

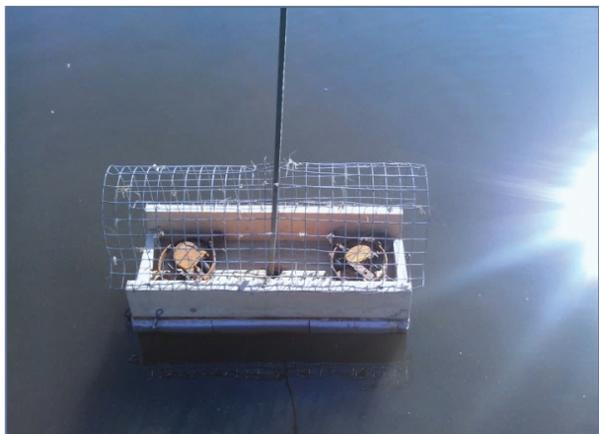
Finally, trappers should not use baits and lures that attract water birds, such as corn and wheat. Scent lures and baits that attract muskrats are more effective at assisting in the capture of muskrats and avoiding water birds.

## TECHNIQUES FOR HUMANE CAPTURE OF MUSKRATS

Smaller-diameter mesh size on float coverings not only minimizes water bird capture, it can also prevent a muskrat from bypassing your traps and going over the sides of the float set, or becoming stuck in the side mesh openings after capture. A heavy trap is preferred to ensure the trap will hold the muskrat under the water after capture and result in a humane dispatch.

If the trap is too light, the muskrat can climb back onto the float, delaying dispatch. If multiple traps are used on a float, a barrier between the traps, and shorter chains holding the traps onto the float, will eliminate a “double catch,” which is when a muskrat is captured in multiple traps.

Finally, make sure to place float sets in deep enough water to ensure the submersion set will work.



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*Fine mesh over the top of the platform will prevent birds from landing on the traps, and the mesh also creates a confined space which might make the platform an undesirable space onto which swimming birds might climb.*

## IF YOU CATCH A NONTARGET WATER BIRD

It is important that North Dakota trappers make every effort to reduce potential capture of nontarget birds, but it can still happen. If it does and the bird is still alive, release it.

If the water bird is dead, leave it in the trap and contact a local game warden within 24 hours. The warden will provide specific instructions on what to do.



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## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:



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# MUSKRAT TRAPPING IN NORTH DAKOTA

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## AVOIDING NONTARGET WATER BIRDS USING MUSKRAT FLOAT SETS

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Muskrats are a commonly trapped furbearer in North Dakota. They are found in many wetlands scattered across the state, are fairly easy to capture, and have a desirable soft pelt.

Since muskrats and water birds use the same habitat, there is potential for muskrat trappers in North Dakota to encounter water birds, primarily in spring and early fall when wetlands are ice-free. This brochure provides information on methods for reducing the likelihood of catching nontarget water birds, with little compromise on muskrat trapping success.

gripping traps placed on the top of the platform. Use of float sets has increased in recent years because they are easy to use and efficient for capturing muskrats.

The float set research took place in portions of eastern North Dakota since this is an area with high muskrat trapping pressure, as well as high waterfowl presence during spring and fall migrations. The results showed that water birds are occasionally captured or injured when they are attracted to float sets to loaf or perch, prompting development of techniques to minimize or avoid these situations.

platform. Smaller diameter mesh sizes will deter water birds from going through the mesh openings, which will prevent incidental contact with the traps.

Additionally, floats that sit higher out of the water and are tippy or unstable in the water also deter water birds from using the float as a resting site. Floats should also look unnatural. Trappers should avoid using log floats or cover floats with cattails or other wetland vegetation.



*For 3 years, researchers analyzed muskrat float sets, their likelihood of capturing nontarget birds, and options for minimizing nontarget captures without sacrificing effectiveness for catching muskrats.*

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*A typical float set – a wooden platform resting on a foam bottom, with traps positioned at both ends to capture muskrats as they climb onto the platform to rest.*

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*A wire covering over the platform can provide a perch for wading birds like herons, but keeps them well away from the traps.*

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## FLOAT SET RESEARCH

During the 2012-14 spring and fall muskrat trapping seasons, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and University of North Dakota conducted research to determine frequency of incidental nontarget water bird captures using float sets.

Float sets are popular open-water trapping equipment used during spring and fall trapping seasons. They typically consist of a flat wooden platform that floats just above the water's surface, with either foothold or body

## TECHNIQUES FOR AVOIDING WATER BIRDS

Surveys conducted by the North Dakota Fur Hunters and Trappers Association suggest the most popular float design used by trappers in the state is a rectangular board with a foam bottom, with a foothold trap at each end of the float.

Trappers can do several things to modify these float sets to avoid capturing water birds. A covering of wire, wood, or plastic keeps water birds from landing on the float



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