

## **Manitoba Conservation Public Review of the Furbearer Management Policy**

Manitoba has a long history of trapping and furbearer management, dating back to when First Nations people occupied the landscape after the glaciers receded. The pelts of many animals, from bison to deer to wolves, have always been used for clothing, shelter, ceremonies and trade.

Only in the last 300 years have animal pelts been most valuable for their trade or commercial use. The demand for beaver pelts led to the formation of the Hudson Bay Company in 1670, and the establishment of trade posts throughout Canada and numerous communities which exist to this day.

By the 1940s, trapping was out of control in northern Manitoba and furbearing animal numbers, especially beaver, had been badly depleted. Part of the reason was the large influx of new people into the north with the building of the rail line to Churchill. More tragically, local people (mostly First Nations) who had been trapping on the land for generations saw their traditional livelihoods threatened.

At the request of communities, Manitoba and Canada created the registered trapline (RTL) system to allow local people to continue trapping on their traditional lands and at the same time make them stewards of their traplines. From the original RTLs created around the communities of Thicket Portage and Pikwitonei, the system has grown to a total of 46 community-based “sections” each with a varying number of individual lines.

Priority was given to family members, helpers on the line, and other trappers from the community. Qualified trappers from outside the community also had the opportunity to get a line under certain circumstances.

### **How is trapping managed in Manitoba?**

Manitoba is divided into two different trapping areas: the Open Trapping Area and the Registered Trapping Area.

The Open Trapping Area covers much of the southern portion of the province where most of the land is privately owned. Licensed trappers can harvest furbearers on any lands to which they have the right of access, such as private land and most provincial wildlife management areas.

The Registered Trapping Area covers the majority of the province, and is comprised of predominantly boreal forest habitat on Crown lands. The registered trapline (RTL) system is a commercial furbearer harvest management system whereby a person, the “lineholder,” is granted (or “registered” as having) the exclusive opportunity to harvest furbearing animals in a certain line. The system ensures sustainable furbearer populations by controlling the number of trappers in that area and making the lineholder the steward of the resource. Some RTL sections are called “blocks,” where no individual lines exist and all eligible community members may trap within the block.

The Special Trapping Areas around The Pas are within the Open Trapping Area, but are managed similar to the Registered Trapping Area.

### **Why is trapping even more important today?**

When an RTL section was created by the community/First Nations trappers themselves, it usually also represented the traditional lands used by the families within a community and defined those boundaries legally for the first time. These boundaries now form the basis for many major land-use projects around those communities (such as the Northern Flood Agreement management areas, the Poplar-Nanowin Rivers Park Reserve, and Wabanong Nakaygum Okimawin communities). RTL trappers themselves are often the best sources of natural history information (traditional knowledge), as they are on the land more often than are most other people. It comes at a time when this information is constantly needed to monitor not just furbearing animals, but other wildlife and the health of habitats.

Within the Open Area, trapping is also a commercial pastime, but also an important tool for problem wildlife management. Beavers and coyote damages, for example, cost property owners and livestock producers millions of dollars in losses annually. Trappers help to reduce the damage to property.

### **Manitoba Furbearer Management Policy**

The rising price for pelts and the demands to get a trapline by the early 1980s drove the development of the first formal furbearer policy for Manitoba. While addressing all activities related to trapping in the province, perhaps the most important component was a standard scoring system for registered trapline applicants. This system ensured that the criteria for getting a line were the same throughout Manitoba. At the same time, the most qualified people could be chosen as lineholders. The order of priority continued to be 1) family members, 2) helpers on the line, c) trappers from the community, then d) trappers from adjacent communities.

The demands for lines remained after prices dropped by the early 1990s. One demand focused on compensation programs offered through the Northern Flood Agreement. Another demand was the opportunity to have a trapping cabin in remote areas where recreational structures were not allowed. Traplines were also components of the traditional territories of many First Nations and a loss to a non-community member meant a loss of the land. A revised Furbearer Management Policy introduced in 2002 tried to address some of these issues. Again, the order of priority remained as before but qualified trappers from elsewhere could also apply.

Recent legal issues in both trapping and other resource related situations further demonstrated that trapping and traplines needed to be managed differently than before. These issues included the Northern Flood Agreement, potential land use planning agreements, and several Provincial and Supreme Court of Canada decisions.

## **What Are The Issues and How Are They Addressed?**

The responsibility to ensure sustainable populations of wildlife, including furbearer species, lies with the government of Manitoba. Manitoba provides trapping opportunities by issuing all trapping licenses and permits. Manitoba is also tasked with ensuring that the resource is allocated to Manitobans on a priority basis.

### **Issue: Local Stewardship**

The RTL System was developed so that local people had access to the fur in their traditional areas, in the face of high grading trapping by people coming from the south on the Hudson Bay Railway on its route to Churchill. The change in local communities in the 21st century means fewer people in those communities to take over the trapline. Many individuals from outside the communities are eager to begin trapping in the area. In some RTL Sections the majority of helpers are already from outside the identified community; the current helpers are potential holders of the lines on which they trap.

Response: Proposed policy changes retain higher points / preferential scoring to local residents in trapline competitions.

### **Issue: Trapline Allocations**

The awarding of traplines in Manitoba is done through a competition, similar to applying for a job, and traplines cannot be sold or “handed down”. Typically, the most qualified person is the one awarded a trapline. Manitoba is one of the few provinces that have the same process throughout the entire registered trapline system. Other provinces allow local communities, resource boards, trapper organizations, or the outgoing lineholders themselves to decide on new lineholders, although the actual trapping of furbearers is authorized by a provincial license.

Response: Proposed policy changes acknowledge that local communities may take a larger role under formal agreements in deciding who gets a trapline in their area. These agreements can be existing or developed between Manitoba and First Nations, resource management boards, and/or management authorities.

### **Issue: Lineholder Cabins**

Trapline holders are allowed to build cabins in areas where no other structures can be erected, such as wilderness or backcountry land use categories of provincial parks. Incoming lineholders are not obligated to buy old trapline cabins. Often, cabins end up having significant value following several decades of use and the owners believe that they should be able to either retain the cabin or sell these assets when they retire.

Response: The proposed changes maintain that cabins remain the property of the outgoing lineholder, and incoming lineholders are not obligated to buy them. Under Supreme Court of Canada (*Sundown*) decision, a communal cabin may be maintained as a reasonable extension to the Treaty right to hunt for food.

## **Issue: Traditional Lands**

Numerous First Nations communities are developing land use plans for their traditional areas. These traditional areas are often delineated by the boundaries for the registered trapline section. The trapline is integral with other community and family activities that focused on the trapline and cabins, such as hunting and gathering. Loss of a trapline to a non-community member is a loss of another part of the traditional lands of a community or family.

Action: Proposed policy changes continue to acknowledge that activities on the trapline were family-centred and involved more than trapping. The changes include additional criteria on what constitutes a family line and how such a line can be maintained. As well, traditional areas land management planning may include formal agreements as to how traplines themselves may be managed in the traditional area.

## **Your Views Are Important**

Concerned people have an opportunity to talk to staff about these proposed changes at any one of the scheduled events below. Staff will also be pleased to meet with community leaders and organizations (see contact information below).

Drop-ins will be at the following locations from 1:00-4:00 p.m. and 7:00-9:30 p.m:

Powerview	Chicken Chef	June 9, 2010
The Pas	Kikiwak Inn	June 21, 2010
Roblin	Veteran's Hall	June 23, 2010
Mafeking	Mafeking Community Hall	June 24, 2010
Thompson	Thompson Wildlife Association Hall	June 29, 2010

Contact information is below, should you wish to:

- Get additional copies of review documents,
- Provide any comments or feedback

If your organization wishes to make a formal presentation at any of these events or a separate meeting, please contact Wildlife & Ecosystem Protection Branch (Winnipeg) at 945-7469/7751 or the Regional Wildlife Manager of Manitoba Conservation in Swan River, Thompson, The Pas, and Lac du Bonnet (see below or the Manitoba Government pages in the telephone directory).

Manitoba Conservation Offices  
[www.manitoba.ca/conservation/wildlife](http://www.manitoba.ca/conservation/wildlife)

or

Manitoba Conservation Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch  
Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent,  
Winnipeg MB R3J 3W3  
204-945-7469/7751 204-945-3077 (fax) Toll free at 1-800-214-6497