

Humane Trap Research

Renewable resource industries such as agriculture and trapping have always been important in maintaining Canada's economic stability. Animal welfare organizations have played a vital role in improving renewable resource harvesting methods generally, and trapping methods in particular, through their continuing concern about how we treat and care for the animals we harvest. Canadian governments and animal welfare organizations have been working together with scientists and industry in an ongoing process to ensure that the most humane methods of handling animals are used. Today, the Canadian government can assert that in harvesting Canadian renewable resources, this is certainly the case.

One of the first animal welfare organizations to focus on the methods used for trapping wildlife was the National Anti-Steel Trap League, founded in the United States in the mid-1920s. In Canada, the first organization to express similar concerns was the Canadian Association for the Protection of Fur, later known as the Association for the Protection of Fur Bearing Animals (APFA). The goals of this organization included the elimination of the steel-toothed leghold trap and of the market for fur products made from animals caught by this device.

When this organization split into two separate bodies, the newer Vancouver office kept the policy and name of the APFA and the original, Toronto-based office became the Canadian Association for Humane Trapping (CAHT). CAHT launched a campaign aimed at eliminating only the use of the leghold trap and pushing for more humane methods of trapping. This group continues to strive for more humane traps:

CAHT, probably more than any other single organization, has been responsible for the present worldwide concern over inhumane trapping methods. This has been achieved by the methodical implementation of a carefully thought-out plan designed to achieve what it hopes will be realistic and long-lasting solutions to the complex problems surrounding the trapping issue.⁽¹⁴⁾

Even before this campaign commenced, a trapper named Frank Conibear developed in 1929 a trap consisting of two metal frames and a spring. When the trap was set off, it was thought that the frames would clamp together delivering a blow to an animal that would kill it instantly. Because the springs were too weak, however, the trap did not live up to expectations, and the project was shelved. Eighteen years later Frank Conibear approached the APFA with a proposal to improve the earlier trap if the Association would provide him with the necessary funding. In cooperation with the British Columbia Trappers Association, the APFA and Frank Conibear developed a quick-kill trap. This trap, known as the Conibear, was put into mass production in 1958.

In 1956 the federal government became involved in trap research for the first time. Through the Canadian Wildlife Service and the National Research Council, it developed and listed a number of killing prototypes. Efforts concentrated mainly on the engineering aspects of trap design but the traps developed did not prove viable.

The Humane Trap Development Committee (HTDC) of the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS) was established in 1968 to study the development of more humane traps. This research has been touted as the "most scientific and intensive search for more humane trapping devices in the 300-year history of trapping..."⁽¹⁵⁾ Although the Committee operated until 1973, it did not produce any traps considered as suitable alternatives to the leghold trap. It was recently reactivated when the CFHS, at its annual meeting in 1985, passed a resolution which included a grace period of two years for all concerned to "make significant progress towards the establishment of compulsory trapper education and improve trapping regulations at least to the levels which have been adopted in Ontario"⁽¹⁶⁾ as well as to progress towards the development of a humane trap. This resolution does not