

# Responsible Pet Owners, Wildlife and Traps

## Keeping Your Dog Safe is Your Responsibility



If you allow your dog to run “at large” in wildlife habitat<sup>(1)</sup> at any time of year, you are breaking the law as defined under the Nova Scotia Wildlife Act. “At large,” under the Act, means unaccompanied by the owner or handler and has been further defined as “not under the immediate control of the owner or handler and not within sight of the owner or handler.” (A dog is not considered to be “at large” if engaged in hunting or training activities under the supervision of the owner or handler as specifically permitted by the wildlife regulations).

Dogs that run “at large” face a greater risk of encountering motor vehicles, exposure to hazardous substances or poisons, contact with diseases from domestic animals or wildlife, attacks by wildlife or other domestic animals running “at large,” and accidental capture in legally set traps. By allowing your dog to run “at large,” you are not only putting your pet at risk of being injured or killed from any of these hazards, you may also be liable for any damage which results from its actions.

When traveling in wildlife habitat<sup>(1)</sup>, unless your dog is well-trained to obey and stay close by, or within your sight, it should be on a leash at all times. Even normally obedient dogs may forget some of their training in unfamiliar surroundings, exposed to interesting scents or upon confronting wildlife. Letting your dog off-lead in the woods is taking a chance. The kindest thing you can do for your pet is to keep it under control.

When you are not with your dog, make sure it is safely secured at home, on a chew-proof tether, in a fenced yard, chain-link kennel, or secured by other means of containment. You are responsible for your pet and its actions.

(1)- “Wildlife habitat” means any water or land, or combination thereof, where wildlife may be found and the roads and highways thereon.

## Regulations Governing Trapping and Hunting

- Trapping and snaring for wild furbearing species (except for the use of live holding cage traps for problem wildlife) may only be conducted during open seasons from October 15 to March 31 or with special permission from the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. (You may obtain a copy of the annual *Hunting and Furharvesting Summary of Regulations* booklet at a DNR office or view it online at [www.gov.ns.ca/natr/hunt/regulations](http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/hunt/regulations).)
- Traps may be set in wildlife habitat at other times of year (with permission from the Department of Natural Resources) to deal with problem wildlife situations or for scientific research.
- Most hunting and trapping seasons occur between mid-September and the end of March. Certain species, however, may be hunted at other times (e.g. crows) or throughout the year (e.g. coyotes) because of problems caused to property, crops or livestock.
- Except for box traps and submarine traps, no person shall set or place a trap or snare on cultivated land or within 274 m (300 yds) of a dwelling, school, playground, athletic field, or place of business unless that person is the owner or occupier of the dwelling, or has the permission of the owner or occupier. *The only exception is trapping nuisance wildlife with the written permission of a conservation officer.*
- The *Protection of Property Act* allows for individuals to engage in a number of recreational activities, including hunting and trapping, on forested land without permission. Lawns, gardens, orchards, vineyards, golf courses, land for agricultural animals or crops, railway lines, or enclosed/fenced areas require permission. "Forested land" means a wooded area, forest stand, tract of land covered by underbrush, barren ground, marsh or bog. It does not include tree plantations, Christmas tree management areas, forestry study areas, areas where forest products are being harvested, or commercial berry growing areas.
- Landowners have the ability to restrict trapping on their forested land by means of posting a sign stating that trapping is prohibited without permission.
- Traps or snares may not be set on or within 15 m (50 ft) of the traveled surface of a trail or highway. *Some exceptions apply and include: box traps, snares set completely underwater, snares made of copper, brass or stainless steel set for snowshoe hare or red squirrel, or a body gripping trap with a jaw-spread of 12 cm (4.7 in) or less that is completely submerged in water.*
- If a trap or snare is found to be illegally set, the owner or occupier of the land or dwelling may inform a conservation officer and, with the consent of the conservation officer, remove and surrender the trap or snare to the Department of Natural Resources.

- Body-gripping traps with a jaw-spread greater than 12 cm (4.7 in) are not to be used except:
  - (a) *in or over water, but no lower than 61 cm (2 ft) above water when it is the frozen surface of any water body;*
  - (b) *in a dog-proof enclosure; or*
  - (c) *where the trap is set at least five feet (1.5 m) above the ground.*
- Effective October 15, 2006, anyone who sets a trap or snare for a fur-bearing animal must clearly mark his/her unique identification number on the trap or snare. *Traps or snares which are set for red squirrel, or for fur-bearing animals that are being trapped as nuisance wildlife, are exempt.*
- In certain situations, the *Wildlife Act* permits the killing of dogs running “at large” and attacking wildlife.
- While the details may vary, all Nova Scotia municipalities and many towns have bylaws which prohibit dogs from running “at large” (For more details on the municipal by-laws in your area, contact your nearest municipal office or visit their website for a copy of their current by-laws). These regulations and by-laws are in place to protect the public, livestock, other domestic pets, and wildlife from uncontrolled domestic pets roaming “at large.”

## The Best Way to Keep Your Dog Safe

- Know when hunting and trapping seasons are open in your area.
- Know who owns the land where you walk your dog and ask for permission from landowners.
- Keep control of your dog at all times and do not allow your dog to run “at large.”
- Keep your dog on a leash while in wildlife habitat.
- Report dogs running “at large,” harassing or chasing wildlife.
- If you hunt with your dog or walk your dog in wildlife habitat during furharvesting season, in areas where traps and snares may be set, carry a good pair of wire-cutting pliers that can be used to cut wire and free your dog in the unlikely event that it becomes captured in a snare.
- If you encounter a trap or snare, immediately leash your dog and carefully leave the area to avoid other traps that may be in the vicinity.
- Do not disturb any trap or snare and the surrounding area in which the trap or snare is set. If you believe that the trap may be set illegally, immediately notify the local DNR office or, outside normal office hours, call DNR at 1-800-565-2224 to have it investigated.
- Familiarize yourself with the methods to release a dog from a trap or snare. Your knowledge of these methods could save your dog’s life.

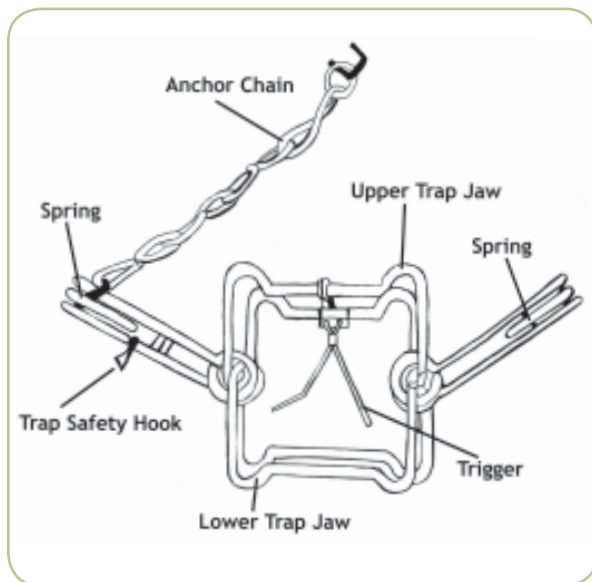
## Removing Your Dog From a Trap or Snare

If a dog is accidentally captured in a trap or snare while in the company of its owner/handler, it is possible to successfully remove it alive if you know what to do. It is essential that you understand and can quickly and calmly follow the steps required to release a dog from a trap or snare. Your familiarity with the dog and its temperament may determine whether or not you will be able to release the dog by yourself. Remember the surprise and shock of being captured may cause the dog to become extremely excited or agitated, even to the state of biting at anyone who comes close to it. Your ability to reassure and calm the dog will be a key factor in securing its release.

### Body Gripping Traps

Body gripping traps (known as 'Conibear type' traps) have a square frame with two rotating jaws. Larger versions typically have two springs. These traps are designed to strike small to medium- sized animals in the neck or body and kill them quickly and humanely. Various sizes are used to capture animals ranging from weasels to raccoons and beavers.

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1.1 Body Gripping or Conibear trap

The only way to open the jaws on these types of traps is to compress and secure the spring(s) on the trap. It is impossible to pull the jaws apart otherwise. Once the spring or springs are compressed, the jaws of the trap will open freely, allowing you to release the dog. Larger body gripping traps are equipped with springs which may be difficult, if not impossible, to compress with your hands. By using a dog leash, rope or belt and following the instructions below, you will be able to create a crude pulley system with increased mechanical advantage, making it easier to compress and secure the spring(s) of the trap with moderate effort.





**Step 1** Place your foot through the loop end of the leash. You can also use a piece of rope or a belt, but you will have to make a loop in one end.



**Step 2** Take the free end of the rope or leash and feed it through both eyes of the spring.

**Step 3** Loop the rope or leash over the spring eye farthest away from you and feed it back through the eye closest to your foot.



**Step 4** Stabilize the other side of the trap with your foot by standing on the lower edge of the spring.

**Step 5** Pull up on the rope or leash with both hands until the spring is compressed.



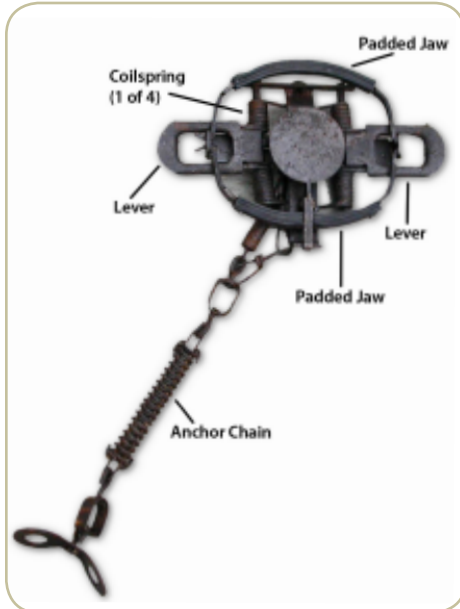
**Step 6** While still holding the rope, secure the safety hook in place to lock the spring in the compressed position, taking pressure off the jaws. If the trap has a second spring you will need to repeat these steps. With both jaws compressed, you will be able to remove the trap from the dog.

## Foot or Leghold Traps

The term “leghold” is a misnomer. These traps are designed to capture the target animal by the foot and hold it alive until the trapper arrives to remove it. The foothold trap most likely to be encountered in wildlife habitat is the coil spring foothold trap. While it may be disconcerting to have

your dog caught in a foothold trap, accidental capture in such a trap is not life threatening. Provided you are with your dog, and are able to remove the trap relatively quickly, there is little risk of anything more than minor injury.

Your familiarity with the dog, its temperament and how excited it becomes while in the trap will determine whether or not you will be able to release the dog by yourself. If help is not immediately available, it is possible for one person to release a dog caught in a leghold trap. If, after attempting the steps below, you are unable to remove the dog from the trap, you may need to leave the dog and the trap site to seek help. You may also be able to unfasten the trap from its anchor point (may be attached by wire or chain) and take the dog with the trap still on the dog’s foot to someone who can help you remove the trap.



*Coilspring Leghold Trap*



*Your weight on the levers will relax the pressure on the trap jaws, loosening the jaws and enabling your dog to pull its foot free.*

**Step 1** Secure your dog by pinning it to the ground or holding it in an upright position. Depending on the individual, the size of the trap, and the size of the dog, you may be able to grab both levers with your fingers and, using the palms of your hands, stabilize the bottom of the trap or base plate. Once this is accomplished, pull the levers of the trap toward you with your fingers using one continuous motion. This will release the pressure on the jaws of the trap enough for the dog to pull its foot free or to allow the foot to fall out from between the jaws of the trap. The trap jaws do not have to be completely opened for the dog to free its foot.

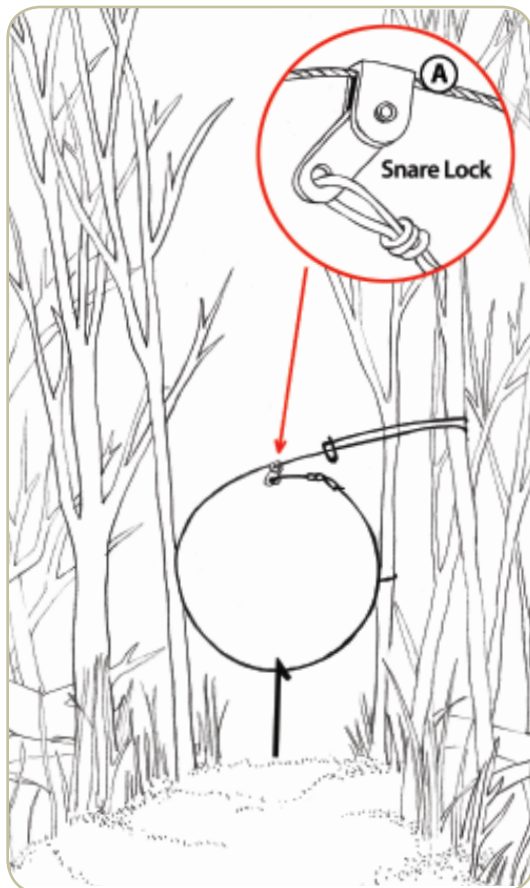


**Step 2** If the trap is too large to manipulate the levers of the trap with your hands, secure the trap on the ground with both springs pointing upward. Place the inside of your feet simultaneously on both levers and pivot forward using your body weight to compress the levers of the trap. Your weight on the levers will relax the pressure on the trap jaws, loosening the jaws and enabling your dog to pull its foot free.

The duration of time the dog was held in the trap may determine the extent of its injuries. Foot or leghold traps are designed to hold an animal alive with a minimal amount of damage to the foot. If you are with your dog when it is caught and are able to release it immediately, you should expect minimal injury to the dog's foot.

## Snares

Snares set for furbearers in Nova Scotia are generally made of steel aircraft cable and are legally required to have a locking device, which prevents the snare from loosening after the animal is captured. As a result, the harder the animal fights the snare, the tighter the locking device closes. The intent of this design is to kill the target animal quickly. Due to their size, snares set for fox, coyote or bobcat may present a risk to dogs in wildlife habitat.



1.II Coyote Snare



*Insert a finger between the cable and the dog's neck so you can insert the wire cutters.*



*Use a good pair of wire cutters to cut the steel cable.*

How and where you let your dog run will determine the likelihood of your pet getting tangled in a snare. In general, hunting dogs or dogs which run “at large” are more susceptible to getting caught in a snare as they cover more ground than the average pet under close supervision and control. The closer your dog is traveling with you, the more likely you are to find it if it becomes entangled in a snare and the less time it will have to struggle and tighten the cable around its neck or body.

- Step 1** Try to calm the dog. This will help prevent the snare from tightening further and allow more time to free the dog.
- Step 2** Loosen the locking device on the snare to slacken the cable around the neck or body and remove it from the dog.
- Step 3** If you are unable to loosen the locking device, try to cut the loop of the snare cable with a set of wire cutters wherever you can best access the cable around the neck of the dog. The best location is often just past the locking device on the loop. You may also be able to pass a finger under the cable around the neck to lift it away from the skin slightly and cut the snare cable at that point.
- Step 4** If you are unable to directly cut the cable loop around the dog’s neck, cutting the cable as close as possible to the lock (label A on preceding diagram) may allow you to work the lock a bit, causing this short cut-end of the cable to slip through the hole in the lock, loosening the cable and freeing your dog.

Some dogs may not struggle if caught in a snare, but will sit down and wait for their owner to release them. This behavior is far more likely in dogs that are regularly restrained by a collar and a leash, rope or chain. Dogs not accustomed to a leash or to being tied up, tend to fight the snare cable. If your dog is accustomed to spending its time loose in a kennel, house or your backyard, consider getting it familiar to being restrained by a tether.

*Never try to release a wild animal from a trap or snare. While it may look docile, it is not used to human contact and you could get seriously scratched and bitten.*

For more information, please contact the **Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division at (902) 679-6091.**

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Illustrations I.I and I.II: abridged from *Wild Furbearer Management and Conservation in North America*.