



**1985-86 Winter Snaring Studies  
on Lac du Flambeau and  
Bad River Reservations**

by

**Jonathan Gilbert  
and  
Timothy Andryk**

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**BIOLOGICAL SERVICES DIVISION  
Wildlife Section  
Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission  
P.O. Box 9  
Odanah, WI 54861**

**(715) 682-6619**

## ABSTRACT

A snaring assessment study was conducted on the Bad River and Lac du Flambeau Reservations, in northern Wisconsin, during the winter of 1985-86. Snares were set under the ice for beaver, in open water for beavers, as bank sets for beavers and otters and as upland sets for canids.

Conibear killer traps were 7 times as efficient as snares when used under the ice for beavers at Lac du Flambeau. However, snares used in conjunction with conibear traps greatly increased the flexibility of any set. Snares were more selective than conibears taking only target species while conibears took both target and non-target species. Snares with 10-14 inch loop sizes harvested only adult beavers while snares with loop sizes less than 10 inches took only immature beavers. Snares were not the preferred method of trapping under the ice but they did increase harvest and provide a supplemental trapping tool.

Loop size was the factor which most affected snaring success while trapping otter at Bad River. A small loop size (5.5 - 6 in.) would catch large adult otters while any larger loop would let otters pass.

Snare placement, rather than loop size, would minimize the chances of killing domestic dogs. A 14 inch loop within 2 inches of the ground would act as a foot snare, capturing the animal alive whereas a 14 inch loop 8 inches off the ground would be a killing neck snare.

## INTRODUCTION

Snaring is a traditional trapping technique which Chippewa trappers have been employing for many generations. Many groups of American Indians used snares to produce furs for the earliest trade with Europeans (Boddicker 1982). In northern Wisconsin, Chippewa Indians used snares to take all species of furbearers including; beaver (Castor canadensis), muskrat (Ondatra zibithica), raccoon (Procyon lotor), hare (Lepus americanus) martin (Martes americana), mink (Mustela vison), fisher (Martes pennanti) and lynx (Lynx canadensis) and, in some cases, ruffed grouse (Bonasa umbellus), (Cleland 1985). Schorger (1982) described methods Chippewas used to snare otter (Lutra canadensis) and white-tailed deer, (Odocoileus virginianus). McCabe and McCabe (1984) state that snaring was one the popular methods the Chippewa used to capture deer.

Snaring is currently used by many Chippewa trappers, particularly on the Bad River Reservation. Hares and rabbits are the most frequently snared species but trappers also target coyotes (Canis latrans), red fox (Vulpes fulva), gray fox (Urocyon cinereoargenteus) and fisher.

Given this extensive history of Chippewa snaring and the current interest in this technique, the possibility of increased snaring in ceded territories under tribal

regulation should be explored.

In 1984 the Chippewa tribes included as part of their proposed trapping regulations a provision that would permit the use of snares as traps. The 1984 Tribal/WDNR agreement allowed the use of snares in the capture of hares and rabbits only.

In 1985 there was no Tribal/WDNR agreement regulating trapping. Inter-tribal regulations provided for snaring of all species open to trapping. The State's emergency rules allowed snaring of rabbits and hares, as in 1984, and provided for experimental snaring under a cooperative agreement between the tribes and the state.

The state of Wisconsin is also interested in exploring the use of snares as a trapping tool, particularly for beaver control. WDNR created a departmental working group and held a snaring workshop in September 1985. During this workshop Keith Gregerson, a snaresman from Roundup MT demonstrated many snaring sets. These snaring demonstrations were videotaped for training purposes. Representatives from GLIFWC and the Lac du Flambeau Fish and Game Program attended.

During the winter of 1985-86 GLIFWC began a study to evaluate the use of snares as trapping tools. The objectives were to evaluate cost, efficiency, selectivity, time requirements, ease of sets and fur damage.

Two members of the Bad River tribe agreed to voluntarily participate in the snaring assessment on their reservation.

In December 1985 the Lac du Flambeau Fish and Game Program and GLIFWC began a cooperative study to compare the use of snares to the conibear killer traps as a method of beaver control.

The purpose of this paper is to describe these two studies and present the results of the first winter's work.

We would like to thank the Lac du Flambeau Fish and Game Program particularly Joe Cobb, Albany Potts and Duane Poupart, and Bad River's Tom O'Connor and Mat O'Claire for their conscientious record keeping. Without their assistance this study would not have been possible. We would also like to thank Chuck Pils, WDNR, for providing the video tapes of the snaring sets.

## **METHODS**

Prior to setting out snares, trappers were shown video tapes of Keith Gregerson's demonstration sets. However, trappers were not given specific instructions as to where and how to make their snare sets. They were allowed to set their snares in any fashion they deemed appropriate to trap the species they were targeting. Some trappers experimented, on their own, with snare type, snare placement and loop size. The trappers were requested to keep detailed, accurate records of each set made. Information, recorded for each set included date, land ownership, type of snare used, species targeted, species snared and a description of the set.

### Lac du Flambeau

Previous to the assessment period #3 Gregerson snares were set for practice. Many beaver escaped from these sets as only a few immature beavers were captured. It was determined that #3 snares with a maximum loop size of 9.5 inches were too small for under-ice adult beaver sets and therefore #4 snares were used during the assessment period.

Sets of 3 #4 snares and 3 #330 conibears were established at each location so that comparisons could be made between snares and conibear traps. Sets were all made under the ice and within 15 feet of beaver houses. At each location, there were four 5 ft. poles suspended from the ice three holding one conibear each and one holding 3 snares (Fig. 1). The snares had a 12 - 14 inch loop size and were placed 3 - 4 inches from the pole. The snares were evenly spaced on the pole with the top snare well below the ice (to prevent a snared animal from freezing to the ice) and the bottom snare was 1 - 2 ft. off the bottom. Fresh aspen sticks were used as bait on all trap poles.

One set was on Trout River where beaver were threatening a wild rice bed. The other sets were on lake outlets and were made in response to beaver damage complaints. Sets were made for 50 days between January 1 and March 15, 1986.

### Bad River

Each Bad River trapper targeted different species; one used bank or water sets to snare beaver and otter, the other used dry land sets to target free-ranging domestic dogs. Other trap types were not used on Bad River in this assessment study so comparisons will not be made.

One water set was made for 7 nights (January 10-17, 1986) in the open water of a spring-fed stream. The snare (a #3 Gregerson) was half submerged and anchored to a tree root. This snare was targeting otter. The trapper decreased the loop size every other night starting at 9.5 inches. (9.5 in., 9 in., 8 in., and 7 in., respectively).

Five #3 Gregerson snares were set as bank sets, 3 targeting otter and 2 targeting beaver between January 10 and 14, 1986. The trapper again decreased the loop size as he found snares sprung with no animal caught (9 in., 8 in., 7.5 in., 7 in.). All snares were set in otter or beaver runs and were approximately 2 inches from the ground to the bottom of the loop.

Six #4 Gregerson snares were set as bank sets on otter runs between the dates January 17 and 22, 1986. Again the trapper decreased the loop size on successive nights (10 in., 9 in., 8 in., 7 in. and 5.5 - 6 in.) but maintained the height above the ground at 2 inches. At the smaller loop size the trapper leaned the snare up hill at a slight angle.

Five trail sets were made with homemade snares 44 inches long. These sets were targeting free-ranging domestic dogs. Each set was in a dense willow thicket and was baited with

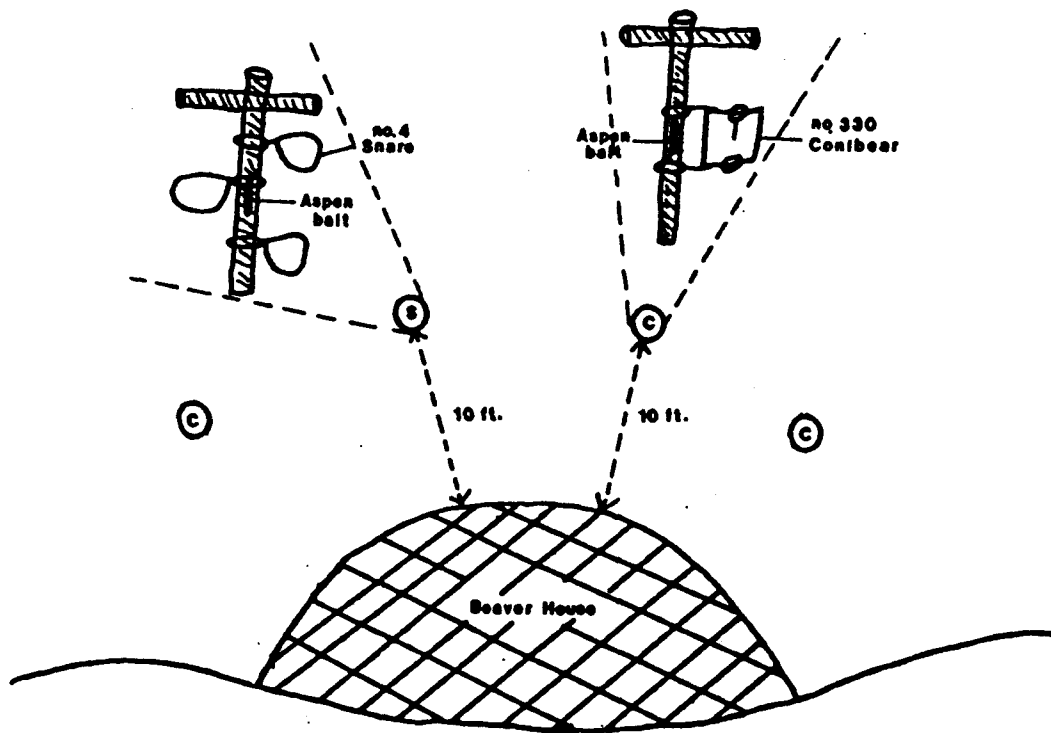


Fig. 1. Diagram of the under the ice conibear (C) and snare (S) sets at Lac du Flambeau, WI 1986.

either a raccoon carcass or deer scraps. Each snare was set with a 14 inches loop and was placed 8 inches above the ground. Sets were made between February 22 and 28, 1986 although they were not all set each of these nights.

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

### Lac du Flambeau

There were a total of 450 trap nights each for snares and conibears (Table 1). Twenty-two beaver were trapped using conibears and 4 beaver were snared, yielding a 0.05 and 0.008 beaver/trap-night for conibears and snares, respectively. Conibears also caught 4 muskrats and 1 white sucker during this time period.

Table 1. Relative efficiency of snares and conibear traps targeting beaver, otter and canids during the winter 1985-86 on the Lac du Flambeau and Bad River Reservations.

Location	Set Placement	Trap Type	Loop Size (height)	Trap-Nights	Animals Snared	Animals/trap-night
Lac du Flambeau	under ice	#4 snare	14in.	450	4 beavers	0.008
Lac du Flambeau	under ice	#330 conibear	-	450	22 beavers	0.05
Bad River	water set	#3 snare	9in.	7	none	--
Bad River	bank set	#3 snare	7-9in. (2 in.)	20	none	--
Bad River	bank set	#4 snare	6.5-9 in. (2 in.)	24	none	--
Bad River	bank set	#4 snare	5.5-6 in. (2 in.)	6	3 otters	0.5
Bad River	upland set	44 in. snare	14 in. (8 in.)	18	2 dogs 2 coyotes	0.22

The results indicate that conibears were 6-7 times more efficient than snares when used under the ice. However, it was the opinion of the trappers that snares provided a good supplement to the use of conibears by increasing the number of traps and the placement flexibility of each set.

Snares were more selective than conibears. By using

different snare sizes or loop sizes, different sized beavers can be targeted. The early use of #3 snares with a 9.5 inch loop indicated that many larger beavers were tripping the snares and escaping, while the smaller immature beavers were caught in these smaller snares. The #4 snares with their larger 14 inch loop size caught only the larger, mature beavers.

Snares were also more selective in that they caught only beaver. The conibears, on the other hand, caught muskrats and even fish. Although this incidental catch was insignificant it is anticipated that snares will continue to be selective and that conibears will continue to kill non-targeted species.

Setting snares and conibears took approximately the same time. However, if an animal was caught it was much more time consuming to free and replace the snares than it was to free the trapped animal and reset the conibear traps.

There was no fur damage created by the use of snares. Both conibears and snares yielded furs which were marketable.

#### Bad River

There were 7 trap nights of #3 Gregerson snares as water sets (half submerged), 20 trap nights of #3 Gregerson snares as bank sets and 30 trap nights of #4 Gregerson snares as bank sets (Table 1).

No animals were snared in the water set because of ice-up problems. Ice accumulated quickly on the cable releasing the snare.

No beaver were snared during this assessment. There were only 8 trap-nights targeting beaver using the less efficient, smaller snares. The trapper felt that a larger loop size (8-10 in. or larger) would be necessary to successfully snare beaver. This corresponds well with the results of the Lac du Flambeau assessment.

No animals were snared in the #3 bank set snares. Otters were wary and any unusual objects in or near their runway appeared to preclude their use of these runs. If the snare support was placed away from the run, the length of the #3 snare cable was not adequate to extend from the support to the otter trail. Therefore, #3 snares were replaced with #4 snares with a greater snare length.

Animals continued to escape from the #4 snares while the loop size was greater than 6 inches. Three adult otters approximately 40 inches in length were snared in the #4 snares when the loop size was reduced to 5.5 - 6 inches.

It is difficult to evaluate the efficiency of snares used as bank sets in otter runs based on this winter's assessment because the trapper continually adjusted the loop size until he caught otters. Otters were able to run or slide through the snares until the loop size was adjusted to 5.5 in. - 6.0 in. Three otters were caught within 6 trap-nights once the proper loop size was determined (a rate of 0.5 otter/trap-night). This was the most efficient snaring

rate accomplished during the winter assessment period.

It was the opinion of the trapper that once the proper loop size had been established snares were more effective otter traps than any other type of trap he has used. The snares blended well with the snow after boiling in a baking soda mixture. They were faster and easier to set than steel traps as no digging was required. They are light-weight and therefore easier to transport. Although the animals put up a fierce struggle in the snares, there was no damage to the furs.

Upland sets targeting canids caught 2 dogs and 2 coyotes in 18 trap nights yielding .22 canids/trap-night.

The trapper was after dogs and caught 2 incidental coyotes. There does not seem to be a method of setting for dogs and not trapping coyotes or vice versa. One solution would be to limit upland snaring for canids to 1 mile from urban areas or .25 miles from the nearest residence. If this is not possible then only live-sets could be used, with a 14 in. loop size approximately 2 in. off the ground which would snare these animals by the legs. Dogs could then easily be released if they were snared.

No deer were caught incidental to canids because the snares were set off the trails and used bait to attract the dogs and coyotes.

## **FUTURE ASSESSMENTS**

Snaring will continue to be examined at Lac du Flambeau as long as the Fish and Game Program continues with their beaver control program. In this way the use of snares for beaver control at other times of the year will be evaluated.

It is anticipated that the use of snares as land sets and targeting other species will continue to be explored on Bad River and, possibly, other reservations. It is desirable to obtain more information on snare selectivity on land so that adequate regulations may be formulated to reduce the chances of snaring non-target species.

The use of snares as trapping tools has high potential in Wisconsin. Many people continue to have concerns about snaring but these assessments indicate that with proper regulations snaring can become a simple, safe and effective trapping technique.



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