

Colony Traps

Note: This version of the colony trap regulations is effective July 11, 2011, and supersedes a previous version of the colony trap regulations which contained an error in the description of legal trap dimensions.



Colony traps became a legal method to trap muskrat in Wisconsin on February 1, 2011. A colony trap is an enclosure type device that allows for the capture of one or more muskrats in a single set. The trap design functions with one or more one-way entrances that allow muskrats to push through and enter, but prevents exiting by the mechanics and/or design of the door or opening. These traps are called by other names, but will be referred to as colony traps in the trapping regulations and related articles.

Colony traps are commonly used in many Midwestern states for the regulated harvest of muskrats. The states of Michigan, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Iowa, Ohio, and Missouri allow the use of colony traps, but regulate them based on variables such as: overall length, door or opening dimensions, placement in relation to culverts, whether bait can be used, and placement with regard to water (i.e. 100% submerged, 50% submerged, etc.). Each regulation is based on different variables that may influence non-target capture and welfare of trapped animals. For example:

- Restricting trap opening dimensions reduces the chances of taking incidental beaver, otter, and other wildlife.
- Culverts tend to force/funnel all animals, including non-target species into colony traps. Requiring traps to be a set away from culverts reduces this possibility.
- Prohibiting the use of bait reduces the risk of attracting fish or turtles into the trap.
- Requiring the set to be underwater at all times assures complete submersion and humane dispatch.

During the review and spring hearing process here in Wisconsin, these variables were taken into consideration by members of the Public, Wisconsin Conservation Congress Fur Harvest Committee, and the Wisconsin DNR's Technical Furbearer Advisory Committee. This committee includes representatives from the WDNR Bureaus of Wildlife Management, Research, Fisheries, Endangered Resources, and Law Enforcement; U.S. Forest Service; Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Commission; County Forest; Wisconsin Conservation Congress, Wisconsin Trappers Association, and USDA Wildlife Services.

Based on this review, the following regulations were suggested and approved for colony trap use in Wisconsin:

- 1) Overall length can not exceed 36 inches and height and width cannot exceed 6 inches. If using a round trap, the diameter cannot exceed 6 inches.
- 2) Colony traps can not be placed within 3 feet of any culvert.
- 3) Artificial or natural materials can not be used to funnel animals into the trap.
- 4) Bait may not be placed in the trap or at the set location.
- 5) The trap must be completely underwater at all times.
- 6) Colony traps may only be used for muskrat but mink that are incidentally captured can be retained

Starting this fall (2011-2012 season), colony traps can be used beginning on the opening day of the regulated muskrat season.

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