

Furbearers

Licenses and General Information: **1-888-248-6866**

General Information

- License Requirements and Fees (see pages 12–19).
- Legal Sporting Arms (see page 30).
- Hunting on Military Reservations (see page 46).
- It is Legal to Harvest a Marked Animal (see page 9).

It is illegal to set a trap or snare on public land

Exceptions:

- Cage traps may be used to abate damage caused by any animal to property, crops or livestock.
- Enrolled members of a federally recognized Indian nation, tribe or pueblo may use traps or snares solely for religious or ceremonial purposes.



Seasons and General Regulations

Seasons (statewide)

Badger, bobcat, fox, ringtail and weasel	November 1, 2026–March 15, 2027
Beaver and muskrat	April 1–April 30, 2026; November 1, 2026–March 31, 2027
Nutria	April 1, 2026–March 31, 2027
Raccoon - all legal methods	April 1–May 15, 2026; September 1, 2026–March 31, 2027
Raccoon - restricted methods	May 16–August 31, 2027

(Restricted methods include cage traps, foot-encapsulating traps and hunting).

Public Land

State-owned land, state-leased land, lands held in trust by the state, lands administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the United States Department of Defense, state parks and any county or municipality.

Species with No Open Season

There is no open season to hunt or trap mink, river otter, black-footed ferret, marten, Mexican wolf, lynx or coatimundi.

Nutria: Nutria is a nonnative, invasive species that has caused extensive damage to wetland and riparian habitat in the United States. Their distribution is restricted in New Mexico to the Rio Hondo in Chaves and Lincoln counties. The trapping season for nutria is open year-round to prevent population increase and expansion.

Beaver: Hunting or killing any beaver on public land within the Cibola, Lincoln or Gila National Forests is prohibited.

Nongame: There is no closed season or bag limit for nongame species such as coyotes and skunks; however, hunters and trappers must still abide by NMDOW rules regarding trapping and hunting.

State Wildlife Commission Lands

Prairie Chicken WMAs and Water Canyon WMA are open to hunting furbearers, coyotes and skunks November 1 to March 15 by hunters holding a valid trapper license and HMAV. All other WMAs are open to hunting furbearers and nongame by hunters holding a valid trapper license, HMAV, and written permission from NMDOW.

Legal Shooting Hours

Restricted to the period one-half hour before sunrise to one half-hour after sunset, except licensed furbearer hunters who are authorized to hunt for and take raccoons by use of artificial light while hunting at night with a rim-fire rifle or handgun no greater than .22 caliber, shotgun, bow or crossbow. The artificial light used for raccoon hunting must be a headlamp or hand-held flashlight. It is unlawful for any artificial light to be cast from a vehicle while raccoon hunting. Licensed trappers may check and remove furbearers or nongame from their traps at any time of day.

Legal Methods of Taking Furbearers

Legal methods of taking furbearers include any sporting arm (see page 30), falconry, traps and snares. Dogs are allowed for hunting all furbearers during open season. Electronic calls are allowed to aid in taking furbearers. Poison may not be used for the take of any furbearer. Raccoons may be hunted or trapped during the extended season with a current trapper license. Only cage traps and foot encapsulating traps are allowed for raccoon trapping during this period.

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Left: Foothold trap jaw spread. Right: Recessed cubby. NMDOW photo.

Artificial Light

It is illegal to use a spotlight or any other artificial light to hunt any furbearer (except raccoons, see Legal Shooting Hours above) or nongame species including coyotes and rabbits, even if you are on private land and have landowner permission, unless you have an artificial light permit.

Bag Limits

For furbearer species with an open season, there currently is no bag limit; however, NMDOW may set a bag limit for any furbearer species to address significant changes in statewide populations or to address critical NMDOW management needs.

Catchpoles

A release device or catchpole must be carried by trappers, and all captured animals must be removed or released from any trap or snare at the time of check. In cases where assistance is required for safe release of the animal, or when biological data is sought by NMDOW, the Department must be notified as soon as possible.

Tampering with Traps

It is illegal to destroy, damage, disturb, steal or remove any trap, snare, or trapped wildlife without permission of the owner of the trap or snare. However, domestic animals caught in traps may be released at any time. New Mexico Law (Chapter 17-2-7.1, NMSA 1978) prohibits interference with another person who is lawfully hunting, trapping or fishing. To report illegal traps or other poaching activity call Operation Game Thief: **1-800-432-4263** as soon as possible. Removing or destroying traps (or other evidence) prevents officers from prosecuting poachers and is illegal.

Fur Dealers

A fur dealer license is required for any person, firm or corporation engaged in the business of buying or selling unprocessed skins or pelts of any furbearing animal in New Mexico. Trappers or hunters selling pelts they harvested, and residents who purchase or sell less than 50 unprocessed pelts per year are exempt. Fur dealer licenses may be purchased only at the NMDOW Santa Fe Office. To purchase a fur dealer license and for additional rules and restrictions please call the Field Operations Division at

505-476-8064.

2026-2027

Swift Fox vs. Kit Fox: Call for Samples

The NMDOW Furbearer Program is interested in working with trappers to collect samples from kit and swift fox in Eastern New Mexico to monitor these species across the state. Trappers and hunters can assist NMDOW by collecting tissue samples (a piece of the foot-pad about the size of a pencil eraser) from any kit or swift fox harvested. Samples can be stored in small paper envelopes at room temperature or in Ziploc bags in the freezer. Trappers who participate are requested to provide detailed location information for each sample, including the GPS coordinates (if possible), the county, township and range. Please call or email Nick Forman **505-257-8701**; Nicholas.Forman@dgf.nm.gov to arrange for collection of your samples.

Trap Restrictions

Restrictions applying to all traps that could reasonably be expected to catch a furbearer: This includes traps set for nongame species such as coyotes and skunks.

Marking Traps and Snares

Each trap or snare must be either permanently marked, or have a tag securely attached, with an NMDOW-issued user identification number or the name and address of the trapper using the trap or snare. Trappers may use either their Trapper ID number, if issued, or their Customer Identification Number (CIN) as a trapper ID.

Check Requirements

All land sets must be visually checked every calendar day. Water sets must be checked at least once every other calendar day. A licensed trapper may designate an agent to check their set traps and snares on alternating check days, but the licensed trapper must personally check the traps every other check day. For example, for land sets operating Monday through Friday, the trapper checks Monday, Wednesday and Friday and his or her agent checks Tuesday and Thursday. Any person may be designated as an agent for any licensed trapper, but the agent must possess written permission from the trapper and a valid trapper license. The permission must include the licensed trapper's full name and contact information, and the agent must know the location of traps.

Minimum setback distances

No land set may be made within:

- 75 feet of a public road or trail
- 150 feet of a livestock or wildlife catchment, pond or tank containing water
- 1/2 mile of established and maintained public campgrounds or boat-launching areas, occupied dwellings without written permission of the occupant of the dwelling, signed and designated roadside rest areas, public picnic areas, and officially designated, mapped, maintained and marked trailheads.

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Size Restrictions - Water Sets

No foothold trap with an inside jaw spread larger than 7 1/2 inches or body-grip trap with a jaw spread greater than 12 inches shall be used in making a water set. Body-grip traps used in water sets with a jaw spread of eight inches or more must be submerged in water to their jaw pivot or deeper.

Size Restrictions - Land Sets

No foothold trap with an outside jaw spread larger than 6 1/2 inches, or 7 inches maximum if laminated above the jaw surfaces, or tooth-jawed trap may be used in making a land set. No body-grip trap with an inside jaw spread greater than 7 inches may be set on land. Body-grip traps with inside jaw spreads of between 6 and 7 inches set on land must be recessed in a cubby at least 8 inches from the entrance.

Offsets

All foothold traps with an inside jaw spread equal to or greater than 5 1/2 inches used in making a land set shall be off-set a minimum of 3/16 of an inch between the contact surfaces of the closed jaws, unless they have been constructed or modified so that a portion of the jaw is padded with a soft material such as rubber or canvas.

Bait

It is unlawful to place, set or maintain any land set within 30 feet of any bait over two ounces in weight which is visible to airborne raptors. Bones that are entirely free of flesh are legal.

Swivels

Each foothold trap set on land must have at least two separate swivel points in the anchor chain. At least one of these swivel points must be within six inches of the trap.

Anchoring

All traps or snares set on land must use stakes, chains, drags or other anchoring that will prevent any furbearer, coyote or wolf caught from escaping with the trap.

Breakaways

Any snare set on land must have a lock or break-away device which is designed to release or fail when a maximum of 350 pounds of pressure is applied to it. Locks or break-away devices must be attached in a way which leaves no part of the snare attached to an animal when it releases or fails. All snares must be securely anchored and cannot be attached to a drag. Exception: foot snares.

Bobcat Pelt Tags

Licenses and General Information: wildlife.dgf.nm.gov

In 1978, NMDOW implemented mandatory bobcat pelt tagging in response to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (ICUN) prohibition on export of any bobcat pelt out of the United States without a permit from the U.S. Department of Interior. Bobcat pelts appear similar to several species of spotted cats which are considered endangered in other countries. Bobcats are not threatened or endangered in New Mexico or the U.S.; they are abundant in the state and can be found in every habitat type.

These regulations are defined by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), an international agreement between governments to ensure that international trade in plants and wildlife does not threaten their survival. CITES specifies that every bobcat harvested in New Mexico must have a pelt tag. The NMDOW pelt tagging requirement also allows for biological data collection to monitor total harvest, harvest distribution throughout the state and bobcat population demographics.

All Bobcats Harvested in New Mexico Must Be Pelt Tagged

Every person who takes a bobcat in New Mexico must present the pelt for tagging in New Mexico prior to transporting the pelt out of the state, prior to selling the pelt, or no later than April 14, annually, whichever occurs first.

Pelts can be tagged at any NMDOW office or participating fur dealer. Hunters and trappers, except residents 11 years of age or younger, must present a current New Mexico trapping license at the time of tagging. There is no charge for pelt tagging at any location. A list of participating fur dealers is available by contacting the NMDOW Furbearer Program: **505-257-8701**.

Bobcats taken outside of New Mexico must be tagged in the state where taken and will not be tagged in New Mexico.

Be sure your pelt is properly tagged before attempting to sell it. Fur dealers may not purchase a pelt that has not been tagged.



*Furbearer auction.
NMDOW photo*

Beware of Rabies

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In recent years, rabies has been detected in some furbearers in New Mexico. All mammals are capable of contracting rabies. Wild animals infected more often include skunks, foxes, coyotes, raccoons, bobcats and bats. Trappers should be aware of the potential risk of contracting rabies when harvesting an animal.

Rabies is caused by a virus that can be transmitted to humans through contact with the saliva, nervous tissue and/or brain tissue of a rabid animal. Rabies is transmitted only if the virus is introduced through a bite, contact with an open cut in the skin, or more rarely when infectious material such as saliva from a rabid animal gets into the eyes, nose or mouth. Some recommended precautions for trappers include:

- Wear protective gloves when handling and skinning animals. Open wounds or scratches increase the risk of infection when protective gloves are not used.
- Always err on the side of caution. Use goggles and a skinning apron if possible.
- Clean tools with a disinfectant such as a 10% bleach solution.
- Wash thoroughly with soap and water, iodine solution or alcohol solution after handling and skinning animals.
- If bitten or otherwise possibly exposed to a rabid animal, thoroughly wash the area with soap and water and seek medical care as soon as reasonably possible.
- If attacked or bitten by a potentially rabies-carrying species, the animal may be required by law to be tested for rabies, depending on the species and the ability to retrieve it. Report the incident as soon as reasonably possible to your local NMDOW conservation officer for assistance with safely collecting the animal.
- There is no risk of contracting rabies through dried skins, as drying renders the virus inactive.

Gray fox (right). NMDOW photo.



Bobcat or Lynx

Licenses and General Information: wildlife.dgf.nm.gov

Know the Difference between a Bobcat and a Lynx

Bobcats are common in almost all habitats in New Mexico. Bobcats are closely related to the Canada lynx that inhabits the boreal forests of Canada and parts of the northern United States. Parts of northern New Mexico are classified as lynx range, and though there are no established populations here, transients may occasionally be observed.

A few key identification characteristics can help distinguish between a lynx and a bobcat:

Range: The only potential habitat for lynx is high elevation forests in the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo Mountains. If you are not in this area, then you will not see a lynx.

Body characteristics: Lynx have much longer legs in comparison to their body size, almost like a bobcat on stilts. They have larger feet for running on top of snow, and the tufts on their ears are much longer – often two inches or greater.

Pelage (coat) patterns: The easiest way to distinguish a lynx from a bobcat, other than by its range, is the tail. Depicted in the pictures below, the tip of a bobcat's tail is black on top, and white on the bottom. In contrast, the tip of a lynx's tail is completely black. Another common difference, although there are exceptions, is lynx rarely have black spots or bars on the undersides and insides of their limbs.

There is no open season for Canada lynx in New Mexico. Any lynx caught while trapping in New Mexico must be released alive, and the incident must be reported to NMDOW within 24 hours. If you are not certain whether you have caught a bobcat or a lynx, please contact your local conservation officer or the NMDOW Furbearer Program: **505-257-8701**.



Left: Bobcat. NMDOW trail camera.

Right: Lynx. U.S. Forest Service photo.

Best Management Practices

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Best Management Practices (BMP)

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) represents North America's agencies responsible for managing fish and wildlife resources to help advance sound, science-based management and conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats in the public interest. AFWA worked with state wildlife management agencies, trapping organizations, veterinarians and university researchers to develop BMPs for regulated trapping in the United States. This effort was motivated by a desire to improve the welfare of wildlife captured by traps, enhance the awareness and understanding of modern regulated trapping and sustain regulated trapping as a wildlife management technique. Common traps were extensively field-tested and evaluated based on five criteria: animal welfare, trap efficiency, trap selectivity, trapper & public safety and practical application. Data collection, including safety evaluations and was undertaken following widely accepted international standards for testing traps from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The resulting BMPs describe different types of traps, how they work, how traps should be set and what training may be needed for people who use BMP traps.

The BMP program has demonstrated with science-based information that many models of traps, including footholds, can be used in a humane, selective and efficient way. The set of recommendations, one for each of the harvested furbearer species in the United States, include practices, equipment and techniques that will continue to ensure the welfare of trapped animals, avoid unintended captures of other animals, improve public confidence in trappers and wildlife managers and maintain public support for trapping and wildlife managers.

NMDOW develops regulations on trap types, size and modifications using the BMP recommendations. The majority of trappers use BMP recommendations when selecting traps, tuning and modifying their traps, and setting them in the field. You are strongly encouraged to read the BMPs for the species you trap, and use traps found in this resource. Modifications like off-set jaws, laminations, shock-springs and swivels improve a trapper's productivity, ensure welfare of trapped animals and improve public confidence in trappers and wildlife managers.

You can find BMPs online at:



www.fishwildlife.org/afwa-inspires/furbearer-management.

These recommendations have helped improve the humaneness and efficiency of traps and increase success when trapping.