

APR 1990  
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### Maintaining a balance

In a world where people have profoundly affected the environment, wildlife must also be managed in order to protect endangered species.

In Western Canada, the draining of wetlands for agriculture has reduced summer nesting grounds for migrating ducks and geese. Without controls on fox and coyote, heavy predation on eggs and young chicks would have a serious impact on the survival of threatened waterfowl.

Similarly, in the southern United States, the trapping of raccoons and foxes for the fur trade protects the eggs of endangered sea turtles on coastal beaches.

In the coastal wetlands of Louisiana, muskrat and nutria (coypu) can completely strip vegetation, resulting in large areas of marsh being permanently lost to the open water. These wetlands support some of the densest fish, bird, and wildlife populations in the world – including an important part of Canada's migrating waterfowl. The marshes are already being eroded as a result of flood control on the Mississippi delta and dredging for off-shore oil exploration. In this fragile environment, trapping provides seasonal income for people who fish, shrimp or do other work the rest of the year, while protecting a unique habitat.

The message is clear. Having altered the environment in countless ways, we cannot ignore our responsibility to maintain a balance that permits the survival of a diversity of wildlife species.

### Protecting the land

We all 'care' about wildlife and the preservation of wilderness areas. But few of us are 'out there' to see what is happening.

Trappers serve as 'environmental antennae'. As people who still spend much of their time in direct contact with nature and animals, they can be our eyes and ears on the land – the first to spot pollution or poorly-planned industrial activity.

In British Columbia, trappers have led the fight against wasteful forestry practices. Clear-cutting large areas may maximise short-term timber revenues, but it is disastrous for wildlife.

With other conservationists, trappers argue that respecting the needs of wildlife may not cost more, even in purely economic terms, if the real value of hunting, trapping, tourism, environmental quality and genetic diversity are included in the balance-sheet.

In the Northwest Territories, native Dene and Inuit hunters and trappers succeeded in stopping a gas pipeline project until environmental assessments can determine the effect it would have on the wildlife upon which they depend.

In northern Quebec, Cree and Inuit communities insisted on increased involvement in environmental and wildlife management planning as part of their land settlement agreement, in a region where hydro-electric development is having a major impact.

In southern Canada, trappers, hunters and fishermen provide a political voice for wildlife, when wetlands are threatened by agriculture or urban development. The biologists can now argue: 'This land is already producing in its natural state – let's leave it alone'.

The point is not that development can or should be stopped. Rather, we can no longer consider 'development' and 'environment' as totally distinct concepts.

There can be no true long-term economic

Spring hunt beaver trap  
Photo: Fran Hurcomb

