



Hunting & Trapping go Hand-in-Hand

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In the last few years, I have noticed a definite correlation between my lifelong role as a hunter and my relatively new role as a trapper.

A few years ago, Mills County lost its county trapper for awhile, and before we hired another one, there was a period of time that going without a trapper really took a toll on our ranch.

Our ranch manager Craig Seward had called me during that time and reported that just in the few weeks prior, we had lost so many sheep and goats due to predators that it had cost us somewhere in the \$10,000 neighborhood.

"This is gonna kill us," he told me. "We need a trapper out at the ranch."

I told Craig I would see what I could do, and went to the Mills County General Store, and S&S Supply, and got two foot traps and about a dozen snares. I watched some YouTube videos and went to work.

Sure enough, I started catching coyotes, bobcats and raccoons, and even from the beginning of starting to trap, I realized this was a much bigger problem than I ever understood.

You see, I had always hunted the predators by calling and spotlighting.



Trapping raccoons saves valuable deer feed and helps the nesting bird population too.



The author trapped this large male coyote in a pasture adjacent to where dorper sheep were lambing. Controlling coyote and other predator populations through trapping helps livestock and wildlife thrive.

We got some of the smaller ones that way, but the coyotes and bobcats were very few and far between, so I just always thought we didn't have many.

The same went for hunting raccoons. I'd harvest a few every year while spotlighting, but never too many on our ranch. So, I thought we didn't have too many.

When I started trapping, however, I soon understood that we **do** have way too many; we just don't see them very often.

After my initial trapping purchase, I started to make my own snares and got some professional grade foot traps. I also bought a bunch of what are called dog proof traps for raccoon control around deer feeders.

There was a real need to manage these predators, especially the ones

that prey on our wildlife and livestock. In addition, I saw this as an opportunity to do my part to bring back quail numbers and turkey, too. Anything that wrecks those nests — raccoons, opossums, skunks — as well as the coyotes and bobcats, they were all on my list.

The more I trapped, the more I realized my many years as a hunter were helping me to hone in on the art or science of trapping.

I already knew about tracks, funnel locations, how to read sign on different animals, and a lot of the where and why they move the way they do. I think this really sped up my success as a trapper.

In the same way, I noticed I was becoming much more watchful for signs when hunting, so it also helped my hunting the more I trapped.

Since I started trapping, the awareness of the numbers of predators really just boggles my mind. I never realized just how many there are.

I went out spotlighting many times over the years. And, I have called for predators at night countless times. But I would have never known how many predators are out there had I not begun trapping.

Speaking of numbers, due to my trapping over these last few years, I have seen turkey numbers explode and our quail numbers increase.

I have also noticed the positive effect trapping has had on our livestock herds. We rarely lose a lamb or kid goat to predation these days. It all adds up to real money saved for the ranching operation.

As an added benefit, we save hundreds of pounds of expensive deer feed each year by keeping the raccoon population down by trapping near feeders.

I have to say that managing our wildlife resources and livestock makes me feel really good, and I continue to refine my techniques, constantly learning more about different animals' movement patterns. I think I have become more in tune with the ecosystem, noticing things I didn't notice before.

Looking at the world as a hunter and as a trapper are different, sure, but since I've been doing both, I can really see how each one benefits the other.

So I encourage the ranchers and hunters in Mills County to really consider starting a trapping operation on their land. It is another arrow in your quiver of wildlife and livestock management. This is especially true for ranches that raise sheep and goats.

Plus, I'm willing to bet you'll see trapping enhances your hunting abilities and vice versa. I know it has for me.