



**NAFA**

FURS BEYOND EXPECTATION

**WFSC**

WILD FUR SHIPPERS COUNCIL

**WILD FUR PELT HANDLING MANUAL**



North American Fur Auctions' principal business is the sale of raw fur pelts. The pelts are received on consignment from producers of ranch-raised furs and harvesters of wild furs. The fur pelts are sold to fur garment manufacturers and fur pelt dealers worldwide. The Company is the largest fur auction house in North America, and the third largest fur auction in the world.

An organization of wild fur producers that strive to promote the culture, heritage, and economic viability of fur harvesting through an ownership position in North American Fur Auctions.

Wild Fur Shippers Council, Respect for our past Commitment to the future.

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*I would like to thank the NAFA grading staff for all the help they gave me to improve my understanding of the grading process, and how what we do as trappers can affect the grade and price of pelts.*

*I would also like to thank all the NAFA collectors that put on the skinning demos at the trappers meetings. I watched many of these great fur handlers skin, flesh and board fur. They were always great to work with, answering all my questions. It was the information from these demos that provided most of the content for the manual.*

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## INTRODUCTION TO PELT HANDLING

This pelt handling manual is a guide put together by the Wild Fur Shippers Council [WFSC] and North American Fur Auctions [NAFA] as a joint effort to help improve the quality of fur handling. We've interviewed several expert fur handlers and utilized NAFA's grading staff for comments and suggestions on how to properly handle your pelts and get the most value for them. NAFA is in the business of marketing fur and, if anyone knows what the buyers are looking for it is NAFA. It's beneficial to all the trappers to put up pelts uniformly. When a buyer comes to the auction to buy, a uniform pelt is more easily sold to them, because they understand how many square inches of usable product the pelt will dress out at. It is also easier for the NAFA grader, for example: some trappers may board a marten on a mink board and pin the marten to 22", an XL skin, but this does not fool the grader, they have to take time after they check the length to move it down one size because the skin is too narrow. Not only is this extra steps for the graders but it makes for an uneven string of pelts. Therefore it is advantageous for all trappers to utilize the same techniques and dimensions for fur forms when handling their pelts. It helps the overall collection of wild fur look better. NAFA offers the largest collection of wild fur available anywhere to the buyers of the world, and it is a goal of the WFSC that not only is it the largest but also the best handled. Every year, thousands of dollars' worth of pelts that would be high quality, valuable furs are sold as low value pelts due to improper handling. Through this manual we'd like to be able to not only teach a beginner how to properly handle their furs but also give tips to a seasoned veteran that would improve their handling and result in an increase in their fur check at the end of the year.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

It's important when you begin to purchase the tools needed to handle fur properly that you buy the best quality tools you can afford. If your tools are properly cared for they will last longer and work better. All reputable trap supply dealers have tools that can be purchased. A good two-handed fleshing knife that's sharp on one side and dull on the other is used for taking the fat and gristle off the leather side of your pelts. A good fleshing beam is used in conjunction with your fleshing knife. Sharp skinning knives are important, because you'll have fewer cuts in your fur than with a dull knife. Many trappers are now using scalpel knives with replaceable blades, because the blades are inexpensive, easy to change, and razor sharp. Fur combs and brushes are important tools. Furs must be combed out, because mud, burrs, or blood matts that are imbedded in the fur can quickly cause a nick or hole in the pelt during the fleshing process. A tail stripper makes it easier to pull the bone out of the tail when skinning the animal. Latex or surgical gloves are great for protecting you from diseases that could be transmitted to the fur handler. A good skinning apron is a must to save on the clothes. Another item that is very useful in the fur shed is dry, clean sawdust. It can be used to clean excess grease from your fleshing beam. It also can help to clean and dry furs. A handful or two of dry sawdust combed through a damp or dirty fur will clean out mud and dirt and help dry the pelt. It can also be placed directly on the skin of greasy animals, such as raccoon, as you flesh them. This will absorb



*Tools needed to handle fur properly.*

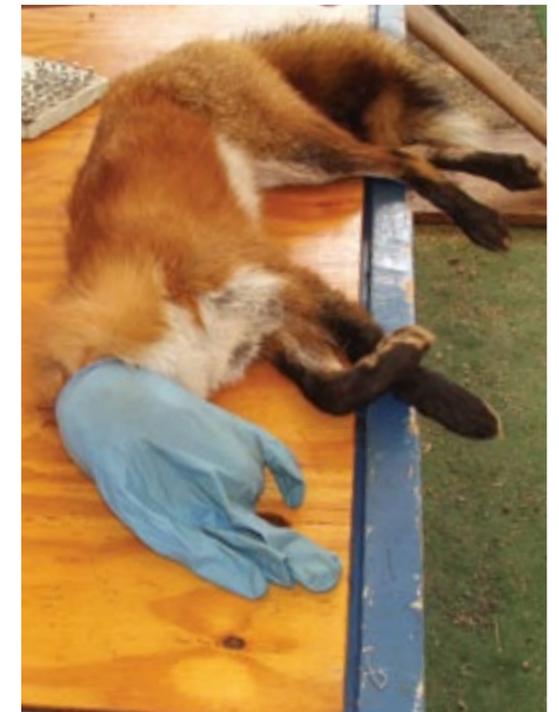
excess grease and oil as it is fleshed from the pelt and will help to keep the fur clean. While expensive, some high-production trappers utilize a fur drum. They are very useful in the trapping shed but not an item that you need to put up high quality pelts. They are used on pelts to help clean the fur. Many trappers will drum their Muskrats and mink before skinning to help dry them. It also helps break down the membranes under the leather and makes the animal easier to skin. A spray bottle full of water is necessary if you are putting up Otters. An Otter pelt must be kept damp while handling to avoid singe.

## TRAPPING METHODS

First and most important, always trap fur when it is prime. Early caught blue, unprimed fur is less valuable. Keeping a pelt in the best condition begins even before a trap or snare is set. Snares and traps should be degreased, dyed, waxed (if preferred), tuned, and defective or weak trap springs repaired or replaced. Trap locations should be selected to minimize pelt damage. Most of the time an animal is clean until it is caught. Choose your location carefully. Is there anything the trapped animal may get in that would damage the fur? Burrs, thistles, barbwire fence, pine pitch, and heavy mud are all things to avoid. Most of the time you will not have to give up the location, only move the trap a few feet. Proper sized traps and correct trigger and dog positions should be used to avoid pelt damage. Conibear traps that are too big or too small for the intended animal, weak springs, poorly-designed traps, or an incorrect trigger position can damage fur and can reduce pelt value significantly. Check your traps regularly to reduce pelt damage caused by other animals, adverse weather conditions and taint.

## FIELD HANDLING

Often times animals held alive in traps will be dirty because they have been in contact with burrs, thistles, and mud. There may also be blood in the fur after the animal has been dispatched. Animals trapped near water can be rinsed out as they are caught. Some canine trappers will put a rack made of wood just a few inches above the inside of their truck bed to lay their animals on so the blood will not get into the fur. Remove snares carefully because the snare cable can easily get entangled with the fur. Animals caught in Conibears or drowning sets are generally cleaner, and there's no blood, but they can present different problems. If the weather is warm, the animals could start to taint. Traps should be checked frequently enough to avoid spoilage. In extreme cold weather, animals can freeze to traps or other objects. Remove traps carefully and if the animal is frozen to the trap, take everything home to thaw and replace the set with a new trap. Tug animals gently that are frozen to mud, snow or ice so the guard hairs stay on the pelt. Careless handling will remove guard hairs from the pelt and depending on the location and the amount of pulled fur, pelt value can be reduced. Be careful not to lay wet animals directly onto the ice, as they could instantly freeze to it.



*The glove placed over the head of this Red Fox will keep the blood out of the fur while skinning.*

## TRANSPORTING THE FUR

Most trapping activity takes place when temperatures are cold or below freezing. Carelessly placed fur may freeze to metal and other objects, particularly if it is wet. Fur can be pulled from the bumping and jarring in trapline vehicles and trailers. Putting the animals into bags to protect them from metal or each other will greatly reduce pelt damage. Don't pile freshly caught animals on top of each other. Body heat must be allowed to escape.

## SEWING HOLES

With the exception of .22 caliber bullet holes, always carefully sew up any holes. Depending on the location and the number of holes on the pelt, neatly sewn holes generally do not affect pelt grade. Leaving unsewn holes does affect pelt grade. Neatly sew any holes and make sure all blood has been thoroughly removed around bullet holes. When the hole is being closed, sew from the leather side and use care to not sew fur under the thread.

## WASHING PELTS

While washing is not needed for all pelts, it does improve their appearance. Removing mud, dirt, or blood will give the fur grader and buyer an accurate assessment of the pelt's true value. Washing also loosens matted fur that has been crushed by Conibears and snares that would have left obvious breaks in the fur and a lower pelt value. Washing in cool water with a little soap will not remove the pelt's natural oils. Too much soap will leave a dull, "dead" appearance to the fur by removing the pelt's natural oils.

## BOARDING PELTS

All trappers have their preference when it comes to boarding fur. Whether it is wire frames, split stretchers, or solid boards, they should be shaped to conform to the fur trade. Never over-stretch pelts. Over-stretching can thin the fur and create a weak appearance. Pelts handled leather-out need a window or inspection area so fur graders can evaluate the pelt's quality. Cut the window when the pelt is still green. Doing so will "seal" the edge making it hard to rip. Sometimes the window is cut too far into the flanks or too high into the belly and can devalue the fur.

## DRYING PELTS

Pelts should be dried relatively slowly, between the temperatures of 55°F-65°F (12°C-18°C). As the pelts dry, wipe off excess oils that may appear. Burlap is the best material to use for this. Old bath towels also work well. A fan should be used to circulate the air around the pelt. An inexpensive box fan is perfect. Occasionally, pelts are dried too quickly. When this happens, the leather looks and feels stiff and board-like. The leather is tough to bend and if dried too quickly at very high temperatures, the skin cooks. When bent, the leather actually cracks. Areas where the leather has burnt will not dress (tan) properly and will be greatly reduced in value.

## TURNING PELTS

Fur-out pelts are first dried leather-out, and then turned fur-out while the head is still pliable. Be careful to avoid tearing the leather. The worst tearing occurs in the shoulder area of the pelt and the tear usually runs up and over the shoulders. Tearing in the butt usually runs in a straight line up the back of the pelt. Provided the armpits and legs are dry, leave the legs inside the pelt when it is turned. This virtually eliminates tears in the shoulder and does not affect the grade of the pelt. Any moist spots, like in the armpit area, can be treated with a preservative like borax. If a pelt gets too dry to turn, use a damp cloth to soften the leather before turning to reduce the chance of ripping the pelt.

## STORING PELTS

After the pelts have been removed from the boards they should be hung in a cool, dry place out of the reach of animals. Smaller pelts can be stored in the freezer to prevent them from going stale. This should be done in the case of wild mink, which oxidize easily. Otter pelts must be kept in a cool location to prevent singeing. Pelts stored in areas that are too warm or in the light will turn stale. Pelts stored over the summer should also be kept in a cool, dark area or preferably wrapped and stored in a freezer to avoid bug damage.

## TRANSPORTING PELTS

Keep bags of fur dry. Rain or wet snow can damage pelts. Do not transport otter in heated areas. They can singe, so avoid putting them in a vehicle with the heater on. Keep leather-out pelts separate from fur-out pelts. Pack beaver flat, fur to fur, without rolling pelts. Make sure pelts have completely dried, particularly those which have been frost-dried. Beaver castor is shipped in bags, onion bags, or cardboard boxes, never in plastic bags.

# RACCOON

Raccoons are trapped throughout most of the U.S. and southern portions of the Canadian Provinces. Given the wide geographical area of harvest, they vary in size, color, and fur quality, more so than most any other fur bearers. Due to this, there are several different sizes of fur forms that are used in the boarding process and also several different sections of grades that the NAFA graders utilize. The Grading Sections recognized for raccoons reflect the length and density of the fur and the thickness of the leather.

## PELTING (SKINNING)

Raccoons are case skinned. Most trappers will start the pelting process with the animal on the bench, laying the raccoon on its back. The opening cut is from the base of one hind foot to the other on the belly side about 1 ½" to 2" under the anus, following a line separating the longer guard hair from the shorter belly fur. This is an important cut as it will take advantage of the long guard hair in this area and will add length to the pelt. Next you will cut from the center of the opening cut around the anus and down the underside of the tail 2"-3". This cut down the tail will make it much easier to pull the tail bone out when the time comes. With these cuts made you can skin the hide from the carcass around the back legs and cut the hide loose next to the back feet. At this point you will move the animal from the bench and hang it from a skinning gambrel by the hind feet. With the help of a tail puller you can pull the tail bone out, and then use your knife to open the area where the bone was removed. The next step is to pull the hide down over the carcass to the front shoulders. You may need to use your knife to help but be careful not to cut the hide. Much of the fat will stay on the hide and that is fine as it will be removed in the fleshing process. Once you get to the shoulder and front leg area you need to use your finger and thumb. With the help of your knife, pull the hide from the front legs. Cut the front legs free somewhere between the foot and the mid joint in the leg. It is always best to leave a little extra leg length on the hide it which can be trimmed later. Skin down over the head. Cut the ears free trying to not leave too much of the ear cartilage with the hide. Cut the eyes loose as you pull the hide over the head, trying not to cut the eye openings any larger than they are. The last two cuts are the nose, which stays on the hide, and the lower jaw, which is left on the carcass.



Proper opened Raccoon.

## FLESHING AND PELT PREPARATION

1. It is a common practice for Raccoon trappers to skin and freeze their pelts so they can be fleshed and dried at a later time. If you choose to do this it will not affect your grade as long as you do to correctly. First, turn the pelt fur side out. Next fold the head and tail in and roll it into a ball. Place the pelt in a plastic bag to protect it from freezer burn. Do not freeze more than two pelts in a bag to make thawing easier. Thaw the pelts slowly away from direct heat.

2. Brush out dirt, blood matts and burrs. Pelts that are too dirty or blood stained to brush out should be washed in cold water. The removal of matts and burrs is important as the "flow" of the fleshing knife must be uninterrupted. A burr in the fur will cause a restriction under the leather when fleshing and possibly result in the fleshing knife cutting into the leather.

3. All fat, flesh and gristle MUST be removed. The use of a fleshing beam and a good two-handled fleshing knife, one that is sharp on one side and dull on the other, is best for this. Fat and flesh should be cooled before fleshing begins so the fleshing tool can "bite in". Pelts not sufficiently cooled are difficult to flesh. Using the sharp side of the knife, start just behind the ears and work your way down the back of the neck to about the shoulders. This area is mostly gristle and it takes the sharp side of the knife to cut the gristle free from the leather. As you get past the shoulder area you will feel the difference in the flow of the knife. Here, you want to flip the knife to the dull side. The rest of the fat is pushed off by repositioning the hide on the beam until all the fat has all been removed. Some trappers remove the gristle from the head, although this is not necessary.

4. The use of sawdust is great to clean your beam after each animal is fleshed. It will absorb fat, grease and oil. Rub the beam down with one or two handfuls. Some trappers will put sawdust on the hide as they flesh to help absorb the grease and oil. If sawdust is used in this fashion make sure it is scraped from the leather to give the leather a fresh appearance when dried. Sawdust does not affect grade, but it can stain the leather.

5. Sew any holes that appear in the hide. Do not waste time sewing small holes such as .22 bullet holes.

## STANDARD SIZES

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
6XL	Over 41"
5XL	38" – 41"
4XL	35" – 38"
3XL	32" – 35"
2XL	29" – 32"
XL	27" – 29"
LGE	24" – 27"
LM	22" – 24"
MED	20" – 22"
SML	Under 20"

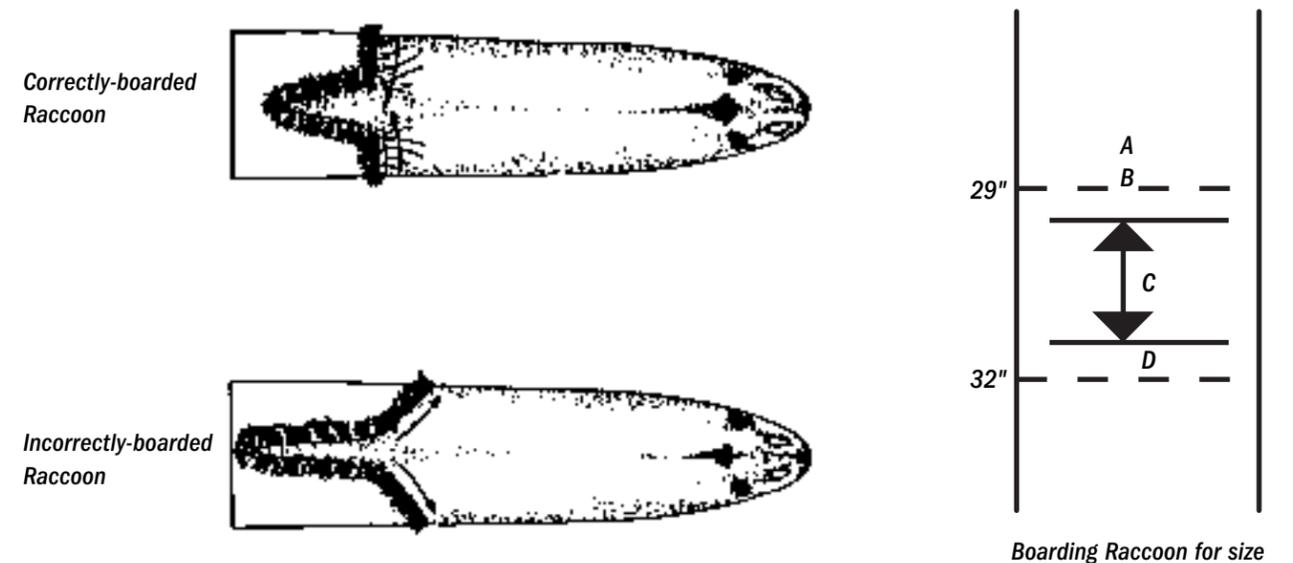
## BOARDING RACCOONS

Raccoons are boarded leather out. Never board wet fur.

1. Use the correct sized wire frames or wooden boards. Wooden boards are highly recommended, as they provide a square skirt, better fur density, and better overall appearance.
2. Pull the pelt snugly onto the board by working the sides, especially in the neck and abdominal areas. It is important that these areas are properly stretched so that maximum length is achieved without overstretching.
3. If using boards, first pin the pelt on each side of the base of the tail using pushpins. Next, pin the skirt in a straight line with the base of the tail, pleating the skirt if needed. This will ensure dense fur in the inspection area. If the skirt is pulled away from the tail it will give the fur a 'weak' appearance. Making sure the skirt is in a straight line with the base of the tail ensures maximum length measurement.
4. If wire frames are used, stretch the pelt in the same manner as with wooden boards. Be sure you reshape your wire frames to conform to the NAFA diagram indicating recommended shape. The hooks are placed into the base of the tail and legs. The edges of the pelt must be pulled down and 'pinned' with clothes pins, so the skirt is straight across the line with the base of the tail.
5. Do not stretch the tail long—push it towards the inspection area. Wire or plastic screen may be used over the top of the tail if desired. On wire pelt frames, a wooden insert may be used to tack the tail out or it can be left to hang loose to dry.
6. The legs are now tacked onto the side of the board, or in the case of wire frames the legs are pulled down. Do not pull down tight on the legs as you will rob fur density from the inspection area. Keep the legs short but snug.
7. Remove any further bits of fat or sawdust. Sawdust allowed to dry on the pelt is unsightly and will sometimes stain the leather.
8. Cut the front legs short (1/2" to 3/4"). Do not cut flush with the pelt as too large a hole will result. Trim off lower lip.
9. Trim out the inspection window. The cut should be made no higher than the penis opening (or in the same vicinity on females), taking care not to extend the cut into the flanks. Never cut a window after the pelt dries. This will cause a weak edge, which is sharp and susceptible to tearing. A window cut out green will 'seal' at the edge and be strong when dried. If using a wooden board, insert a Belly Board or Wedge between the pelt and the board.
10. Dry the pelt slowly. As it dries, wipe off any excess oil which appears on the leather. Burlap works best. If burlap isn't available, cotton rags or old bath towels work well. In the right conditions 55° to 65°F [13° to 18° C] with some air movement] it will take 3-5 days to fully dry your raccoons. Pull your pelts from board as soon as fully dry they are harder to pull if let to set for a long time.

### Tips from NAFA graders and collectors

1. Make sure your skins are fully dry. Check around the ears and the tail area as these are the last areas to dry.
2. Use the right size board for your fur. Raccoons boarded too narrow but long are moved down a size anyway. This happens more often when using wire forms.
3. Put your Raccoon up on wooden boards. You will get a nice square skirt and a raccoon that just feels fuller and heavier. If you do use wood and staple your fur in the process make sure all staples are removed from the fur as they can cause a nasty cut to the graders.
4. Wipe down your pelts when pulled off the boards and use a fur comb to comb out the flank and the inspection area.



Boarding Raccoon for size

Raccoon will shrink after removal from the board. To adjust for shrinkage, pin your Raccoon between two sizes.

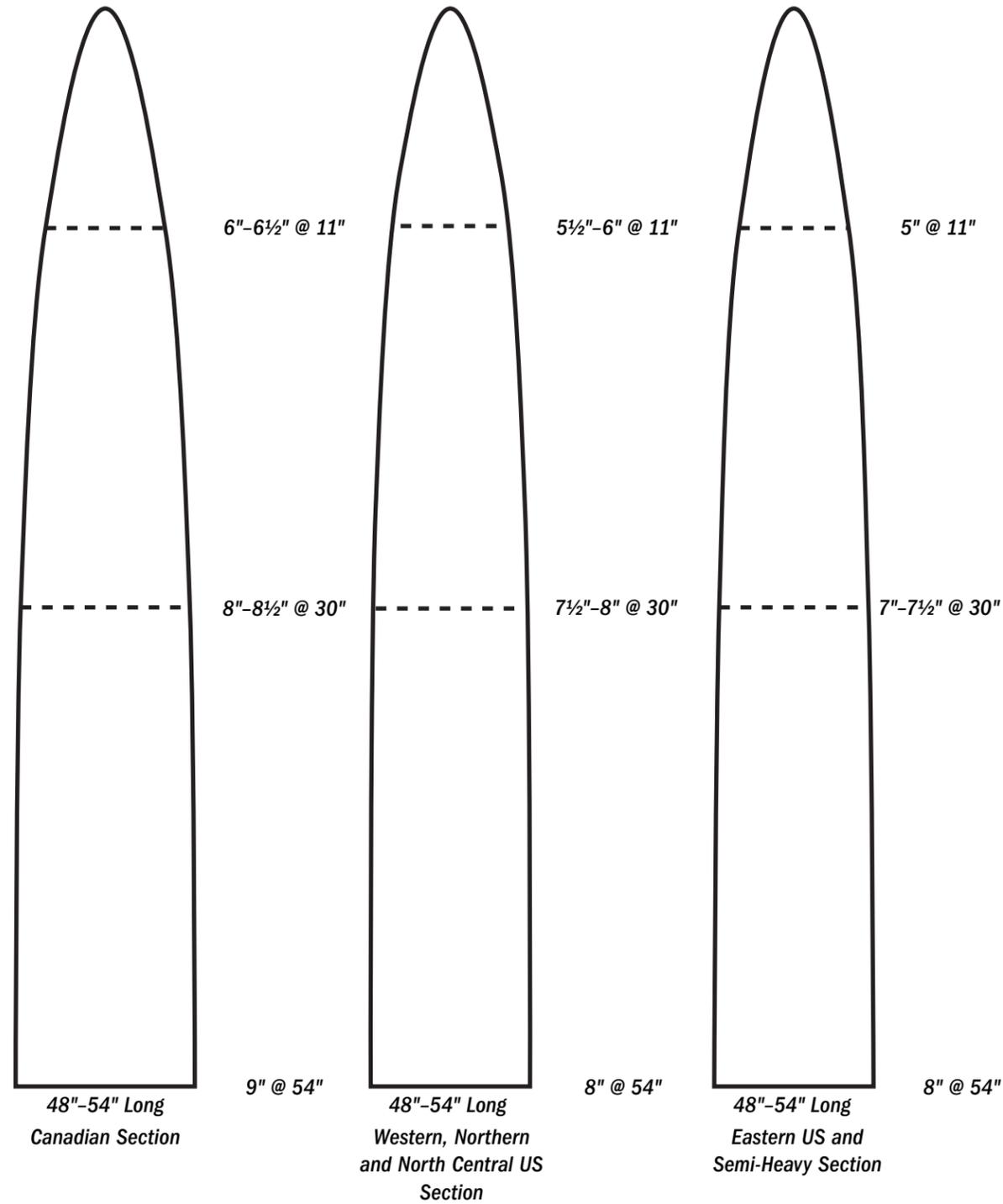


Proper handled Raccoon pelt notice the square skirt and the leather is fleshed clean.



Proper handled Raccoon good inspection window.

# RACCOON BOARDS



More than two boards may be used varying in size as indicated.

A belly board is required on solid boards (no more than 1" wide tapering to ½". Boards are ½"-5/8" thick.

Central and Southern US Section boards should be no narrower than 5" @ 11" and 6½" @ 30".

# HOW TO MODIFY A WIRE RACCOON STRETCHER TO INCLUDE A WOOD SKIRTING BOARD

## EQUIPMENT REQUIRED:

- Heavy-Duty Bolt Cutter
- ¼" Drill
- Wood Saw
- Screwdriver

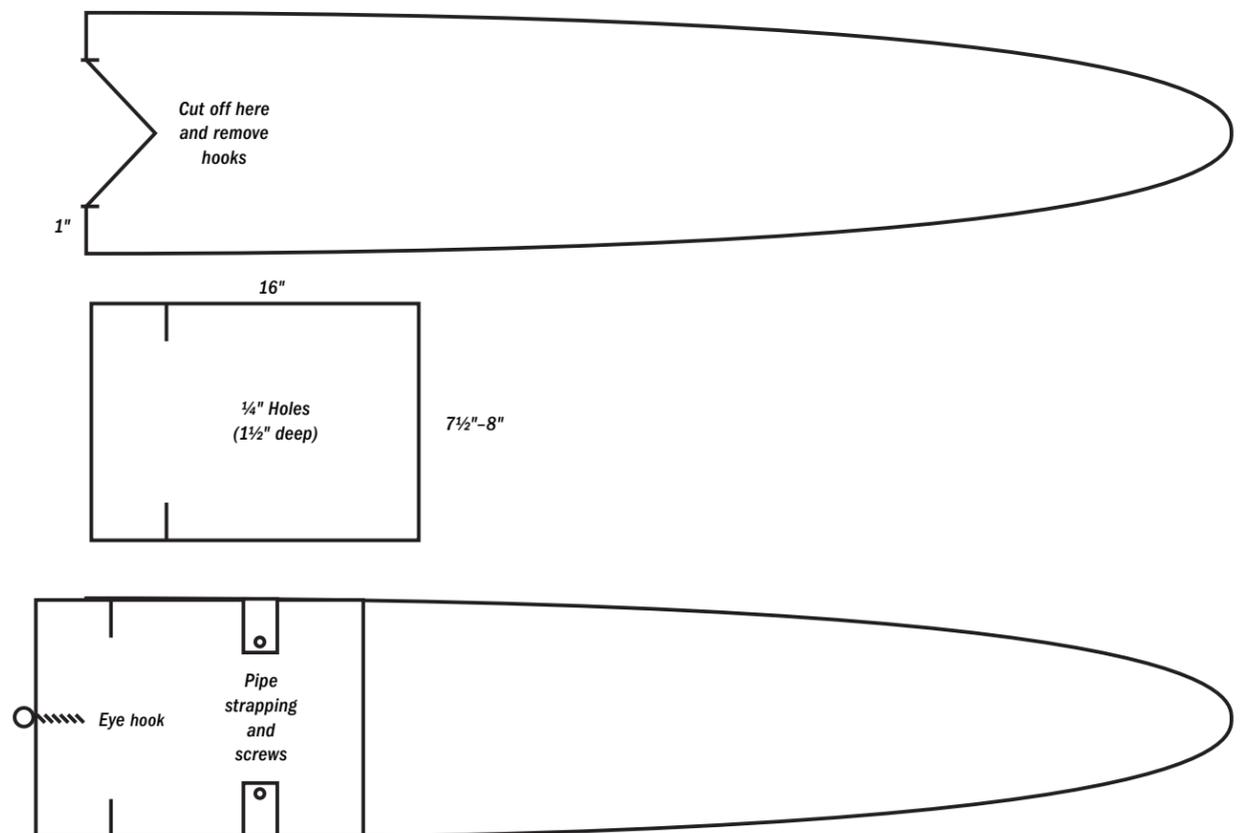
## MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- 1 16" Length of 1"x8" softwood
- 2 5" pieces of perforated pipe strapping
- 4 ½" wood screws
- 1 ¾" eye hook

## INSTRUCTIONS: (PLEASE REFER TO DIAGRAM ON OPPOSITE PAGE)

1. Cut the base of the wire off on both sides approximately 1" in from the edge and remove hooks from frame
2. Drill two ¼" holes in the 1x8 board, one on each edge, approximately 4" up from the bottom and across from each other.
3. Insert the ends of the remaining base of the frame into the ¼" holes in the board and retain with the pipe and the 4 ½" screws. This should be done with the longest section of the board up inside the wire frame.
4. The eye hook can be screwed into the centre of the bottom edge of the board for hanging the boarded pelt.

\*Note: Most wire frames are too wide at the shoulder and should be bent in slightly to conform with recommended dimensions.



# BEAVER

Today, after almost four centuries of commercial exploitation, the Beaver is a thriving species across most of the US and Canada. In many places it is considered a nuisance. On land the Beaver is a large, clumsy, hump-backed animal. In the water, however, it is sleek and torpedo-shaped, propelling itself with its powerful, webbed hind feet and maneuvering with its large, flat, scale-covered tail.

The Beaver's fur provides insulation to protect it from the ice cold water and outside temperatures. The underfur is fine, soft, wavy, and extremely dense. In comparison, the guard hairs are stiff, thick, and long, 2 to 2 ½ inches when fully grown. Peak primeness occurs between December and March, depending on latitude. Although most Beaver appear reddish dark brown, they can range from jet black to pale silvery or blond. There can be considerable color variation among Beaver in any one region.

## GRADING SECTIONS

Beaver pelts are normally sorted into Eastern and Western groups.

**Eastern:** Pelts from Eastern Canada—east of the Ontario-Manitoba border. Also included are pelts from the Eastern United States with Minnesota as the dividing line. Pelts from the Eastern section are generally darker and finer in texture. There are two weights found in Eastern pelts, Heavy and Semi. The Heavy weight pelts tend to be Canadian in origin but will include some pelts from the Northeastern US. The underfur is deep and heavy. The Semi weight pelts are mostly of United States origin. The underfur is not as heavy.

**Western:** Pelts from Western Canada—west of the Ontario-Manitoba border. Pelts from the Western United States, to the west of Minnesota, are also included. Pelts from this section are larger than most Eastern Beavers, and are paler in color and coarser in texture.

Paler Beaver from Eastern regions may grade into the Western section. Similarly darker Beaver from Western regions may grade into the Eastern section. The grader will put the skin where it best fits.

## TRAPPING

Damage to pelts can easily result from the use of unsuitable equipment and poor set methods. By using proper traps and sets fur damage can be avoided.

Conibear-style traps should be painted or dyed, because rusty traps can stain the pelt. Conibear traps should be equipped with springs that are strong enough to render the animal unconscious rapidly. Snares are best used under ice or set so that Beaver is drowned quickly when caught. The perfect strike with a Conibear-style trap is one jaw just behind the head. Trigger and dog positions are a large factor in possible damage with Conibears. Trappers should try to avoid the dog of the trap striking the back of the Beaver, as the dog is more likely to cause damage than the trigger. When possible, the trigger rather than the dog should face the approaching Beaver. By doing this the dog will be on the jaw of the trap away from the Beaver. By offsetting the trigger and dog assembly the dog is less likely to strike in the center of the back and thereby less likely to cause pelt damage.

The narrow edge of the dog can damage the pelt at the strike location. Another technique is to set the trigger and dog on the bottom so that when the trap is fired the dog will strike the underside of the Beaver. If the dog does cause damage on the underside, there is a good chance it will be where the opening cut will occur on the pelt.

Beavers left visible or floating at scented locations are often bitten severely by other approaching Beavers. Traps at these locations should be set so that the trapped Beaver will remain completely under water. This will greatly reduce the chance of bites. Beaver traps should be checked more frequently in the spring to minimize the possibility of fur slipping due to warmer weather and to avoid bites from other Beavers.

## HANDLING IN THE FIELD

Beavers should be removed carefully from Conibear-style traps and snares to avoid pelt damage. Handle the animal by the leg rather than by pulling on the trap or chain. Under no circumstances should the Beaver be carried by the trap.

In under-ice trapping, especially in shallow water, care must be taken to avoid puncture of the animal by chopping equipment. Check to insure that the Beaver is not frozen to the ice. In cold temperatures, Beaver must be removed quickly from snares or Conibears to avoid fur freezing to equipment. Do not lay Beaver on bare ice surfaces as fur can quickly freeze to the ice. A burlap or canvas bag will greatly reduce risk of fur damage during transport. Do not drag Beaver behind snow machines or ATV equipment, since this may result in wearing of guard hair and underfur.

If there is silt or mud in the fur when the Beaver is removed from the trap, it should be rinsed at the site if possible. Rolling a wet Beaver in the snow will remove a great deal of moisture from the fur. Many trappers choose to rough skin their Beaver in the field. If this is done it's best to fold the pelts leather to leather to avoid fur contacting grease or blood. If saving castor, the castor should also be folded into the leather side. This will protect the castor and keep the fat or oil out of the fur.

## STANDARD SIZES

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
2XL-3XL	Over 65"
XL	60" – 65"
L	55" – 60"
LM	51" – 55"
MED	47" – 51"
SM	42" – 47"
X-SM	Under 42"

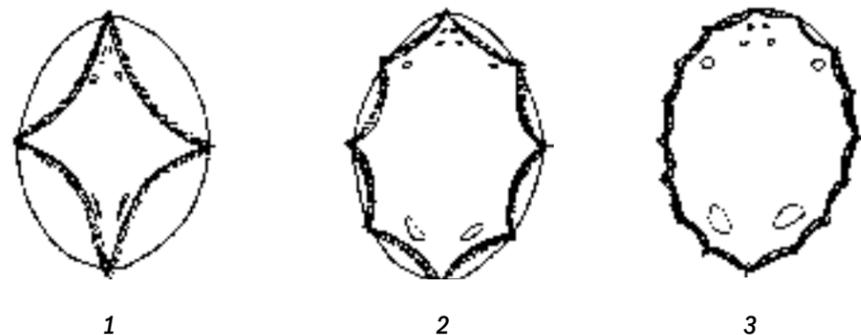
## PELTING (SKINNING)

Before beginning the pelting process, Beaver should be clean, dry and free of blood. If you need to dry the Beaver hang it by the tail or lay it on its back on a wooden rack to get good air circulation. The use of a box fan will speed the drying process.

Beaver are pelted open, with a straight center cut on the belly running from the lower lip to the base of the tail. Care must be taken to avoid cutting through the abdominal wall or damaging the castor glands. The feet are removed prior to skinning. A cut around the leg joints where the fur meets the foot allows them to be twisted off easily. Another method is to use a large pair of lopping shears to accomplish this. At this time you should also cut around the tail. Most trappers choose to leave the tail on, since this provides a natural "handle" for carrying and lifting the carcass when pelting is finished. Whether clean or rough skinning, the pelt should be kept taut by rolling the fur over the fingers from the fur side. This will assist in avoiding accidental cuts during pelting. Most handlers skin to the backbone on one side, then repeat the procedure from the opposite side. As you skin around the legs, no additional cuts in the leather are needed. The leg is pulled and skinned free from the pelt leaving just the hole where the foot was cut off. Ears are cut close to the bone and the nose is left on the pelt. Avoid contact of the fur with the carcass during pelting. Be careful of false cuts.

## FLESHING

Most trappers rough skin their Beaver and flesh after skinning. Some trappers clean skin. This is the art of removing all the flesh and fat as you skin with the use of a large curved-blade knife. There are several methods when it comes to fleshing Beaver. They all have the same goal in mind—that is, removal of all the fat and flesh from the pelt without causing damage to the leather. Using a two-handled fleshing knife and a beam is the most common method. Keep your beam clean of grease. Clean saw dust is good for this. Start by placing the pelt on the beam with the head of the Beaver at the point of the beam. With the sharp side of the knife remove the flesh and fat from just behind the ears down the back to the tail. The area just in front of the tail has a heavy gristle. Take care to remove this down to the leather. From here the pelt can be repositioned on the beam until all fat and flesh have been removed. Keep your stomach pushed firm against the end of the beam as you flesh so the pelt does not slip over the nose of the beam, which can pull guard hair.



## BOARDING

Beaver should be clean and dry before boarding. Do not over comb the pelt. Compressed air can be used to help dry the fur or to blow light dirt out of the pelt. Beavers should be boarded in an oval shape. This conforms to the natural shape of the Beaver and maintains the integrity of the pelt. Stretching to other shapes can result in over-stretching in the back area and loss of fur density. A 4'x8' sheet of 3/4" plywood, cut at 32" intervals, will produce three Beaver boards. Use NAFA Beaver patterns and mark your board on both sides. Use of the NAFA patterns will provide a guideline to help you achieve a perfect oval stretch. Marking the board on both sides will allow you to put a beaver on each side simultaneously. Some trappers use wire hoops instead of boards to stretch their Beaver. Hoops work fine, if used properly. Hoops do stretch round rather than oval. It is still possible to get an oval-shaped Beaver pelt using a hoop. To accomplish this tie a piece of light rope to both sides of the hoop after the Beaver is attached. Pull the sides of the hoop in to create an oval shape. Run the rope so it is on the fur side of the skin. If pulled across the leather side it will leave a mark in the leather as it dries.

While most trappers use nails to secure the pelt to the board, some trappers prefer to use staples. However, if using staples, it is especially important that the fur be completely dry. This is because you won't be able to lift the pelt from the board 1/2" to create airflow as you would if using nails. To determine where to begin securing the pelt to the board, hold the pelt by the nose and let it hang naturally against a board that is marked with the pattern guide marks. The base of the pelt should drop approximately 2"-4" over the line that the Beaver will nail out at. Pelts are nailed leather up with nails spaced 1 inch apart. Number 6 common or box nails work well. Do not use rusty nails because they can rip the skin when removed. Reusing the same nails results in a good coat of grease on them and they work better. Nails should be driven in far enough to hold the pelt but loose enough to allow the nail to lean in as the pelt dries. Nailing should be started at the head, tail and midpoint on each side. Additional nails are added midway between the initial nails, cutting the distance in half around the pelt until complete. The lines marked on the board are intended as a guide only. Individual pelts may require nailing between guide lines to avoid overstretching. At this point the nose and lips can be trimmed off. Leg holes should be closed to give a neat, complete appearance. Leg holes can be nailed or sewn. Nailing is faster. However, if using nails, be careful not to overlap the skin as this could cause taint.

Boarded pelts should be dried slowly at 55° to 65°F [13° to 18°C]. Drying too quickly results in board-like leather. Do not dry the pelt next to direct heat, since this can burn the leather. Wipe away the oil that forms on the leather as the pelt dries. To determine when a pelt is completely dry, check the head area and the base of the tail, as these are usually the last areas to dry. Also, frost-dried pelts can sometimes appear to be dry when they are not. When the pelt is determined to be completely dry, remove the nails or staples. It is very important that all staples are removed. Staples that remain hidden in the fur can seriously cut anyone handling the pelt. Store the pelts in a cool, dry place. Pile them leather to leather and fur to fur. Always keep the pelts flat. Never roll or fold Beaver pelts.



### Tips from NAFA graders and collectors

1. Make sure that all excess grease and dirt has been removed from the fur.
2. Pelts should be thoroughly fleshed and fully dried.
3. Any holes should be sewn closed.



Poorly handled Beaver leg holes open, nail spacing too far apart.



Proper handled Beaver pelt.

## BEAVER CASTOREUM/CASTOR

By Ron Lancour

Beaver castors are quite valuable to the trapper if removed and handled properly. Although they are often called castor glands, they are not glands in the true sense of the word. The castor sacs are located between the pelvic bones of both male and female beaver along with the oil glands. For the commercial market only the castor sacs are of value. The oil glands are used mainly by trappers as a scent additive.

### USES

In the early 18th century beaver castor (castoreum) was believed to have many medicinal properties. Today it is an important ingredient used by the perfume industry. In perfume making, the term castoreum is more liberally applied to denote the resinoid extract resulting from the dried and alcohol tintured beaver castor. The dried beaver castor sacs are generally aged for two or more years to mellow and wait for their raw harshness to dissipate. In perfumery, castoreum has largely been used for a leathery long lasting scent.

Trappers also use castor in scent and lure preparation to be used at trap sets. Some minor uses are as a food additive, which is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

### SALE

Beaver castors are sold by private treaty to a limited customer base. If sold at auction, the expenses of buyers to attend the auction would considerably drop the price per ounce. The primary buyers are the European perfume industry. Some castors are sold into Pakistan and India but the actual use is unknown.

### GRADING

There are three grades of castor.

#1 - Castor is a clean, full, firm, dry pod.

#2 - Castor is a semi full, dry pod.

#3 - Castor is small immature pods and shells.

### REMOVAL

Once the beaver has been pelted the castors can be located between the pelvic bones at the base of the tail. Lift the meat above the castor and make a small cut, careful not to cut the castor sac. Then use your fingers peel away and separate the meaty membrane and fat from the castor sac. Repeat on the other side. Now you have two pods attached in the middle. Cut away from the carcass so as to keep the pods intact. Give them a twist to close off the opening. DO NOT tie them with wire or string. Do not remove the oil glands with the castors; there is no commercial market for these.

### DRYING & HANDLING

The pods can now be hung up to dry over a nail or wire. Turn the pods after a couple of days so as to dry the part where the two pods were touching. They can also be dried on a wire screen rack. Dry in a well ventilated spot. Turn frequently to ensure equal drying and drying spots that may be touching each other. After six to ten days the castors can be wrapped in newspaper, put in a plastic bag, and frozen in a deep freeze.

### SHIPPING

A couple of days prior to shipping remove them from the deep freeze and spread out to dry the accumulated frost. Once dry wrap in newspaper, burlap, or a mesh bag (onion sack) and then pack in a cardboard box for shipping. DO NOT ship in a plastic bag, and DO NOT ship wet castors, they will spoil (rot) in shipping.

### RECEIVING and HANDLING

Upon receipt, castoreum is identified by owner, placed in a well-ventilated wire cubical or hung up in a mesh bag until it is graded. Once graded, each grade is weighed and recorded. This is the final weight and shippers are paid accordingly.

# MUSKRAT (MUSQUASH)

Musk rats are the most common fur-bearer found in North America and for many trappers it's the first animal they learn to trap. The Muskrat is easily caught, has a beautiful fur, and is one of the easier animals to pelt and board. So whether you are a diehard Rat trapper or just a beginner, the Muskrat is a great animal to target.



*Well handled Muskrats notice the sides are pinned down to get the maximum length the nose is also pinned to keep it from sliding over the top of the board. These Muskrats are put up on wood. When using wire you can use clothes pins to achieve the same results.*

## TRAPPING

Checking traps daily will result in Muskrats that can almost be shaken dry when pulled from the water. If left in the trap for two or three days, the natural oils in the fur can no longer repel water and the fur will become saturated. The Muskrat is then harder to dry and often times the belly area may start to taint. Conibear and Colony traps should be painted or dyed, as rusty traps can leave stains on the fur. It is important that Colony traps be set completely under water so that the muskrat will drown quickly. If more than one Muskrat is alive in the trap, biting is likely which will cause pelt damage. The biting that results in the spring mating season can severely reduce pelt value. When it is apparent that a high percentage of Muskrat are damaged from bites, it is a good time to quit trapping and leave what is left for breeding stock. A second sign that it is getting too late in the spring to trap is the appearance of what are called "kidney spots". These are light or yellow colored egg-size patches on the leather over the kidney area that will appear as the pelts dry. This is a sign of shedding and as the spots grow darker the pelt is reduced further in value.

## PELTING (SKINNING)

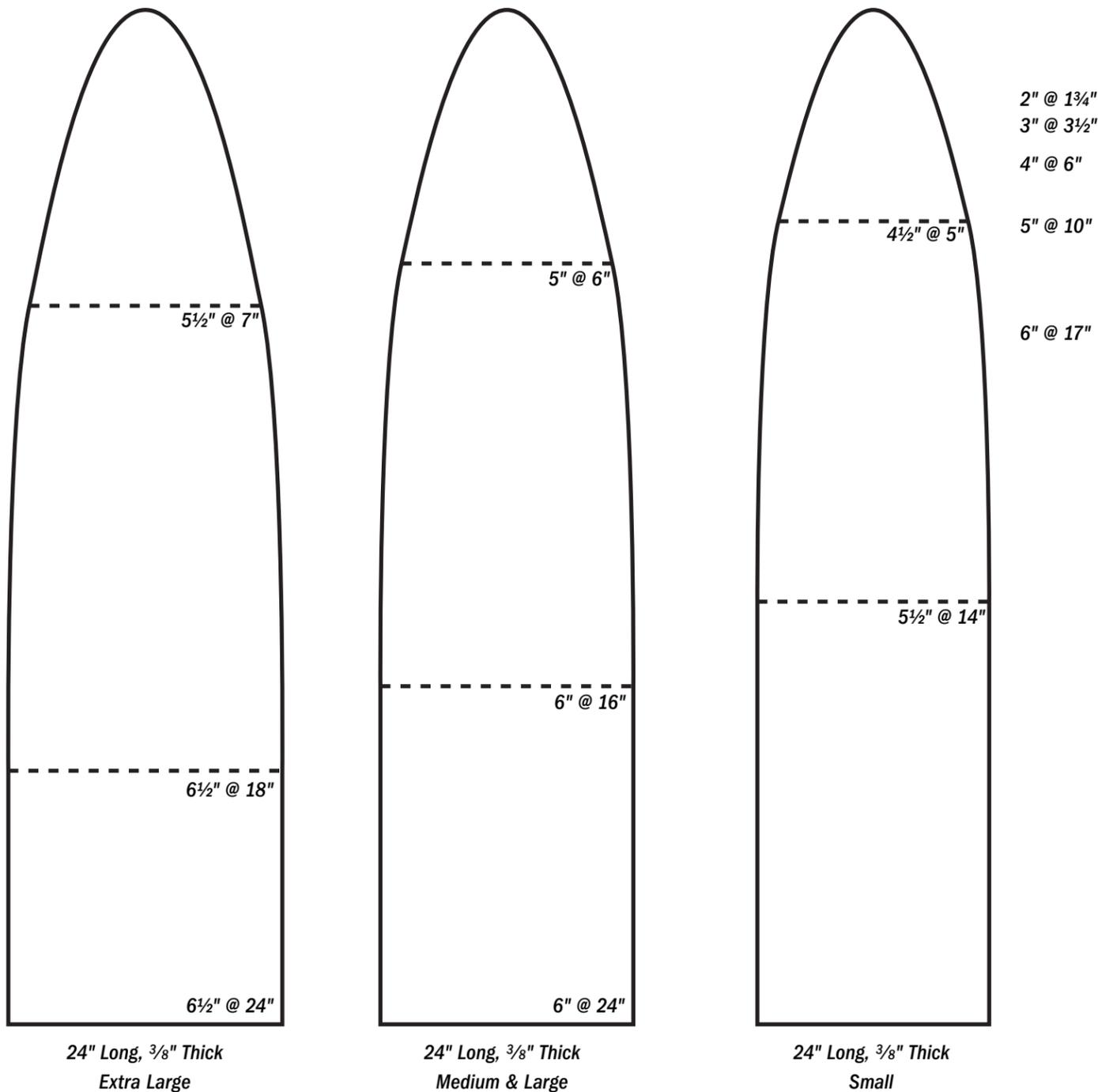
It is best to have Muskrats dry before pelting. They dry better on the carcass. This is easily accomplished by hanging them in a dry area with good air movement. Some trappers will also run a dehumidifier to shorten the drying time.

Begin pelting by removing the front feet with a pair of side cutters. For the opening cut, most trappers will lay the Muskrat on its back on the skinning bench. Hold the hind foot and with a sharply pointed knife cut from the heel to the underside of the tail and then continue the cut to the other heel. Next, turn the Muskrat onto its belly and push the knife through on the underside of where the back fur and the top part of the tail meet. The knife cut should include an inch or so of the top section of the Muskrats tail that is attached to the back of the pelt. Now the hind legs can be worked free from the pelt. At this point the muskrat can be hung by the hind legs and tail to finish the pelting process. Work the pelt free to the front shoulder, and then pull the front legs free. Use care to not open up a large hole when cutting around the ears and eyes. Finally, cut the nose so it is left on the pelt.

## FLESHING

A dull scraper is used to remove all the fat and grease as well as any excess meat. Some trappers do this on a fur board, while others will put the skin on a small beam for fleshing before boarding. Either method is fine. Most Muskrats only have excess fat on the underside of the front legs and belly area. Do not remove the red membrane covering the leather. This membrane prevents the hair roots from being exposed and will protect the leather from becoming too dry and papery.

# MUSKRAT BOARDS



One piece board—use belly stick, round the edges.

## BOARDING

Muskrats are boarded leather out. Make sure the fur is thoroughly dry before boarding. If boarded wet the fur tends to get matted. This makes it harder for the grader to determine fur quality during the grading process. Wet boarded fur can also cause the pelt to taint or the fur to slip. It is the trapper's preference whether to use wire or wood forms. Both work well. By following the NAFA board patterns you will ensure your pelts are dried to the proper size.

When using wire, be sure the Muskrat is centered on the form. Pin the nose with a clothespin to keep it from sliding over the form. Pull the sides down making sure they are even and hook the tail by placing the hook in the piece of tail leather that was left on the pelt. Use care not to overstretch the pelt. Pin both sides with clothespins. This keeps the sides from sliding up the form. This is important because the Muskrat will be measured for size from the nose to the shortest side. This is where a wooden form can give the trapper a larger size because on wood the sides are pinned and cannot slide up the form. The best method for putting a muskrat on a wooden form is to, center the Muskrat on the form. Pin the nose. Pull the sides down evenly and pin them and Pin the tail last.

Hang to dry away from direct heat with good air flow. Under proper conditions, drying will take two or three days. After drying remove the pelts from the forms, wipe the leather down with an old towel or burlap to remove oils or grease, and store in a cool dark place until ready to ship to NAFA. If you need to keep your pelts for an extended period of time they can be stored in the freezer. Place the pelts in a plastic bag (multiple pelts can be stored in the same bag) and remove as much air as possible. They should be removed from the freezer a few days before shipping and hung to remove any excess moisture.

## STANDARD SIZES

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
3XL	Over 17"
2XL	15.5" – 17"
XL	14" – 15.5"
LGE	13" – 14"
MED	11.5" – 13"
SML	10" – 11.5"
X-SM	Under 10"

# MARTEN (SABLE)

## TRAPPING- HANDLING IN THE FIELD

When setting Marten traps, select places that will avoid the trapped animal coming in contact with resin from coniferous trees. Often times resin matts in the fur cannot be removed, and if bad enough they can affect the fur grade. The 120 Conibear-style trap is the most common trap used for Marten. These traps should be painted or dyed so that rust marks are not left on the fur. The traps should be set so the dog of the trap fires away from the animal, because the sharp edge of the dog can cause pelt damage. Position the trigger so the marten does not get too far into the trap before the trap is fired. The perfect strike with Conibear-style traps is one jaw just behind the head. A marten caught with a double strike (one in the belly and one behind the head) will taint quickly in the area of the belly strike. Marten will also taint quickly if the temperatures are not cold enough to freeze the dead animal, so if the weather is warmer traps need to be checked more often. Remove frozen Marten from the traps carefully to avoid pulling fur.

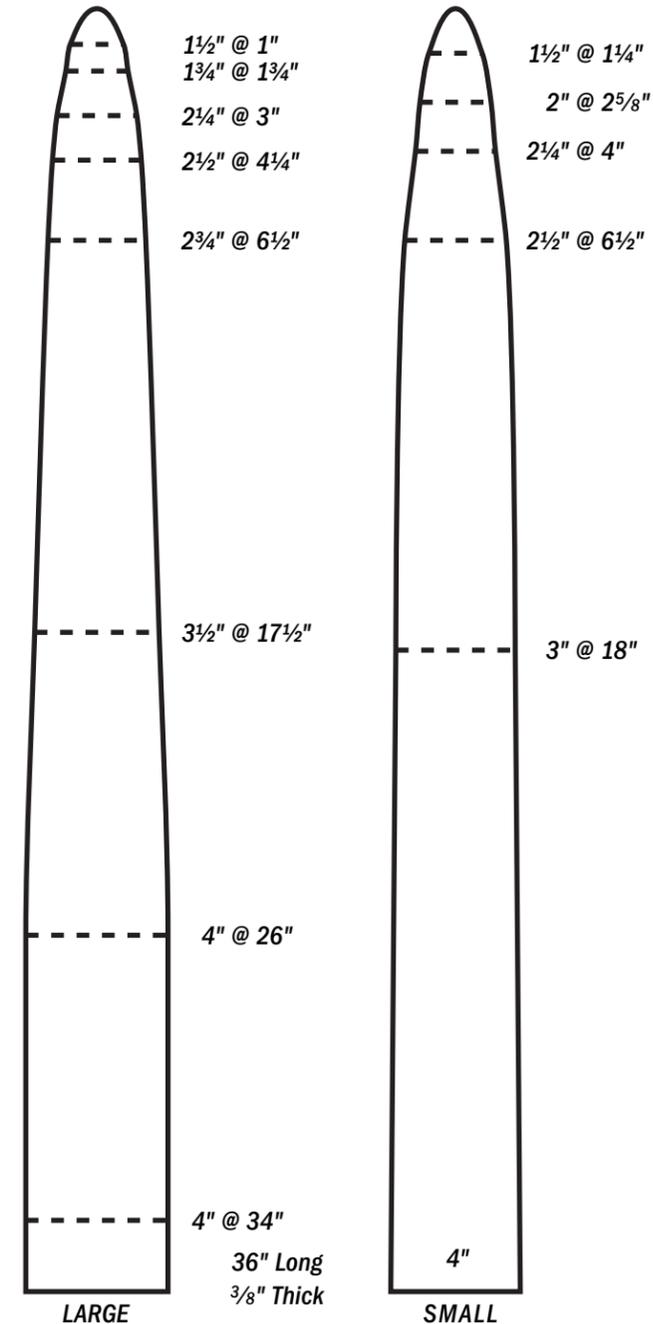
## PELTING AND BOARDING

Marten should be pelted as soon as possible to avoid taint. The fur should be dry and lightly combed prior to pelting. If an animal must be dried before skinning it should be hung by its hind legs. This allows the belly contents to drop into the chest cavity and will help prevent spoiling, which can cause the fur to slip.

Marten are case skinned. The opening cuts should extend from the center of the hind foot to just below the anus and across to the opposite foot. This places all the long guard hair found on the back legs onto the back of the pelt, maximizing pelt length. The feet should not be left on the pelt because the claws are sharp. They add no value to the pelt, and if left on they can cut the fur handlers and possibly cause the pelt to rip in the drumming process. The lower lip should also be removed. It adds no value and it easier for the pelt to be ticketed by a NAFA agent if the lip is absent. The tail should be split to allow proper drying. Marten need little in the way of fleshing but fat or flesh on the pelt should be removed before boarding. Also at this time any holes can be sewn. Wood forms are best for boarding Marten. Use the NAFA recommended dimensions when making or buying boards.

The pelt is first placed on the board leather out. Marten pelts dry quickly and require turning of the pelt fur side out relatively soon after boarding. The front legs should be left inside when the pelt is turned. This will keep them from catching on the drumming machines and causing pelt damage. The use of a belly board will help the pelt dry faster, and will also make it easier to remove the pelt from the board once it is dried. The pelt should be left on the board until completely dry. Resin matts should not be cut out. If a matt cannot be removed without the loss of guard hair or under fur, leave it in. Some resin matts will dissolve in the dressing process. The NAFA grader will make this determination. Marten should not be packed in the same shipping bags with leather-out skins to keep the fur clean of grease and oil when shipping.

# MARTEN BOARDS



XXL boards may be made using a 4 1/2" base.

A tapered belly board is required for solid boards (no more than 3/4" wide tapering to 1/4").

## STANDARD SIZES

(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)

SIZE	LENGTH
2XL	Over 23"
XL	21"-23"
LGE	18"-21"
M	16"-18"
SM	Under 16"

# FOX & COYOTE

Fox and Coyote are harvested by trappers in most areas of the US and Canada. They provide more of a challenge to catch than many of the other furbearers. There is a wide range of colors and fur densities depending on the geographical region they are harvested in. In most areas full primeness will be early to mid-November and the fur will stay prime until mid to late February. Pelts taken late in the season can start to get “rubbed”. This is a loss of guard hair in the rump area, and depending on the severity could result in considerable reduction in value.

## HANDLING IN THE FIELD

Traps and snares should not be set in locations where the animal will come in contact with burrs and mud. If using a snare, kill snares are best to use to avoid pelt damage but only if they are legal in your trapping area. Traps and snares should be checked on a regular basis to keep the possibility of taint minimal. The belly area of Fox and Coyote can taint quickly if the weather is warm. Remove snares carefully. Try not to pull out any fur that may be tangled in the cable. Freshly killed animals should not be piled on top of each other. Lay them out separately so the body heat can escape. Pelt animals as quickly as possible after trapping. If the animal cannot be skinned the same day it is caught, it is best to hang them by a hind foot in a cool place. This will allow the stomach to fall into the chest cavity and will help to keep the belly from tainting.

Fox and Coyote can be heavily loaded with fleas. This is very true in the dry areas of the West. A good method for flea removal is to place the animal in a large plastic garbage bag and spray Raid or some brand of flea killer in the bag. Tie the bag closed. This will kill the fleas in ten to fifteen minutes and will not harm the pelt.

## PELTING (SKINNING)

Fox and Coyote are case skinned. The most commonly asked questions about pelting Fox and Coyote pertain to the front legs, the tail, and the head area.

There is no value in the front legs. Leave enough leg to protect the pelt from tearing but cut the legs short enough so they don't create a problem when drying. The legs can be cut at the elbow and left inside the pelt when it is turned. The claws should NOT be left on the pelt.

The tail bone should be pulled out when skinning and then the tail should be split so it can properly dry. Tails should not be cut off. The pelts look better complete with the tail, and if there is no portion of the tail extending from the butt the pelt will be graded Slight Damage.

Ear cartilage should be removed completely so the ears will dry thoroughly. They can be pinned folded forward when the pelt is boarded. The nose stays on the pelt. This helps to keep the pelt from sliding over the nose of the form. The lower lip should be trimmed off.

Before you begin with the opening cuts, comb out any mud or burrs from the fur. Be careful not to remove any fur in the process. With the animal on the skinning bench cut around the front legs just below the elbow. Cut from each hind foot to the vent along the natural line between the white belly fur and the darker fur. Cut around the vent. Use your fingers and thumb to work the hide free from the hind legs and cut it free next to the hind foot. Hang the animal from the skinning gamble. Using a tail stripper, pull the tail bone from the tail and split the tail with a sharp knife. Work the pelt all the way down to the front legs, carefully using a knife where needed. Use your fingers to pull the front legs out and free them from the pelt. Pull the pelt to the head, pulling until the ear cartilage is exposed. This is the best time to remove the cartilage from the ear. Do this by inserting a screwdriver between the ear and the skull. Pull the screwdriver straight down to separate the fur from the cartilage. This will leave only the fur from the back of the ear on the pelt. Carefully cut the eyes free. Cut the nose, leaving it on the pelt. The lower lip should be trimmed off.

## FLESHING

Fox and Coyote taken in some regions have very little fat to remove, while animals in other regions have considerably more. This is true more with Gray Fox and Coyote than with Red Fox. A fleshing beam and the dull side of a two-handled fleshing knife are the best tools to use. It's important the pelt be free of burrs, blood, and mud, because foreign objects in the fur could cause the fleshing knife to cut through the leather. Use care not to over-scrape the pelt and expose the hair roots.

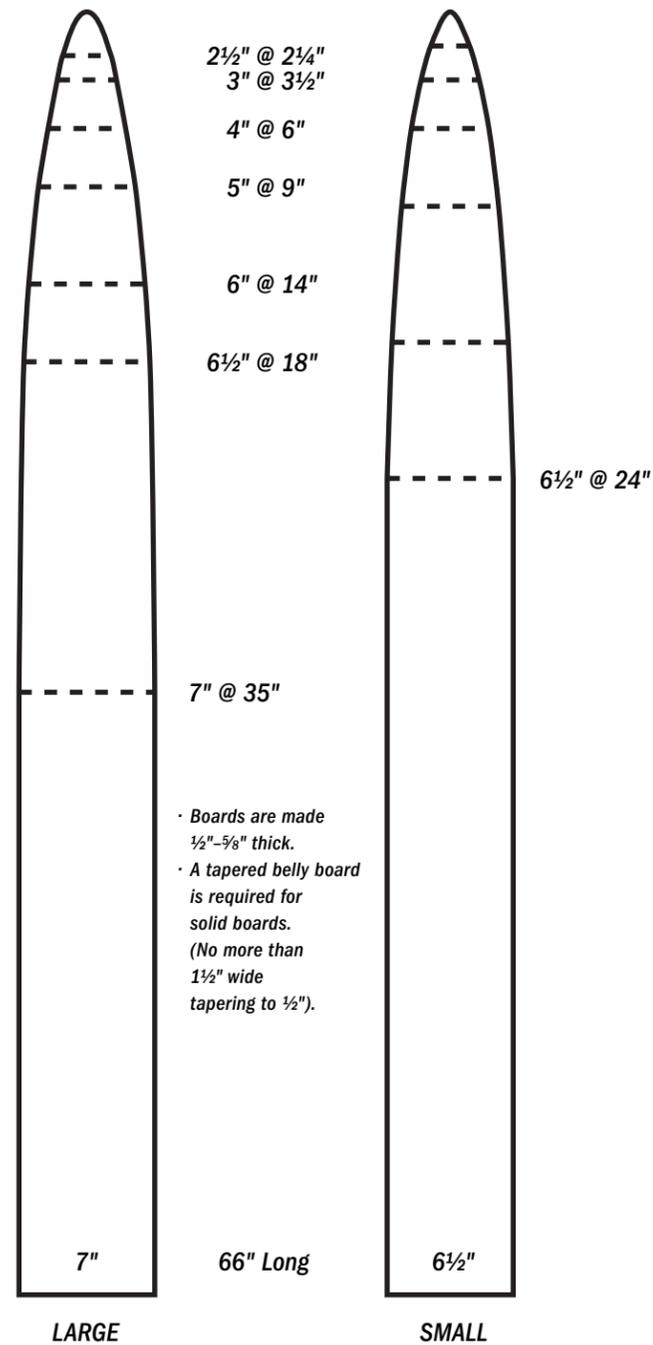
## BOARDING

Wooden boards are far superior to wire forms in maximizing the size and improving the appearance of the pelts. Whether using split or solid boards, make sure they are not too wide. Correct board measurements are crucial in the handling of these pelts. Use the NAFA size chart to obtain the correct measurements. Two of the biggest concerns with boarding are using boards that are too wide, and pulling too hard on the hind legs when pinning. Both of these actions will weaken hair density, particularly in average or poor quality pelts.

Coyote and Fox pelts are placed on wooden boards, leather out, and dried until the head is almost dry, then turned fur out and returned to the boards until thoroughly dried. The front legs can remain inside the pelt when turning, provided they are thoroughly dried. Leaving the legs inside the pelt greatly reduces the chance of the front legs tearing across the shoulder area during drumming and shaking.

When the pelt has been removed from the board, wipe any excess oil from the leather and brush the fur. Make sure the pelt is completely dried, especially the ears, legs, and armpits. Pelts should be stored in a cool location to avoid possible damage by small rodents. When bagging Coyote pelts for shipping, fold at the head and tuck the tail inside the pelt. This way the pelt will fit nicely into the bag and will keep the fur more full and natural than if it is folded in the middle.

# FOX BOARDS



Two sizes of Fox boards will fit most red or coloured Foxes.

Fox boards are narrow at the nose and neck to accommodate the pointed nose of the Fox. If boards are made too wide at the head and neck, Fox will be too short and wide.



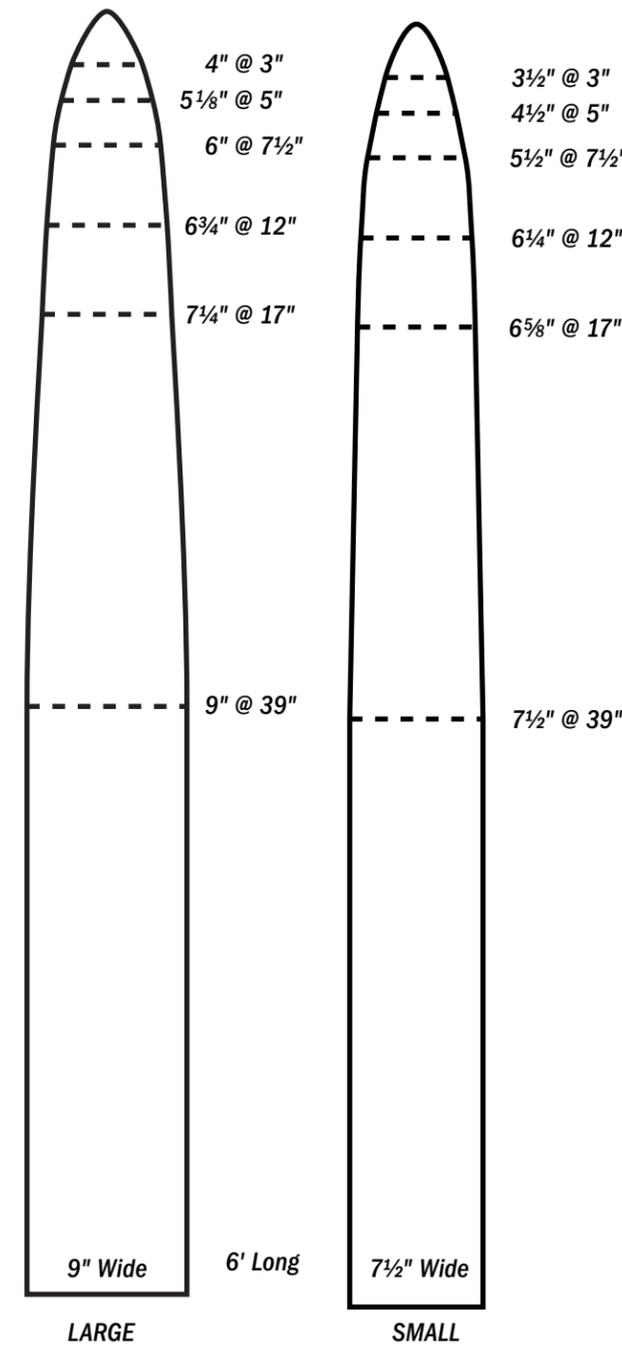
Red Fox, proper removal of ear cartilage to avoid taint.



1. Proper Handling  
Lower lip removed  
and front legs inside.

2. Improper Handling  
Front legs and left out,  
rear legs too long,  
lower lip not removed.

# COYOTE BOARDS



Coyote boards are made ½" or 5/8" thick. A tapered belly board is required for solid boards (no more than 1½" wide, tapering to ½", about 42" long).



Placement of the screw driver to help in the removal of the ear cartilage.

## STANDARD SIZES GREY FOX

(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)

SIZE	LENGTH
XL-L	Over 25"
M-SM	Under 25"

## STANDARD SIZES RED FOX

(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)

SIZE	LENGTH
XL-L	Over 28"
M-SM	Under 28"

## STANDARD SIZES COYOTE

(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)

SIZE	LENGTH
2XL	Over 42"
XL-L	36" - 42"
M-SM	Under 36"

# LYNX AND LYNX CAT (BOBCAT)

Most all Lynx are harvested in Canada, while Lynx Cat, commonly referred to as Bobcat by most trappers, are harvested throughout much of the US and Canada. They can both bring very high prices compared to some of the other wild fur species. The most valuable Lynx Cats have clear white bellies with distinct black spots. These usually come from areas in the West.

## PELTING AND BOARDING

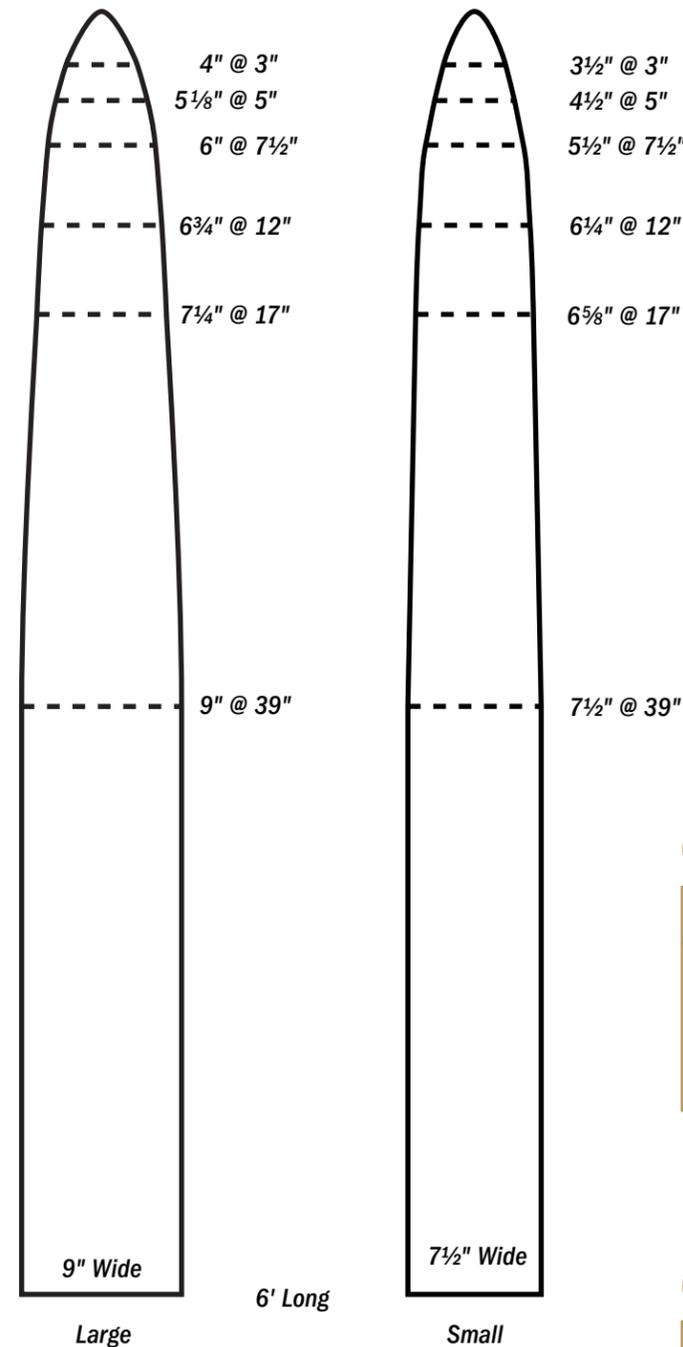
Both species are thin leathered so fur handlers need to use care when skinning and fleshing so the pelt is not damaged by tearing or cutting. The claws on both species are very sharp and the feet should be removed. Claws add no fur value, and if left on, can rip pelts in the drumming process and seriously injure fur graders. The front and hind feet on Bobcat are cut at the ankle, while the Lynx are cut at the elbow. The black and white pattern on the legs of the Bobcat is of value to the pelt.

Cats are case skinned with the same opening cuts as Fox. To help in the removal and drying of the front legs, cut the back side of the front leg from the ankle to within two inches of the body. Cutting too close to the body can result in the pelt ripping in that area during the turning or drumming process. All fat and flesh should be removed from the pelt before boarding. Most cats will need very little in the way of fleshing. Cat pelts are boarded on the same forms as Coyote and are first boarded leather out, with the split front legs spread out and pinned to cardboard. Otherwise they can fold together and will not dry. Be certain the neck area is almost dry before turning the pelt. If Cat pelts are turned too soon, the neck will wrinkle during the final stages of the drying process. Front legs on the nicely spotted western cats can be turned to the outside of the pelt and pinned down flat to the belly, a small board can be inserted in the leg, if needed, to insure that it dries flat. The front legs on the weaker quality Cats are often left inside the pelt when the pelt is turned. This helps the pelt feel heavier in the back area. It is the trapper's choice when preparing the front legs; both methods are acceptable and will not affect the grade. A belly board will help the skin get more air in the final drying stages and make it easier to remove the pelt from the board when completely dry.

## SHIPPING

To ensure that your fur out pelts do not come in contact with oil and grease, pack fur out pelts with other fur out pelts, and leather out pelts with other leather out pelts.

## LYNX, LYNX CAT BOARDS



Lynx, Lynx Cat boards are made 1/2" or 5/8" thick.  
A tapered belly board is required for solid boards  
(no more than 1 1/2" wide, tapering to 1/2", about 42" long).

## STANDARD SIZES LYNX

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
XL	Over 39"
LGE	35" – 39"
MED	31" – 35"
SML	Under 31"

## STANDARD SIZES LYNX CAT

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
3XL	Over 44"
2XL	40" -44"
XL	36" – 40"
LGE	32" – 36"
MED	28" – 32"
SM	Under 28"

# FISHER

Most Fishers are harvested in Canada and northern New England states. Through good conservation efforts, reintroduction programs, and wildlife management practices, Fisher populations are expanding into many states including Pennsylvania, New York, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, some of which now have limited Fisher seasons and are harvesting Fisher.

## HANDLING IN THE FIELD

Fisher, especially the males, are strong animals. Make absolutely certain Conibear-style traps have springs powerful enough to render the animal immediately unconscious when the trigger is released. Make certain the traps are dyed or painted, as rusty traps may leave a mark on the fur that will be difficult to remove during the dressing process. Conibear-style traps set in boxes should be set so the dog is on the jaw that folds away from the Fisher when fired. Also it is a good idea to use wired triggers on 220-size traps. This will prevent small female Fisher from getting too far into the trap before it is fired, which can result in an inhumane hip catch and excessive fur damage. Remove Fisher carefully from Conibear-style traps to avoid damage or pulling of guard hair and underfur. Transport Fisher with care and make every effort to keep the fur from coming into contact with freezing metal, especially if the fur is damp. Placing Fisher in canvas or burlap bags will alleviate this as well as keep the fur clean.

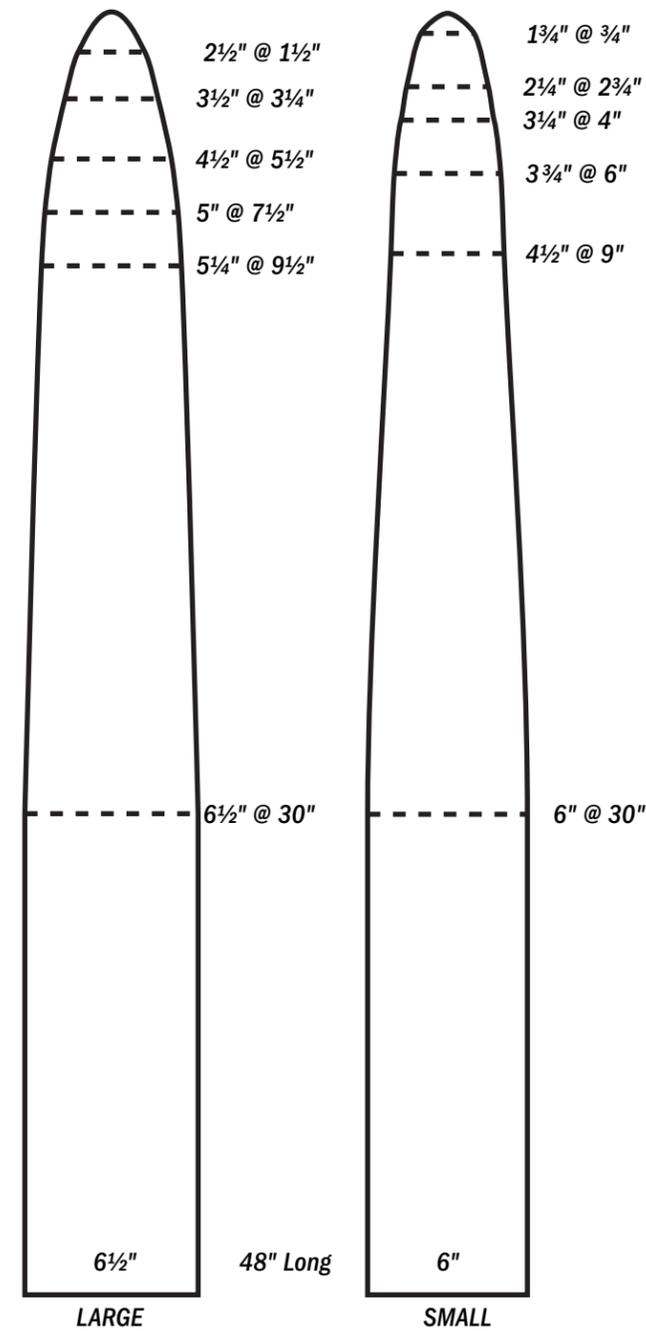
## PELTING AND BOARDING

Fisher are case skinned. Pelt Fisher as soon as possible. This is because they taint quickly, especially in the abdominal regions. Fisher need to be dry and clean before pelting. If you need to hang a Fisher to dry, it's best to hang them by their back legs so the contents of the stomach fall into the chest cavity. Lightly comb out the animal before skinning. Fisher often have porcupine quills in them and these should be pulled during the handling process.

The opening cut should extend from the center of the hind foot to just below the anus, and out to the opposite foot. The tail bone should be pulled so the tail can properly dry. Claws should be removed on both front and hind feet. Front legs can be cut off just below the elbow. When fleshing Fisher, thoroughly remove all fat, grease, and flesh. Fisher grease-burn very easily. Fisher found to be grease-burnt lose their value dramatically. If pine pitch cannot be successfully removed from the fur without pulling out guard hair and underfur, it is strongly recommended to leave these resin matts alone. Under no circumstances cut or trim matts.

It is very important that Fisher are boarded fur-side out. Due to the wide range of grades, colors, and clarities, Fisher are marketed as a fur-out pelt. There are two different sized Fisher boards recommended by NAFA. The use of a belly wedge will help in the drying process. When turning Fisher leave the front legs inside the pelt. This greatly reduces the chances of the front legs tearing during the drumming process. Do not dry Fisher pelts too quickly or where it is too warm. Pelts that have dried too quickly become very stiff, especially the males. Dry them relatively slowly in temperatures between 55° to 65° F [13° to 18° C]. When lower temperatures are used for drying fur, a circulation of air is necessary. An inexpensive box fan can be used, but do not direct airflow directly onto the pelt.

## FISHER BOARDS



*Small and Medium Fisher are both boarded on the small boards.*

*A tapered belly board is required for solid boards (no more than 3/4" wide tapering to 1/4").*



*Well-handled fisher pelts these pelt will be turned fur out and re-boarded to finish the drying process.*

## STANDARD SIZES

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
LGE	Over 28"
MED	25" – 28"
SML*	Under 25"

(\*Females only)

# RIVER OTTER

An equal number of River Otters are harvested in Canada and the US each year. Major areas of harvest are Ontario, Louisiana, Quebec, Manitoba, Florida, Georgia and Alaska. In the US, a combination of loss of habitat, environmental pollution and over-harvesting had limited the areas where Otter could be trapped. However, reintroduction efforts in many states have been a great success. Through conservation efforts, reintroduction programs and good wildlife management practices, there are many more States opening up limited Otter seasons.

Dressed Otter fur is very durable and beautiful and wears extremely well. In fact it is the standard against which other furs are rated for durability. However, the fur when in the raw or undressed state is very delicate and the guard hair is susceptible to singe. Most singe in Otter pelts is avoidable with proper care.

## SINGE

Simply explained, singe is the curling of the tips of the guard hair. It is caused by excessive dry heat, strong direct sunlight, and artificial heat sources, stroking of dry fur, fur coming into contact with frozen metal and by the Otter itself in late season. Singed guard hair reflects light differently than straight hair, making it impossible for the garment maker to match a singed fur in with an unsinged fur. This effectively eliminates the pelt from being used naturally. Although late season Otter can become naturally singed, it is the trapper or pelt handler that causes singe most of the time. Singed Otter pelts are plucked and sheared for other uses. Because of this singed Otter can see a considerable reduction in value, depending on the amount of singe and utilization of the pelt.

## HANDLING IN THE FIELD

In order to avoid singe, keep the Otter damp at all times, don't place it close to heat, and protect it from contact with frozen metal. Otherwise, the same practices that are used on beavers apply to Otters.

## PELTING (SKINNING)

Otter are case skinned. A spray bottle with plain water is a great help when handling Otter. Start by wetting the Otter from head to tail with a fine mist, then comb out the fur to remove any dirt, mud, or mats. Opening cuts are from the underside of each hind foot to just below the anus. Next, cut around the anus to the tip of the tail. Cutting just below the anus will help create a good inspection window when the pelt is boarded. It is also helpful to cut around each front foot at the first joint. This will make it easier when you pull the front legs out and will insure your cut is in the right place. Care should be taken not to cut any holes in the leather. The saddle and much of the fat can stay with the leather. This will be removed in the fleshing process.

## FLESHING AND BOARDING

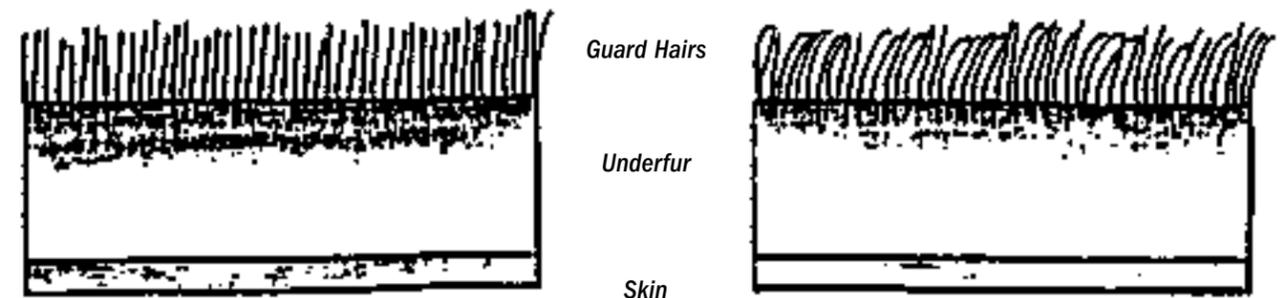
Fleshing is best done on a beam with the use of a good sharp two handled fleshing knife. Make sure your beam is clean and free of fat or grease. With your spray bottle wet the beam before putting the Otter on it. Start with the sharp side of your knife just below the head. The Otter will have a "saddle" which is a thin layer of red flesh on its back. Unlike Mink and Muskrat, where the saddle is left on the leather, the Otter has too much fat under the saddle, and therefore it must be removed. The use of sawdust is helpful to keep the grease out of the fur. Putting clean sawdust on the pelt as you flesh will soak up most of the oil and grease. The Otter must be fleshed clean of fat and flesh including the tail and belly areas.

Otter are boarded fur in. Wooden boards are by far the best choice for putting Otter up and marking your boards for length at each size is also very helpful. When placing the Otter on the board make sure it is well centered. Tapping the board on the floor a few times will help to seat the skin on the form. Before you start to tack the otter out, check the length lines that are marked on your board. Measure at the base of the tail. Many trappers will try to pull a skin to a larger size. This over-stretching can thin the fur density of the pelt. When the pelt is removed from the form it will shrink some. An example is an Otter that is snug and just falls on the 38" line. By moving it up the board to 37" it will still sell as the same size but you have not thinned the fur by over stretching. The next step is to begin tacking out the pelt. Start with a tack or two beside the base of the tail to hold the length where you want it, then tack out the tail. Some trappers will tack the tail short and wide, while others will tack the tail out long. Both methods are fine and do not affect the grade or size. If you do tack the tail long don't pull it to the point of thinning the fur in the inspection area. Tack the back legs onto the back side of the board next to the tail. This will help to make a nice inspection area that needs little trimming of the belly. Next, turn the board, trim the belly if needed, and insert a belly wedge. Dry away from direct heat between 55° to 65° F [13° to 18° C] with some air movement. Keep the oil that forms on the skin wiped down. In these conditions drying will take 3 to 5 days. After the skin is completely dry, remove from the board. Tuck the tail inside the pelt. This will help to protect the inspection area. Store in a cool dry place and away from direct sun light.

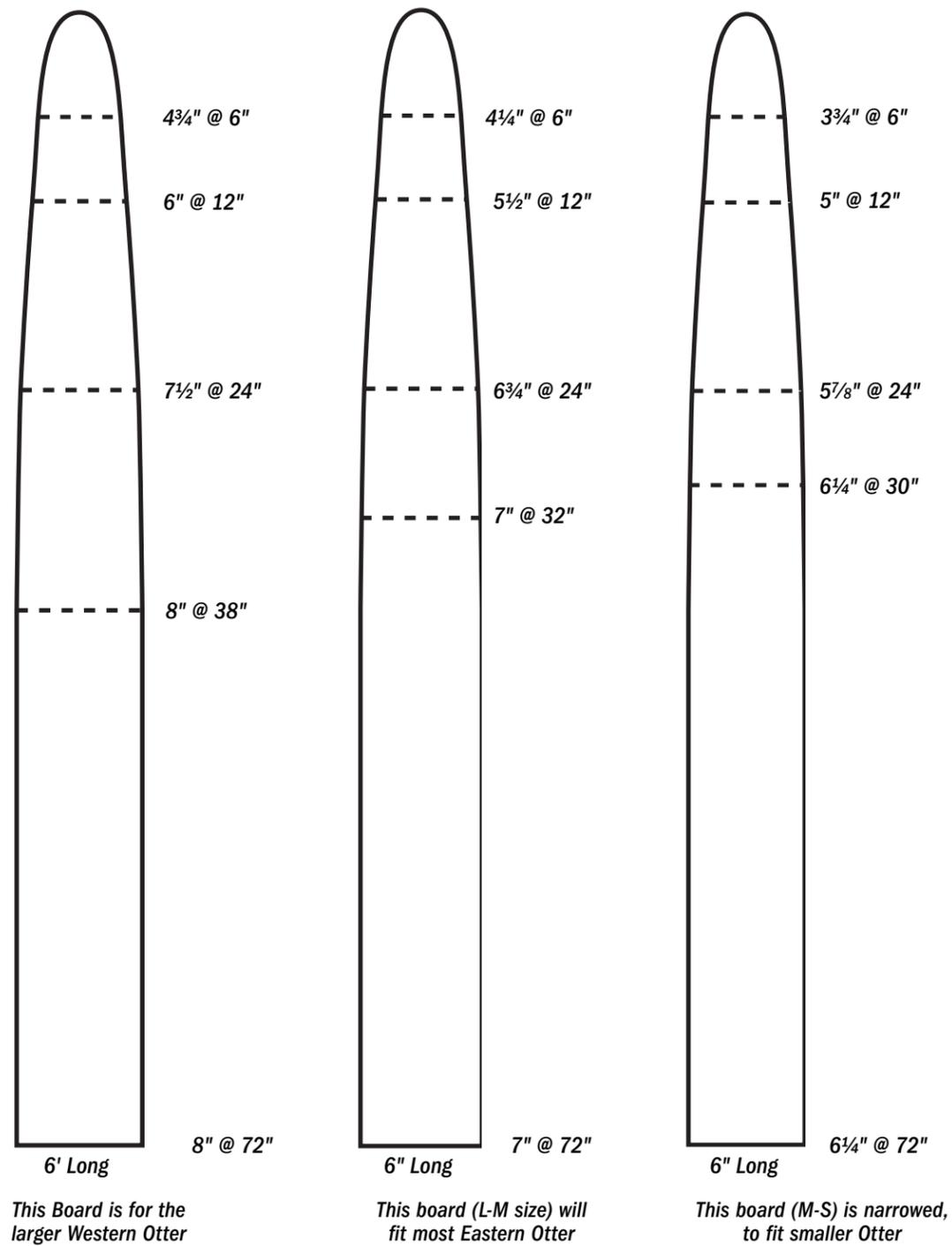
### PROFILES OF STRAIGHT AND SINGED GUARD HAIRS OF RIVER OTTERS

*Guard Hairs Are Straight:  
The Otter Is Not Singed.*

*Tips Of The Guard Hairs Are Curled:  
The Otter Is Singed.*



# OTTER BOARDS



Boards are made 1/2"-3/8" thick.

A tapered belly board is required for solid boards.  
(No more than 1 1/2" wide tapering to 1/2" )

## Tips from NAFA graders and collectors

1. One of the biggest problems the NAFA graders experience while handling Otter pelts is the lack of an inspection window. To get a good inspection window, the opening cut is very important. Tacking the hind legs to the back of the board will help to create a good inspection window. Lastly, trim the window area on the belly side of the pelt so it is open from just below the penis on males or the same area on females. Always be careful to not take fur from the flank. Trimming needs to be done when the pelt is first boarded NOT after it is dried.



Poorly handled Otter no inspection window tail to narrow legs pinned to the belly side of the form Pelt had to be cut so it could be graded.



Proper handled good inspection window.

## STANDARD SIZES

(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)

SIZE	LENGTH
3XL	Over 42"
2XL	40" – 42"
XL	38" – 40"
LGE	34" – 38"
MED	32" – 34"
SML	32" – 30"
X-SM	Under 30"

# WILD MINK

## TRAPPING AND HANDLING IN THE FIELD

Conibear style traps should be painted or dyed so that they do not leave rust marks on the fur. Most Mink are harvested on or near water, so clean the animal on the trapline if possible by rinsing the mud and silt out of the fur. Clean fur dries faster and looks better. On winter traplines wet mink can be rolled in snow, since the snow will absorb the water from the fur and help it dry. Use care not to put wet Mink on metal objects in cold weather since the fur can freeze and cause guard hair to be pulled from the pelt.

## PELTING (SKINNING)

All Mink should be dry and combed clean of burrs, mud, and dirt. Begin the pelting process by cutting off the front feet just above the wrist joint. This will make it easier when you pull the front legs free. The opening cut will run from the underside of one hind foot to the opposite foot just under the vent. The best way to do this and ensure a straight cut is to secure one hind foot and pull on the other. This method makes it very easy to get a good opening cut. Next you can cut around the vent and pull the tail bone out with the use of a tail puller. Now work the pelt off the carcass. The front legs will pull easily because the front feet were removed earlier. Use care around the head when cutting the eyes and ears free. The lower lip should also be trimmed off.

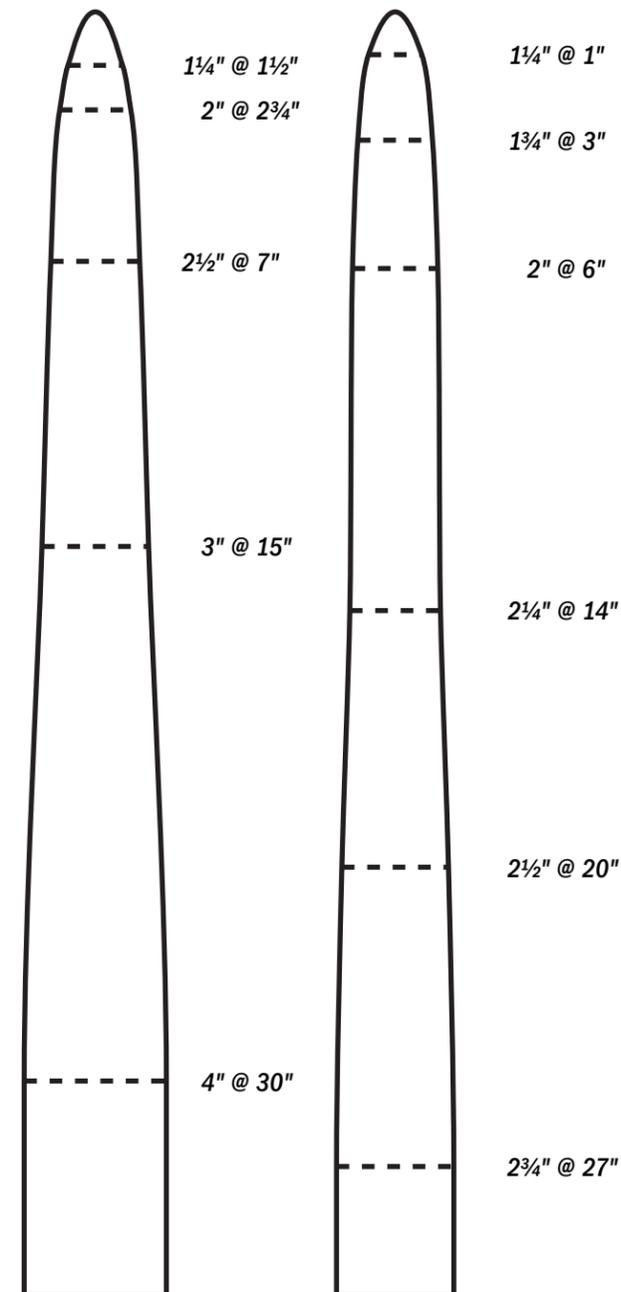
## FLESHING AND BOARDING

Mink can be fleshed on a board or a beam. Use a dull fleshing tool to remove the fat around the front legs and the belly. Do not remove the saddle from the pelt, as it helps to protect the hair roots from damage. Occasionally Mink will have excessive fat underneath the saddle. If this is the case, lightly scrape the area to push the fat out from beneath the saddle or remove the saddle completely and using care not nick or damage the leather. Keep the fleshing beam clean and be careful not to allow any fat or oil to come in contact with the fur.

Mink are boarded fur-side in. Wooden forms are best for Mink. Follow the NAFA guidelines for board sizes. Male Mink should be boarded on male boards, and likewise females should be boarded on female boards. There is no advantage for a trapper to board a small male mink on a female board. Boarding males on female boards will result in the pelt being downgraded in size. Marking your boards with sizes will help to ensure that you don't overstretch the pelt.

Center the pelt on the board. Pin the hind legs onto the back of the board next to the tail. This will create a natural inspection window. Next, pin the base of the pelt between the tail and hind legs, creating a square skirt. Pin the tail. Don't pull the tail, because this can reduce fur density in the inspection area. Another method is to pin wire mesh or cardboard over the tail. This is the handler's preference. Finally, tuck the front legs into the pelt. Excess leg length may need to be trimmed. Use of a belly board is important, because it makes the pelt easy to remove after drying. Dry the pelt away from direct heat with adequate air circulation. Most Mink will require 2-3 days to fully dry, depending on shed conditions. Excess oil should be wiped down when the pelts are removed from the forms. Store in a cool, dry place until ready to ship.

# WILD MINK BOARDS



**MALES**  
36" Long  
3/8" Thick

**FEMALES**  
30" Long  
3/8" Thick

*If there is fat under the saddle, remove the fat or remove the saddle completely without making nicks/cuts in the leather.*

*Board the Mink correctly—Male Mink on male board, Female on Female board.*

*Place the hind feet on the same side as the tail and do not overstretch the hind feet or the tail.*



*Good Inspection Window shortened tail increases hair density.*

*Pleating increases hair density hind legs are on same side as tail.*



*Initial Cut for Pelting.*

## STANDARD SIZES (MALE)

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
XL - LGE	Over 21"
LM	19 – 21"

## STANDARD SIZES (FEMALE)

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
MED	Over 17"
SM	Under 17"

# WOLVES, BEARS AND WOLVERINES

## PROPER PELT HANDLING FOR THE AUCTION HOUSE;

### Pelt usage in the Fur Trade

One of the upmost important considerations when preparing your pelt is to understand the markets and usage of the pelts. Wolves, wolverines and bears are used mainly in the taxidermy trade for full mounts or for rug mounts. A properly prepared pelt will bring the most money to the shipper if you take the necessary steps to handle the skin properly. You need a complete skin with lips split, ear cartilage must complete but separated from the back of the ear, nose must be complete with a small piece of cartilage inside; the feet must be complete with all claws and pads attached. On wolves especially, the tail must be complete and split the whole length to the tip.

The next use for the pelts in the fur trade is for wall-hangers. Large numbers of pelts are also used in the tourist trade for wall-hangers; these pelts can be somewhat incomplete but still have good value. For example, you will see these pelts hanging in tourist shops. A perfect illustration would be a wolf missing all of its claws or a paw, or smaller size pelts dressed to hang over a couch or railing.

Another significant use for the pelts is trim on parkas and some fur garments; wolves and wolverine are favorites for this use, especially wolverine which will not collect frost in the harsh northern climates. In areas of the north with no wolverine, wolf pelts are used for trim where they prefer a shorter napped wolf. Many wolves and wolverine never make it to market as the local demand is so great.

Black bears have a niche market for the military ceremonial dress used by many royal guard regiments in the world. Only the finest long hair pelts are used in this market. A quick count had at least 8 different countries using bearskin hats with the most famous being Queens Royal Guard in England.

## KNOW YOUR MARKET

Knowing and understanding your market is very important when deciding how to handle the pelts. The taxidermy trade is always looking for the biggest and best specimens and proper handling is crucial, sloppy or poor handling quickly downgrades the pelts. It can easily take 5 plus hours to correctly handle a pelt for the taxidermy market. If you are going to invest this much time and energy in a pelt make sure you pick your battles, damaged, early flat pelts, rubbed, will not do well, along with pelts that are poorly harvested and handled or allowed to taint. If you plan on skinning for the taxidermy trade do not take short cuts, make sure you have the right equipment for the job.

Smalls or early caught pelts lacking underfur sell cheap, mainly to the trim and wall-hanger trade, and should be handled differently than pelts for the taxidermy trade. The price difference will be significant. Every year hundreds of wolves sell for less than \$50.00. Different sections have different market values, for example the best section of wolves are from the Northern areas of North America. Arctic wolves are large in size, have long soft silky fur and range from XX-pale to grey in colour. They bring the highest prices at auction, mainly to the taxidermy trade. Western wolves are coarser in texture, darker

in colour and large in size. The eastern type timber wolf is smaller in size with coarse fur and poor colours. Each section has different usages within the fur trade. Black coloured wolves from all sections bring a premium if well furred and well handled.

In the case of bears, size is the most important factor after handling and fur quality, small bears sell cheap, again the fur trade looks for heavy long fur and proper fur handling. Many fall black bear hides sell cheap with little interest from the fur trade, mainly because the pelts have very little fur on them. A complete bear is critical with the ears and feet done properly. Handling a bear is a big undertaking as you will need a large area to flesh, stretch and dry the pelt. One interesting use of polar bear hides is for the raw material for fly tying.

Wolverine, bring the best money in both the taxidermy trade for full body mounts and rugs along with a good market for trim on parkas. For the taxidermy trade, size is critical along with the clarity of the diamond pattern on the back of the pelt. The palest colours bring the best prices and darker patterns are used mainly for the trim trade. A complete pelt with all claws attached is an important factor in the final price.

## HARVESTING & HANDLING IN THE FIELD

Proper fur handling starts right in the field after you harvest the animal; in the case of wolves and wolverine how you harvest and dispatch the animal can have a huge impact on the final price. The best methods do not damage the pelts, another important consideration is the method of dispatching a live animal, use a small caliber gun and dispatch in the proper location, we recommend a shot into the chest cavity if possible. This method will do the least amount of fur damage and will help control any blood from staining the pelt. In the case of bears, a well-placed shot in the chest cavity will minimize fur damage and blood stains. Avoid shooting animals in the head as it will be difficult to conceal the bullet hole. In some cases there is a market for the skulls. It is important to properly skin the pelt as soon as possible to prevent taints and hair slippage; the better the rough skinning in the field the better the final product. In warm weather you need to consider how you will preserve the pelt, either by salting, rough skinning or into a freezer. Take the time to wash out any blood and dirt before freezing or before you start to dry the pelts.

## STANDARD SIZES BLACK/BROWN

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH + WIDTH
3XL	Over 130"
2XL	115" – 130"
XL	100" – 115"
LGE	85" – 100"
L-M	70" – 85"
MED	60" – 70"
SML	Under 60"

## STANDARD SIZES WOLVERINE

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
4XL	Over 41"
3XL	38" – 41"
2XL	35" – 38"
XL	32" – 35"
LGE	Under 32"

## ROUGH SKINNING;

From start to finish proper skinning takes a lot of time, in most cases the wild fur shipper may wish to rough skin first and freeze the pelt to process later in a better environment like their shop or garage. Case skinning wolves and wolverine is the most desirable method for the commercial fur trade. Bears are skinned open with feet and pads attached. Pay extra special attention to the eyes, lips, ears, nose and anal opening, the most money is paid for complete skins for life like full mounts. It is recommended to case skin the head of a bear. The short hairs on the head make it extremely difficult to hide stitches, so it is best to pay extra attention to this area for all three species. In the field, you can skin down to each wrist joint and cut the cartilage between the joints to speed up the skinning time for later processing. You will have complete footpads and claws to work with. The anal opening should be left on the pelt; otherwise, it is difficult to make a full body mount.

The use of a sharp knife like a scalpel blade can make the job much easier, the Havalon Piranta knife works really well around the eyes, lips, nose, and ears along with the detail work for each foot.

## FLESHING

It is important to properly flesh each pelt, for bears, you need a lot of room and some sort of fleshing tool, a beam is also a good asset, another good tip is to use sawdust on the flesh side of the pelt while scraping. Always take care not to over scrape the pelt.

## FEET

Using a heavy string, tie the ankle bone off solid and proceed to skin each foot complete with pads down to the last knuckle on each claw. Do not split the pads down to the individual toe or claw. Skin the foot like a sock with pads intact with each claw. The use of a sharp knife like a scalpel aids in this process. Carefully clean each pad of any fat.



*Proper Handling of Bears' Feet.*



*Poor Handling of Bears' Feet.*



*Proper Handling of Timberwolves' Feet.*



*Poor Handling of Timberwolves' Feet.*



*Preparation of Bear Feet Without Distorting the Claw Cushions, Very Good Drying Process.*



*The Bone of the Claw Has Been Taken Out Until the Last Joint.*



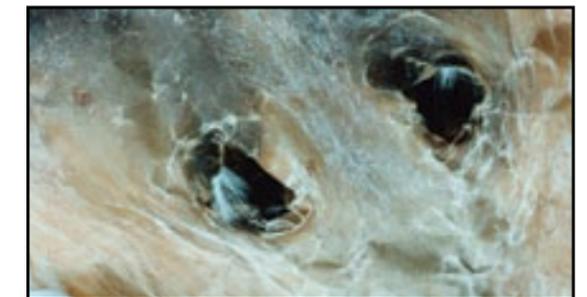
*Feet – Left: Leather Side and Right: Fur Side.*

## EARS

It is important to separate the fur from the ear cartilage and still keep the ear butts attached. Using a sharp knife carefully skin the back of the ear off, the inner ear will remain attached to the pelt but the back of the ear must be separated to allow the fur to dry. Many pelts are tainted because this step is not properly completed.



*Proper Handling of Bears' Ears.*



*Poor Handling of Bears' Ears.*

## EYES

Be extra careful around the eyes; carefully skin the complete eye area including the eyelids, extremely important for quality taxidermy mounts.

## LIPS

Complete lips including the inner material that is close to the jawbone. In the case of bears many fur handlers now case skin the head to avoid cutting the short hairs around the lip. It is very difficult to hide repairs in the short hairs of the head, avoid making any cuts in this area. The lips need to be split which means the lips are skinned open separating the material. This material is important to attach to the mold for taxidermy.



Preparation and Drying of the Head and the Lips Have Been Split.



Preparation of Bear Ears, Cartilage Taken Out and Dried.

## NOSE

Carefully skin out the nose leaving enough cartilage so that the nose remains complete without any large holes. Again be extra careful skinning around the nose area. Any knife cuts into the short hairs of the snout are difficult to hide.

## ANUS

For full body mounts, the pelt must be complete with the anal opening attached to the pelt. If the anus is missing the tail on the mount must tucked down to hide this. It is normal for a wolf to have his tail straight up in a display of dominance. When skinning leave anus intact on one side of the cut.

## TAIL

A complete tail is important for the taxidermy trade. Rubbed or broken tails quickly reduce the value of the pelt. The tail must be skinned out complete and split down the middle to the tip. Always remove the tailbone.

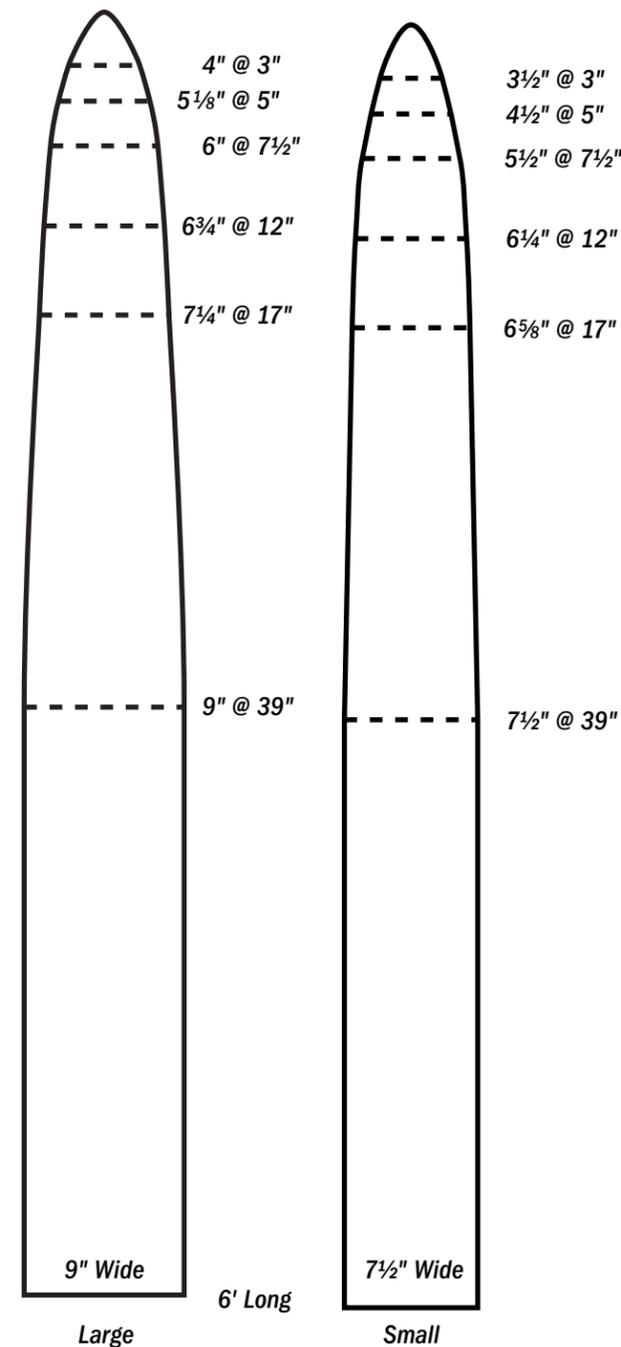
## BOARDING AND DRYING

Bears take a lot of room, two sheets of 4x8 plywood or a wooden frame is used to open the pelt and tack it down to dry. Make sure the pelt is properly fleshed with all fat removed.

Wolves and wolverine are cased skinned and placed fur in on the stretcher board. Carefully sew all holes in the pelt as soon as you place the pelt on the stretcher; if the pelt has any blood wash by hand before you board the pelt. Dry the pelt for roughly 24 hours before turning the pelt fur out then place back onto stretcher for 2 days or until the pelt is completely dry. The feet must be completely dry and turned out so the buyer can see each claw and foot pad. You can use marten stretchers to pin the legs out to allow the feet and legs to dry. The use of fresh clean sawdust or borax will aid in drying the feet. A fur handling tip turn the feet fur in and allow to dry to the touch then turn fur out and fill with sawdust or borax. Turn before the feet are completely dry or you will have a difficult time turning. I do stress that the feet must be completely dry and are normally the last area to dry completely. When turning the whole pelt fur out sprinkling sawdust or borax on the skin side will aid in the turning and help soak up any excess grease. Ensure you brush fur out as soon as you place back on the stretcher, a dog slicker brush and a coarse fur comb work well for this job.

Once removed from the stretcher hang by the nose for a couple of more days to ensure the pelt is dry. The use of a fan will aid in drying the pelt. Carefully brush from head to tip of tail.

## WOLVERINE BOARDS



Wolverine boards are made 1/2" or 5/8" thick.  
A tapered belly board is required for solid boards  
(no more than 1 1/2" wide, tapering to 1/2", about 42" long).

## SHIPPING

Carefully fold a wolf or wolverine before shipping to auction, in the case of bears loosely fold with the legs inside and tie with a string. Ensure the fur has been brushed and is clean before shipping.

### Tips from NAFA graders and collectors

The most money is paid for extremely large complete pelts.

Poor quality pelts are not worth the effort to skin for the taxidermy trade.

Use caution skinning around the head, and eyes; ears, lips and nose require extra attention.

Feet must be complete with all claws and pads.

Legs on wolves and wolverine must be outside the pelt so the buyer can inspect the claws and pads.

## KNOW YOUR MARKET

Highest money for taxidermy quality skins, pelts with some minor imperfections can be used for wall hangers, poor quality inferior pelts are not worth the effort. Understanding the market will aid you in skinning wolves, bears and wolverines.



Open, Pale Colour, Good Pattern.



Cased, Medium Colour, Average Pattern.

# SKUNK AND OPOSSUM

## OPOSSUM

Opossum are thought of by most trappers as nuisance animal on the trapline. They are caught in fox and coyote traps as well as raccoon traps. Opossum populations are high in most of the Southern and Northeastern US. Large prime well-furred opossum do have some fur value for the trapper. Many of the females, if they have raised a litter, and early caught unprimed opossum, will be of no fur value. It is in the trapper's best interest to make the decision in the field if the animal is of the quality to skin and process or not.

The opossum is skinned in the same manner as a raccoon. The only difference is the tail, which has no fur and is of no value. Care must be taken when skinning to avoid cutting holes in the thin leather. Fleshing is best done on a beam with a two handled fleshing knife using the dull side of the knife only. Like the raccoon, let the skin cool so the fat sets and becomes stiff. Opossum pelts rip easily under pressure during the fleshing process. Fleshing earlier caught skins usually results in the hair pulling through the leather and often results in poor grades and prices.

Opossum are boarded leather out. An inspection window should be cut in the belly similar to raccoons. In the case of female opossum, the pouch should be cut out as part of the forming of the window. Opossum can be boarded on the smaller raccoon boards.

## SKUNK

Much like opossum skunks are incidental catches for most trappers, caught mainly in traps set for fox or coyotes. Skunks inhabit most of the USA and Canada. Most trappers do not bother to put up incidental catches of skunks. It seems that the risk of smelling up vehicles and fur sheds as well as clothing is perceived as too great for the potential reward in fur value. Well-handled skunk pelts do have some value and also the oily liquid that the skunk sprays does have a good value. This liquid is NOT an item that NAFA markets, but most trappers sell it to lure makers or trade it for lures and supplies.

Skunks are case skinned. The initial cut on a skunk is very similar to mink due to the presence of the scent glands. Make the initial cut from heel to heel going well below the scent gland which is located on each side of the anus, then make two cuts toward the tail, one on each side of the gland area. This will leave a triangle shape of fur over the gland area. Split the fur part way down the tail and skin out the hind legs and around the base of the tail. At this point remove the scent gland by cutting as close to the body as possible under the gland. Before attempting to remove the tail bone, the front feet can be cut off part way up the forearm and the skinning process can be completed.

Fleshing is best done on a beam in the same manner as raccoons. The leather should be free of grease and fat when done. Skunks are boarded leather out. Depending on the size of the skunk, you can use a small raccoon board, fox board or fisher board. Once on the board the pelt should just fit nicely without buckling at the neck from using too wide of a board or be too loose at the butt from too narrow a board. For the trappers that wish to collect the liquid from the scent glands this can be done easily by using a syringe and needle commonly available at farm supply stores. Insert the needle into the gland and draw out the liquid. Place the liquid into a glass bottle. Do not use plastic, as it will not contain the smell.

## SKUNK



Well-handled Skunk Pelts.

## OPOSSUM



Well-Handled Opossums.

## STANDARD SIZES

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
4XL	Over 26"
3XL	24" – 26"
2XL	22" – 24"
XL/LGE	18" – 22"
M–SM	Under 18"

# BADGER

Most Badgers are trapped in the Western US and Western Canada. A common problem with Badger fur is the presence of dirt and mud, but because the fur will pull out easily, it is recommended that you do not over-comb the pelt. If the Badger is very dirty or muddy, wash the whole animal in cold water and hang it up to dry for a few hours before skinning. This is one animal that even today is put up in several different ways. At one time most Badger were handled open, much like a beaver. Today, most trappers case-skin Badgers. Uniform put up is important for both the NAFA graders and the buyers. THE PREFERENCE FOR HANDLING AND MARKETING BADGER IS CASE SKIN AND BOARD FUR SIDE OUT. The skinning and fleshing of badger is the same as raccoon. The leather must be fleshed free of all fat and grease.

## BOARDING

When boarding a pelt fur out you must first put the hide on the board fur side in and dry it until the leather is no longer wet. This usually takes around 24 hours but time can vary depending on the heat and humidity in your shed. The fur is then pulled off the board, turned fur out, and put back onto the board. The use of a belly board will help in the drying process as well as keep the leather from tightening on the board.

### *Tips from NAFA graders and collectors*

1. Do not over comb as this can pull out guard hair. Wash dirty pelts using cold water.
2. Handle case-skinned and board fur side out.



Cased Badgers.



Open Badger.

# SQUIRREL AND WEASEL

Most squirrels are used for the pelt. Basically, squirrel pelts are tanned, cut into small rectangles, and sewn into blankets or large squares. These blankets are then cut into patterns that are used as liners in expensive rain coats. Any squirrel that reaches the NAFA auction is graded first and foremost on fur Quality, and all the best squirrels will go for the (liner) market. Damaged or poor-quality pelts, often those listed under Section III and IV, often are purchased for the tails by the fishing industry. Squirrel tails are used for flies or to dress treble hooks for spinners and spoons.

## WEASEL MARKETED AS ERMINE

Most weasel skins purchased at auction will be tanned and sold in tourist shops, or used as decorations for traditional costumes. For this reason, the best weasel pelts are pure white, have no defects, and have a complete tail. A complete tail is essential as many buyers will find little interest in weasel skins that lack the black-tipped tail that makes weasels so distinctive. Size also makes a big difference, and the long tailed weasels reach the largest size and bring the most money of any of the weasel species. Early caught weasels that are part brown, part white and damaged skins that may lose fur during the dressing have little or no value.

Squirrels and Weasel are skinned cased and dried leather-out. The opening cut on both animals is from the underside of one hind foot across the anus to the other hind foot. The tail on both species is important so use care when removing the tail bone. When pulling the pelt from the carcass the flesh is prone to sticking to the skin mainly in the shoulder area, using a sharp knife to free the skin in places may be necessary. The front legs should be cut so as to leave just enough length to tuck the leg into the fur side of the pelt when boarded. Place the skin on a wooden board fur side in pin the hind legs a piece of screen pinned across the tail works best to hold the tail open and in place. Any small amount of grease or fat on the leather can be rubbed off with a small piece of burlap after the pelt is boarded. Both species dry fast and most of the time can be pulled from the boards in 24 hours or less.

### *Tips from NAFA graders and collectors*

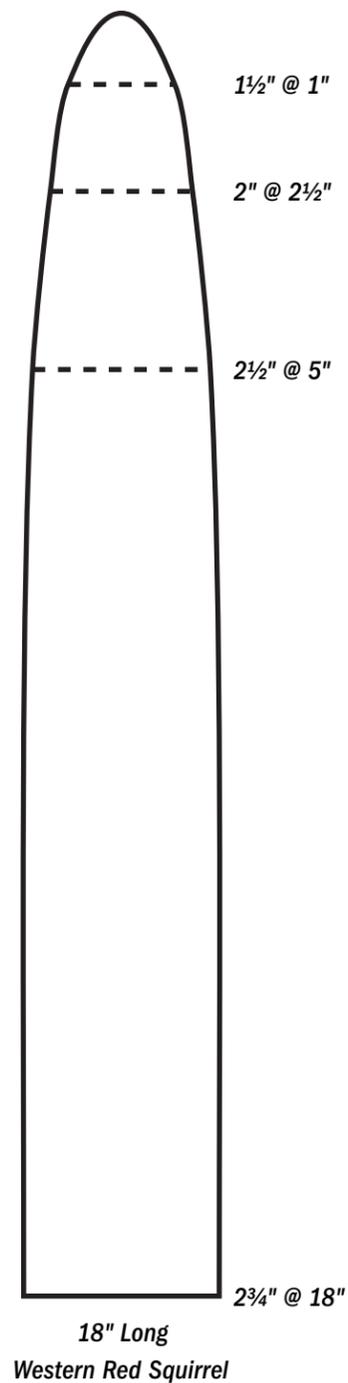
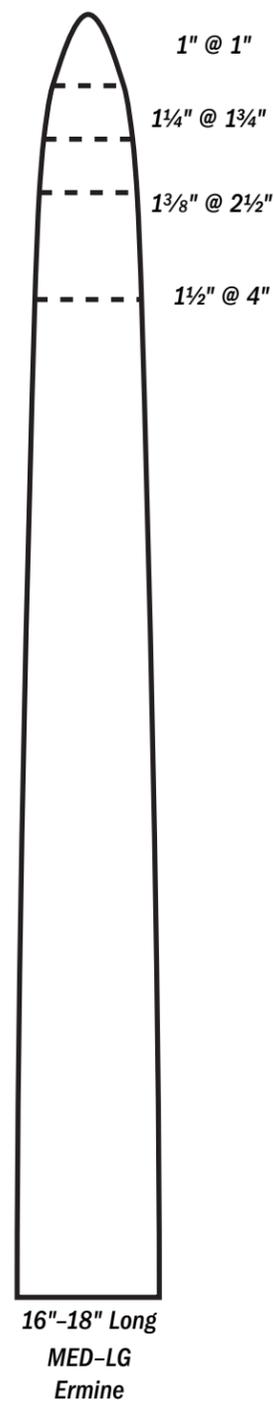
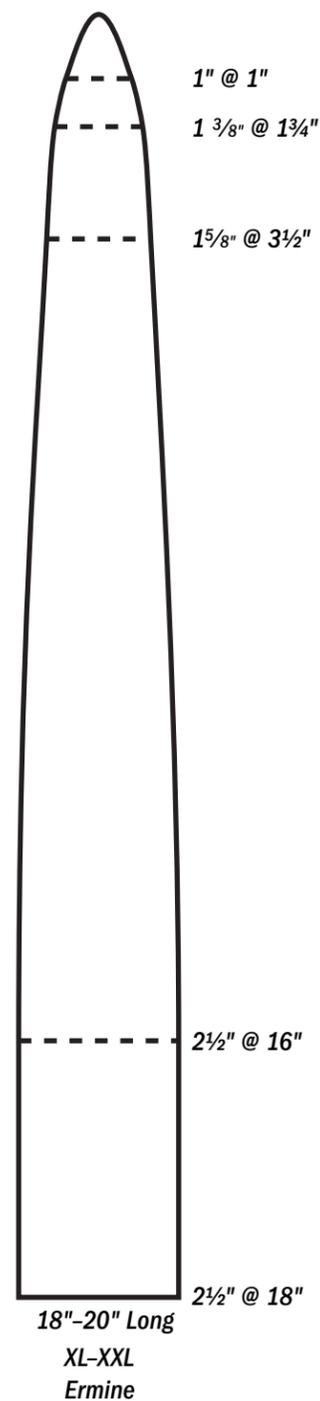
1. A scalpel or very thin bladed sharp knife work best for pelting.
2. Tail bones must be removed and tail split so it can properly dry.
3. Trap prime animals price per pelt is low so early caught can be of no value.

## STANDARD SIZES

*(Widths of certain varieties may vary according to section)*

SIZE	LENGTH
2XL	Over 15"
XL	13" – 15"
LGE	11" – 13"
MED	9" – 11"
SML	Under 9"

# SQUIRREL AND ERMINE BOARDS



A smaller Squirrel board is reduced by 1/8" each side from 2 1/2" point to the base.

All boards 3/16" thick

Ermine boards may be made smaller or larger from 1 3/4" to the base.

# GLOSSARY

BELLY BOARD OR WEDGES	Thin tapered board that is inserted under freshly boarded pelts make removal of the pelt from the board after drying easy This also helps drying by letting more air in around the board.	NAP	The extension of the guard hair beyond the underwool (Long, medium or short).
BITES/CLIPS	Scars from fighting and mating appear as dark or red blemishes or holes on leather.	PRIME	Word used to describe an animal that has been taken when at the peak of its condition. At other seasons it may be too early or too late (early prime or over prime).
BLUE PELT	A skin that is not prime the leather will have a dark blue almost black color.	PUT UP FUR	A skin that has been skinned fleshed boarded and dried.
BURNT	i) The skin may have been dried too quickly. In which case the skin will have a glazed appearance. ii) The skin may not have been washed properly; and then this phenomenon is due to the blood.  A burnt skin will crack easily at touch; and may quite well fall to pieces during the dressing process.	SCRAPING	The same process as fleshing often called scraping in some areas of the US or Canada.
COARSE	Guard hair is rough and stiff; wiry to the touch.	SILKY	Smooth, soft guard hair.
COVERAGE	Density of guard hairs per square inch. Good coverage occurs when the underfur/underwool is not visible through the guard hair.	SINGE	This condition can be recognized by a close examination of the guard hair, which will exhibit a distinct curling of the tips, resulting in a "singled" appearance.
DENSITY	Concentration of underwool per square inch; thickness of underwool.	SHEDDERS & TAINTED	Shedders are pelts which exhibit loss of hair when being examined— possibly because of poor handling, a degree of decomposition or too close fleshing. Tainted skins already exhibit a degree of hairslip evidenced by a patch of bald leather, usually as a result of decomposition before pelts, or bad handling.
FLANKS	The sides, toward belly of a pelt.	SLIGHT	Slight Damaged; small holes or scars, small areas missing fur; small bullet holes; faint trap marks.
FLAT	Guard hair and underwool lying instead of standing; pelt lacks underwool support.	SPRINGY	Leather is stiff, dry, veiny, hard neck; fur is usually broken and is starting to shed, loose underfur; over prime.
FLOW	An important word which plays a large part in the grading of fur. If you move your finger or hand from the tail towards the head, against the lie of the guard hair—you can move the guard hairs in the direction of the motion. Should the guard hair spring sharply back into position again, then there is strength in the pelt, and it is said to "flow". A weak pelts guard hair will lie where it has been pressed.	STALE	Pelt older than current season; yellow, orangey leather colour caused by oxidation; fur is dull looking.
FUR BOARD, STRETCHER	All terms used to describe the device a trapper uses to.	SUMMER SKIN	A pelt from an animal which died or was taken in the summer; the pelt is flat and of poor quality.
GREASY	Pelted poorly, incompletely scraped; excess fat on leather and fur.	TAINTED	Usually caused by the effect of body heat soon after death—especially if left in a pile, but also occurring due to disease or poor handling.  A tainted skin fur comes away from the pelt.
GROTZEN	A stripe of darker-coloured guard hair running down the centre of the back on some species or colour phases.	TRAP MARK	Will show as a slightly curved mark across the pelt, usually across the rump or sometimes at the head end. The extent will vary; but some degree of damage will almost certainly have occurred to the fur.
GUARD HAIR	The longer and sturdier of two hair types in a pelt; extends above underfur.	UNDERFUR	Also called "wool" or "underwool"; shorter, thinner hair type that supports guard hair.
HAIRSLIP	A term applied when the fur of a mink comes away during the dressing process. This could result from a tainted skin, or over-close fleshing.	UNDERWOOL	Also called "wool" or "underfur"; shorter, thinner hair type that supports guard hair.
IN THE GREASE	Animal hide that has been skinned but has not been fleshed A term most often used when trappers are talking about raccoon or beaver.	WEAK	Pelt that lacks density; loose
LOOSE	Wool lacks resistance, not tight; underwool lacks density.	WEIGHT	Depth of underfur.
MATTS	Clumped, knotted underwool caused by dirt, grease or blood, or tree sap. Sometimes appear as gray spots on leather.	WOOLLY	Pelt missing guard hair having areas of exposed underwool.



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