

House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water,  
Oceans, and Wildlife  
Hearing on Fish and Wildlife Related Legislation  
January 20, 2022

Questions from Rep. Cohen

***Question 1. The National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) was established to be a national network of protected lands and waters for the benefit of native wildlife and enjoyment by people. The NWRS currently attracts more than 61 million annual visitors, and trappers constitute only a very small percentage of those visitors. However, their activities put millions of other visitors at risk of stepping into a trap. How can the NWRS fulfill its mission to be a haven for wildlife lovers when the activities of a small minority jeopardize the safety of the majority?***

**Response:** Trapping is a management tool used to ensure healthy wildlife populations and refuges. A review of our records management system was completed, and no records were found regarding humans being caught in traps. To ensure the safety of the visiting public, a variety of methods are used, including signage, appropriate trap placement away from heavily visited areas, avoiding time of year and time of day, camouflage, trap covers with openings designed for target animals.

***Question 2. Over 40% of our nation's 568 wildlife refuges currently allow trapping, either for recreational purposes, management purposes, or both. It is well known that body-gripping traps are indiscriminate and will harm any animal or person that steps into one. Refuges which are enjoyed by Americans primarily are home to more than 380 endangered species. What measures has the agency taken to ensure that it is capturing the animals intended by body-gripping traps, which under the Refuge from Cruel Trapping Act would be invasive species or animals that are hazardous to threatened, endangered and sensitive species?***

**Response:** There are currently 226 refuges that have approved management plans allowing for the use of trapping for management purposes. In 2021, only 100 refuges utilized trapping for management purposes, which is less than 18 percent of the total number of National Wildlife Refuges in the System.

To prevent non-target animals from being captured, a variety of methods are used, including appropriate trap placement (e.g., areas away from non-targets, selecting most appropriate time of year and time of day), camouflage, dyes, trap covers with openings designed for target animals, frequent trap checks, and placing traps in tunnels with excluder devices.

***Question 3. It is my understanding that the FWS does not have a centralized system in place for tracking the trapping that occurs on refuges. Rather, that information is stored separately by each individual refuge. Does the FWS keep any centralized records on the types of trapping—management, recreational, commercial—that are occurring on refuges?***

**Response:** When public trapping is permitted on National Wildlife Refuges, the Service does so in accordance with state laws, state regulations, and state licensing requirements, with additional refuge-specific regulations as needed to ensure consistency with applicable federal statutes. To be consistent with state requirements and also meet refuge-specific objectives, decisions on

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trapping for commercial and recreational purposes, and associated information collection, is maintained at the individual refuge level.

- a. ***IF NOT: What would it take to start tracking that information and making it publicly available?***
- b. ***IF SO: How can the public access the information?***

**Response:** To make trapping data available to the public would require the development of national database and additional staffing capacity at the field, Regional, and Headquarters level to collect and enter data, quality control check, summarize and maintain the data. Additional personnel would also be needed to make the data available to the public on local refuge websites and our national FWS trapping website.

***Question 4. Does the FWS have an agency-wide policy in place for how trapping for management purposes is to be conducted? In other words, does the FWS have NWRS-wide policies in place for trap-check times, wheretraps can be set on the refuge and during what times of year, what the approved kill methods are for trapped animals, what actions need to be undertaken if a non-targeted animal is caught, etc.?***

**Response:** The Service decides whether to use trapping as a wildlife management tool in accordance with the conservation mission of the Refuge System and the purposes of the refuge. The Service conducts a robust analysis on a station-by-station basis to determine if trapping is the appropriate management tool. Trapping must meet the management objectives that have been determined in each refuge's comprehensive conservation plan. Both lethal and non-lethal alternatives are part of the analysis. The FWS Refuge Manual's Trapping Policy, 7 RM 15, applies to trapping for both management purposes and for recreational and commercial trapping and states that trapping programs will be conducted in the most professional manner possible, using the most humane, selective, and effective technique that is reasonably practical.

Requirements, such as trap check times, are intended to reduce animal suffering and non-target captures. General trapping conditions stipulate species and numbers to be taken, seasons and hours, areas where trapping is permitted or prohibited, methods of trapping, methods of dispatching animals found alive in traps, methods of carcass disposal, procedures for submission of reports of target and non-target species and animals suspected to be diseased, provisions governing use of refuge vegetation, provisions governing trap and equipment removal, and other provisions as required. Additional, more restrictive conditions may be required by the refuge manager to be consistent with guidelines of the State wildlife agency.

***Question 5. Steel jaw leghold traps have been banned by more than 85 countries and eight states, yet the United States allows their use and the use of body-gripping traps even on lands deemed a "refuge" for wildlife. Which species can the Fish and Wildlife Service point to that explain the need to use body-gripping traps because other more-humane or non-lethal traps are completely ineffective?***

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**Response:** Invasive nutria within the Chesapeake Bay have degraded thousands of acres of protective marshland through their destructive feeding habits, putting wildlife and people at greater risk from the harms of climate change-amplified sea level rise. The Service and USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Wildlife Services implemented an integrated wildlife damage control program designed to eradicate the species from the Delmarva Peninsula within Chesapeake Bay. USDA and the Service also conducted a robust analysis to determine what methods to use. This analysis resulted in a decision that relocating nutria was not feasible and that the use of traps, firearms, and detection dogs to systematically seek out and remove nutria from infested wetlands would be the most effective. The program has been very successful and is in the process of verifying the successful eradication of nutria.