

Fine furs from Canada have been prized ever since the first European settlers came to the northern half of North America. In fact, it was the search for furs that first led adventurous Europeans to explore and develop the enormous wilderness of the country that was to become Canada. Furs were among the first exports from Canada and were of tremendous importance in the early days.

Fur-bearing animals are found in almost all parts of Canada, from the east coast to the west and from the northernmost Arctic regions to the United States border.

Canada's cold, crisp climate and the rugged terrain of much of the country contribute to the production of furs of the finest quality. Canada's fur-bearing animals have sleek, glossy coats, with dense under-fur and strong supple skins. From such pelts are fashioned garments that are the ultimate in beauty and warmth. Federal and provincial governments carry out extensive conservation and scientific programs to preserve the quality and quantity of Canadian furs.

Importance of harvesting

Wildlife – particularly most fur species – cannot be “stockpiled”. Natural mortality begins reducing the populations as soon as reproduction occurs, maintaining a balance between the reproductive rate and the capacity of the habitat. Unless surplus animals are harvested each season, they are either lost or survive at the expense of “range-quality”.

Canada is blessed with vast areas of relatively undeveloped Crown land, much of it subject to multiple use, including forestry, fur-production, big-game hunting and recreation. The trapper or occasional hunter may be the only person to travel through these regions, and fur may be the only resource harvested in a given area during a particular year. Consequently, fur is a valid and important renewable resource, and the rules for its harvesting cannot be set by reference to conditions existing outside Canada.

Most provinces and territories in Canada have established some form of registered trap-line or fur-block system whereby specific trappers are licensed to harvest the annual fur-crop. A variety of management techniques is used to control and monitor the harvesting of each species as conditions dictate.

The species composition of the fur-harvest varies across Canada according to the habitats and climate