

where beaver have trails exiting the water. The main advantage to using a foothold in shared habitats is the ability to make sets away from the travel way and using lure to attract beaver to a set. Targeting your foothold traps to restrain the beaver by the hind leg will place the trap in deeper water and far enough away from the bank to avoid otter. This is done by placing the trap 16 to 20 inches from the bank, in 10 to 16 inches of water, and slightly off to the right or left of center.

Of all of the tools available to Wisconsin trappers, the snare, when properly set for beaver, is the least likely to capture an otter. For regularly snaring beaver, a loop diameter of 9 to 12 inches is used. With this size loop, most otter will pass through the snare without being captured.

## ALTERNATE BEAVER SETS

Blind sets in beaver travel ways are the least effective set for avoiding otters. Shallow set foothold traps and body gripping traps set in travel ways where otter are present have a high potential for capturing otter. Moving these sets out of the main travel way will help avoid incidental otter catches.

A beaver is highly susceptible to lure and visual attractors, whereas otter are rarely attracted to beaver sign or odors. Making a castor mound set near a travel way allows you to capture beaver while avoiding otter. Baited sets for beaver that use peeled sticks and beaver food lures hold almost no attraction for otter.

## IF YOU CATCH AN OTTER

Many Wisconsin trappers are successful in drawing the necessary permits to trap otter each year. While all Wisconsin trappers should make an effort to avoid incidental otter catches, it is still possible for an otter capture to occur. If an otter is caught incidentally and is still alive, release it

without causing injury to yourself or the otter. Seek assistance if this is not possible.

If the otter is dead, leave it in the trap and contact your local conservation warden. The warden will give you specific instructions on what you should do. While an incidental otter catch is not a violation of law, your conduct following that capture can be. It is important that incidental otter catches are turned into the Department of Natural Resources.

Incidental catches are used in our education program and provide valuable training opportunities to many people. Carcasses provide reproductive, age and health data that are important to our management program, and the pelts are a very effective educational tool used by the Department of Natural Resources and Wisconsin Trappers Association. Otters are a valued, renewable natural resource that requires responsible management. You are a part of that responsible management and your actions today significantly impact the future.

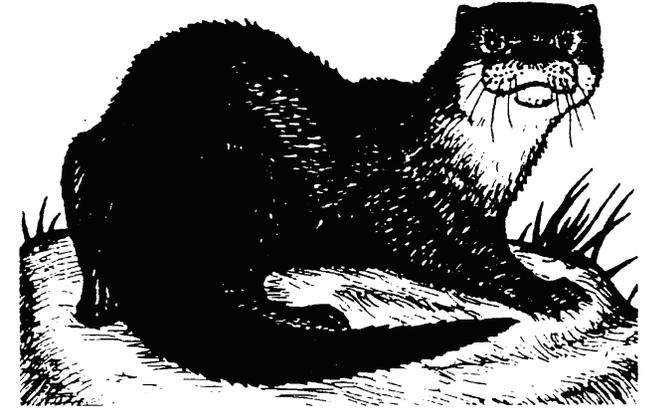
Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program  
Dept. of Natural Resources  
PO Box 7921  
Madison, WI 53707-7921  
(608) 261-6452

<http://dnr.wi.gov>



Visit the Wisconsin Trappers Association Website  
at  
[www.wistrap.org](http://www.wistrap.org)

# River Otter Avoidance Techniques



River otter are common in Wisconsin. Annual research shows that otter are reproducing well and range across the entire state. Wisconsin's habitat and furbearer management programs enhance the environment and provide opportunities for this renewable natural resource.

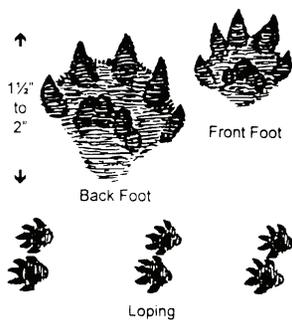
Since otter and beaver utilize the same habitat, there is potential for Wisconsin trappers to encounter otter more frequently than ever before.

This brochure has been produced through the cooperative efforts of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Wisconsin Trappers Association to aid trappers on selecting the best techniques for avoiding incidental otter catches, with minimal impact on their beaver trapping success. Continuing education will help trappers become more effective in these efforts and improve the Department of Natural Resource's ability to manage both beaver and otter populations in Wisconsin.

## OTTER SIGN

The first step to avoid trapping an otter is to learn to recognize when otter are present on your trap line. Otter tracks resemble those of a mink, but they are much larger, measuring usually 2 to 3 inches in width. Otters lope as they travel, so the individual tracks will be side by side in pairs. The distance between pairs may measure 18 to 30 inches, depending on the size of the otter and the speed at which the animal was traveling. Otter latrine sites or “sprints” are also very distinctive. They are typically found on high points along the banks of streams, rivers, lakes or ditches. The vegetation is usually flattened, and the area may contain flat, runny piles of otter vomit, typically greenish in color and usually containing undigested fish scales, bones, or crayfish parts. Otter scat or droppings are distinct clumps of mostly digested material and are black in color. The scat may have a flattened appearance due to otter walking on them. Both vomit piles and scat deteriorate quickly with age.

Otters also make “wallows” or “scratch ups”. These are found along streams, ditches or river edges and consist of an area 3 to 6 feet in diameter where the grass or vegetation has been raked or “scratched” to the center of the circle. Otter use these as identity markers and males will use them to define territory. Often, scat or vomit can be found near by. In winter, look for flattened trails in the snow, known as “slips”, where an otter has slid on its stomach down a bank or between lopes.



## LOCATIONS

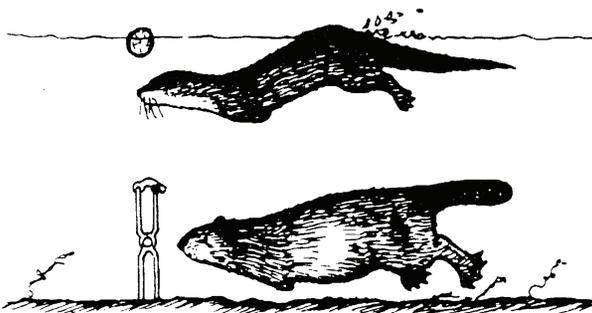
Otters can be found almost anywhere an aquatic food source exists. They usually follow streams and other small watercourses, but they will also travel across dry land.

Otters often travel between watersheds while looking for food. Any small ditch, creek, or stream that connects to another body of water is likely to be an otter travel way. This is especially true of a small drainage that leads to or from a marsh, swamp, or pond where otters prefer to hunt.

The entrance and exits to beaver ponds, and beaver dam crossovers are also common otter travel ways. While these places may be good for catching beaver, they also have a high potential for otter capture. Crossovers at culverts and manmade devices are also typically used by beaver and otters.

Another situation to avoid is an abandoned beaver lodge or bank den. Otters will check these regularly and often use them for temporary shelter. Abandoned dens and lodges are not particularly good beaver trapping locations and should be avoided anyway.

## TRAPS

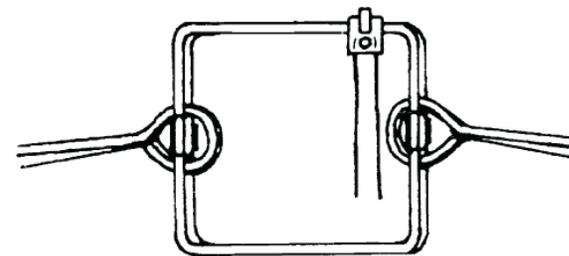


*Setting body-grip traps deep under water may allow an otter to go over the top of the trap, while most beaver will dive to the bottom and be caught.*

The 330 body-grip traps commonly used for beaver trapping have the highest potential for capturing an otter. You can reduce the otter capturing potential of a 330 body-grip trap by placing the trap deep underwater. This kind of set remains effective for beaver while minimizing your chances of catching an otter.

Choose locations that are 2 to 3 feet deep or deeper. Stake your trap on the bottom and float a dive pole over it. Generally, when beaver encounter the pole, they will dive to the bottom to avoid the structure. A properly placed trap will catch a beaver, while an approaching otter will just duck under the pole and pass over the trap.

Another way to reduce the potential of an otter capture in a 330 body-grip trap is to move the trigger wires to one side. Keep the wires pointing straight down, and move them to the left or right side of the trap jaws. This allows an otter to pass through, while still effectively catching any beaver moving through the trap.



*Moving the trigger completely to one side of a body-grip trap can leave room for an otter to get through.*

Field studies and research have shown these configurations effectively reduce the potential for capturing otter when using the 330 body-grip traps, while remaining effective for beaver.

Foothold traps are less susceptible to catching otters, provided they are set in deep water. Foothold sets in shallow water have a high potential for capturing otters, especially those set at water's edge