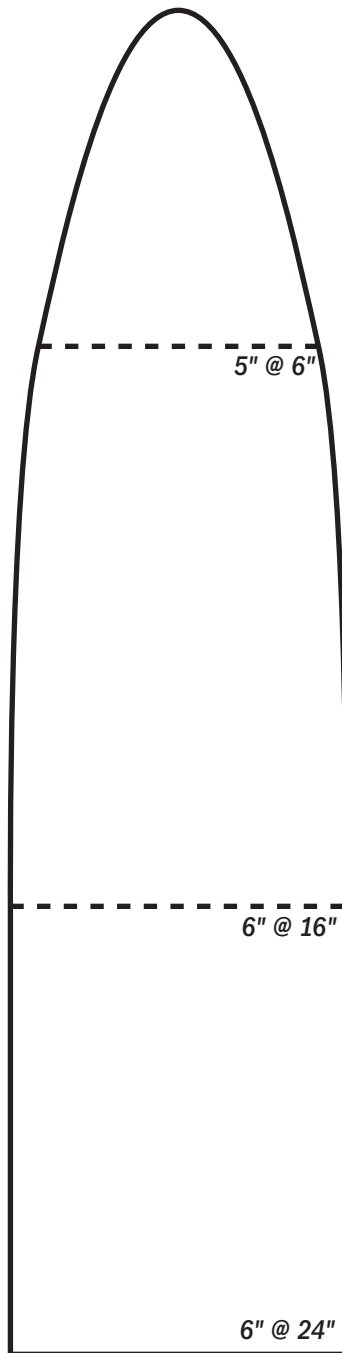
More than two boards may be used varying in size as indicated.

Central and Southern US Section boards should be no narrower than 5" @ 11" and 6½" @ 30".

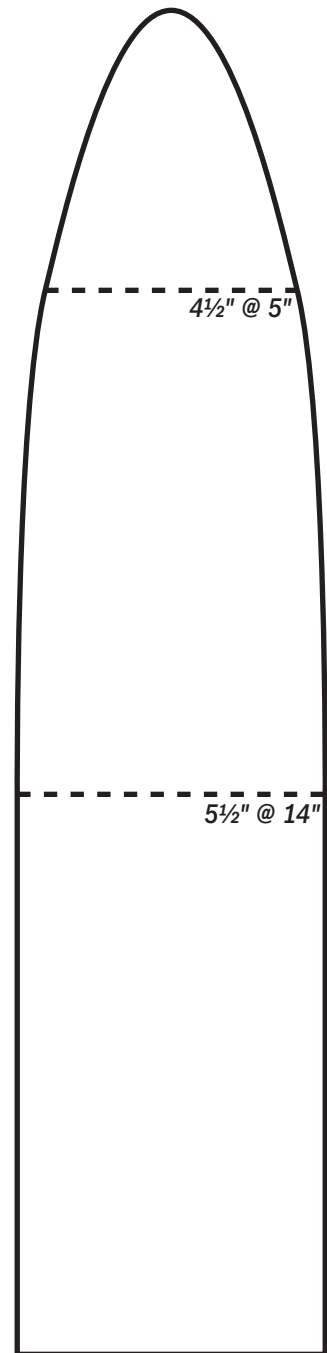
# MUSKRAT BOARDS



24" Long,  $\frac{3}{8}$ " Thick  
Extra Large



24" Long,  $\frac{3}{8}$ " Thick  
Medium & Large



24" Long,  $\frac{3}{8}$ " Thick  
Small

*One piece board—use belly stick, round the edges.*



# NORTH AMERICAN FUR AUCTIONS

65 SKYWAY AVE, TORONTO, ON M9W 6C7 CANADA | TEL: +1.416.675.9320 | FAX: +1.416.675.6865 | WWW.NAFA.CA

## STANDARD SIZES: WILD FUR (Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)

### RACCOON

SIZE	LENGTH	
6XL	Over 104.0cm	Over 41"
5XL	96.5 – 104.0cm	38" – 41"
4XL	89.0 – 96.5cm	35" – 38"
3XL	81.0 – 89.0cm	32" – 35"
2XL	73.5 – 81.0cm	29" – 32"
XL	68.5 – 73.5cm	27" – 29"
LGE	61.0 – 68cm	24" – 27"
LM	55 – 60cm	22" – 24"
MED	51 – 55cm	20" – 22"
SML	Under 51cm	Under 20"

### BEAVER

SIZE	LENGTH	
2XL-3XL	Over 165.0cm	Over 65"
XL	152.5 – 165.0cm	60" – 65"
LGE	140.0 – 152.5cm	55" – 60"
LM	129.5 – 140.0cm	51" – 55"
MED	119.5 – 129.5cm	47" – 51"
SM	107.0 – 119.5cm	42" – 47"
X-SM	Under 107.0cm	Under 42"

### WILD MINK (MALE)

SIZE	LENGTH	
XL-L	Over 53.5cm	Over 21"
LM	48.0 – 53.5cm	19" – 21"

(Smaller males sized with females)

### WILD MINK (FEMALE)

SIZE	LENGTH	
MED	Over 43.0cm	Over 17"
SML	Under 43.0cm	Under 17"

### FISHER

SIZE	LENGTH	
LGE	Over 71.0cm	Over 28"
MED	63.5 – 71.0cm	25" – 28"
SML*	Under 63.5cm	Under 25"

(\*Females only)

### MUSKRAT

SIZE	LENGTH	
3XL	Over 43.0cm	Over 17"
2XL	39.5 – 43.0cm	15.5" – 17"
XL	35.5 – 39.5cm	14" – 15.5"
LGE	33.0 – 35.5cm	13" – 14"
MED	29.0 – 33.0cm	11.5" – 13"
SML	25.5 – 28.0cm	10" – 11.5"
X-SM	Under 25.5cm	Under 10"

### ERMINE

SIZE	LENGTH	
2XL	Over 38.0cm	Over 15"
XL	33.0 – 38.0cm	13" – 15"
LGE	28.0 – 33.0cm	11" – 13"
MED	23.0 – 28.0cm	9" – 11"
SML	Under 23.0cm	Under 9"

### OPOSSUM

SIZE	LENGTH	
4XL	Over 66.0cm	Over 26"
3XL	61.0 – 66.0 cm	24" – 26"
2XL	56.0 – 61.0cm	22" – 24"
XL/LGE	46.0 – 56.0cm	18" – 22"
M-SM	Under 46.0cm	Under 18"

### BLACK/BROWN BEAR

SIZE	LENGTH	
3XL	Over 330.0cm	Over 130"
2XL	292.0 – 330.0cm	115" – 130"
XL	254.0 – 292.0cm	100" – 115"
LGE	216.0 – 254.0cm	85" – 100"
L-M	178.0 – 216.0cm	70" – 85"
MED	152.0 – 178.0cm	60" – 70"
SML	Under 152.5cm	Under 60"

### WOLVERINE

SIZE	LENGTH	
4XL	Over 104.0cm	Over 41"
3XL	96.5 – 104.0cm	38" – 41"
2XL	89.0 – 96.5cm	35" – 38"
XL	81.0 – 89.0cm	32" – 35"
LGE	Under 81.0cm	Under 32"

### RED FOX

SIZE	LENGTH	
XL-L	Over 71.0cm	Over 28"
M-SM	Under 71.0cm	Under 28"

### TIMBERWOLF

SIZE	LENGTH	
4XL	Over 167.6cm	Over 66"
3XL	152.0 – 167.6 cm	60" – 66"
2XL	137.0 – 152.0cm	54" – 60"
XL	122.0 – 137.0cm	48" – 54"
LGE	107.0 – 122.0cm	42" – 48"
MED	Under 107.0cm	Under 42"

### LYNX

SIZE	LENGTH	
XL	Over 99.0cm	Over 39"
LGE	89.0 – 99.0cm	35" – 39"
MED	79.0 – 89.0cm	31" – 35"
SML	Under 79.0cm	Under 31"

### LYNX CAT

SIZE	LENGTH	
2XL	Over 101.6cm	Over 40"
XL	91.5 – 101.6cm	36" – 40"
LGE	81.0 – 91.5 cm	32" – 36"
MED	71.0 – 81.0cm	28" – 32"
SM	61.0 – 71.0cm	24" – 28"
XSM	Under 61.0cm	Under 24"

### SABLE (MARTEN)

SIZE	LENGTH	
2XL	Over 58.5cm	Over 23"
XL	53.5 – 58.5cm	21" – 23"
LGE	46.0 – 53.5cm	18" – 21"
MED	40.5 – 46.0cm	16" – 18"
SM	Under 40.5cm	Under 16"

### OTTER

SIZE	LENGTH	
3XL	Over 106.7cm	Over 42"
2XL	101.6 – 106.7cm	40" – 42"
XL	96.5 – 101.6cm	38" – 40"
LGE	86.5cm	34"
LM	81.0cm	32"
MED	76.0cm	30"
SML	Under 76.0cm	Under 30"

### COYOTE

SIZE	LENGTH	
2XL	Over 106.5cm	Over 42"
XL-L	92.0 – 106.5cm	36" – 42"
M-SM	Under 92.0cm	Under 36"

