

# WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON WITH TRAPPING IN ALBERTA?

Ross Hinter

This is a question running all over this great province as we try to pick up all we can from the discussions, articles, and threats going around on the moccasin telegraph system. It used to be a half decent system - following fur prices being offered, when all one really had to worry about was the price of fur. I remember those days. Now it seems that there is no end to the surprises coming from the telegraph system. Mostly not very good news it seems, from the discussions around the morning coffee, or the evening beer with fellow trappers.

I make my living as a trapper. Trapping the trapline in the winter, teaching courses, and then doing animal damage control the rest of the year. It is a job, a way of life and something I have always had a passion for. I consider myself a professional, and so I have taken a step forward as all these new and alarming threats of change started coming from different directions aimed at my way of life. It seems to me that the only way to get the straight goods is to step forward and attend everything I can to find the source and the real issues instead of just the rumors. I had no idea of what I was going to get myself in to!

The last three years of meetings with big Industry, Government, the public and a lot of serious trappers has been quite a journey. There have been some excellent articles, written by Gordy our President, who has worked exhausting hours on this, trying to bring trappers to an understanding of what is happening as far as progress and info; as well as others in our executive and people like Mark Spafford who is working on the negotiations with SRD (Sustainable Resource Development or Fish and Wildlife as we used to call it).

I am not real good with the written word, and have put off writing any articles where I have to take things important to me (from my heart) and feed the info down on to paper. But the time has come to relay my feelings toward the future of trapping in Alberta. I am not going to go into stats, big industry wording, and some of the other problems that have left most of us simple bushmen confused and bewildered to say the least.

First and foremost let me start by telling you we have never been in better hands than we have these last few years with our executive working on our behalf. I can not over emphasize how important this is during this critical time of our future here. I have sat in meetings until I was exhausted with all the issues and watched Gordy, with his business experience, patience and perseverance, work to educate both industry and Government on how important trapping has been, is now, and even more so, is in the future, for all Albertans. He has worked with the executive and always sought approval and advice from us all. So as a little guy that is not rich and makes his living in trapping let me say once and for all, you are in good hands. We could not find a better man for the job to lead us through this. Nor could you find a more dedicated board of directors willing to work together.

I would like to share with you a simpler version of what has been happening from what I have seen to date and from different angles. It is astounding to me how little (despite the

work gone into meeting with Presidents from each of the locals or anyone interested in coming out to our meetings so that we could relay the info to the homes of the trappers we are trying to represent) the trappers understand or will take the time to learn.

Here, I think, is the single biggest issue we have to make or break the future of trapping in Alberta. It is a very difficult army to organize that will not attend the info sessions to help prepare for what is to come!! My experience in this area with a lot of trappers has alarmed me. When you have been able to go to the meeting and see things as they are and then meet with those who will not leave their spot on the map you begin to see it all in a different light. I have used the analogy that we have been like a group living and going on an island, (which is most of the crown land in the province). Most will not leave their spot on the island and don't want to be bothered by people telling them what to do. They become totally unbelieving that the whole island, not just their part, is sliding slowly into the ocean. From where they stand it makes no sense so they refuse to see it. Indeed they can't see it from where they are. They become annoyed when someone keeps hassling them about the whole issue. It becomes apparent that it would be best to get rid of the ones, or at least ignore them, who try to send out the warning signs and ask for help to stop what is coming for the good of all. Sounds like a fairy tale doesn't it!!

Let me assure you it is no fairy tale. From a point on your trapline in the province to a point on another may not be the same. Let me give you some points to consider about trapping in Alberta. Let me start by saying "Trapping is an Industry in Alberta". It is not a sport nor do we ever want it to be so. As an Industry, which by the way as far as I can see is our oldest land based industry in Canada, we are governed in a different way than hunting and fishing, as an example. As an industry, we are fortunate that we are utilizing a resource that can replace itself in one year under the right management system. Not too many industries can boast such an environmental reality, with such a small footprint on the landscape. I could go on with important parts of our role in conservation, but I am sure you are aware of a lot of them. The point here is that with this industry comes a responsibility to manage and use this resource for the good of all. If we were doing this, and could show the records of sound management, we would have an enormous credibility; being able to speak for the furbearers, not just for the numbers, but the habitat necessary for their survival into the future. This should be and easily could be the best management system both for records and accountability for wild furbearers in the world - in a country that has one of the largest land bases and numbers of species in the world. The potential here is huge and probably what we should be spending our time on is perfecting the way of management.

But here is the reality! As an industry it is staggering how little of the province's RFMA's, or traplines as we have always called them, are actually even being trapped. If you have ever seen a trapline map of Alberta, the RFMA's of varying sizes (from half a township to 28 townships) take up a huge portion of this province. If you took this trapline map and shaded in all the traplines being managed it might shock you. Taking the whole province and putting it on your table in front of you and seeing the magnitude of the area we are responsible for is quite an eye opener. Seeing how much we could shade in as being managed by our industry is as I said shocking! It might be a good exercise for us all as we begin shaking our fist and wondering why we are not looked at with the respect we deserve. Credibility as an industry

begins to drop suddenly as we see the reality and take responsibility for it all. I can't be held responsible for others that are not pulling their weight, you might be thinking. That just isn't good enough any more!! Never lose sight that we are an industry not a sport, and as such are very much affected by what the rest are or are not doing.

The progress to be made, from what I see, is not just in what industry and government need to do but in what we could and should be doing as the fur managers and trappers that we are. To some, all this discussion of trapline management and management plans is all too confusing and even a little scary, but it is all quite attainable, and we have a plan for reaching all of the goals that we have talked about and feel are the main issues related to it. Our objective in all of this is not to see anyone lose their trapline, but to help set up a system to help any trappers that are not able to meet their responsibility because of lack of training or lack of help or whatever. If a trapper is not interested in trapping his line then yes, he will be held responsible, but if he or she is interested in making it work we are going to set up a program to help. I couldn't be a part of it if this wasn't our goal. I have dreamed of a day when trappers would be looked at as the real conservationists that they are. The elite travelers of the predator prey world that exists in the bush, that most just marvel about in nature. The spokesmen of the forest. Do you think it is a pipe dream? Then step aside and watch if you wish. But I say we are at a point now where if you can see past your little dot on the map, we can step up and take hold of this. With what we have to work with we can turn this into a model system of an industry which can show the accountability and knowledge to manage the furbearers, as some are already showing in areas of the province. We have already started to show what help we can be, with our intimate knowledge of areas, with projects ongoing at the University of Alberta as well as industry and Government, from biologists to research workers looking for knowledgeable bushmen.

It begins to open up a whole new world for trappers. Their opportunity to lead into the importance of the future of wildlife habitat, and the part they play in it, all becomes very obvious. It is my hope that you can catch a glimpse of where we are going in the future. Credibility and responsibility first!! Then comes the respect and support needed in dealing with government, industry, and even those who are running around with no clue of how important we are to conservation, trying to stop us from managing this resource.

When I began doing public presentations to try and educate the public about trapping and conservation, I felt like a little bump on a big elephant. It seemed overwhelming with so many people to get out to. That was 15 years ago. I started because I needed to speak from my heart to tell the truth of how nature works from someone who is out there doing it. To show my 5 children that I cared about animals and their future, even though that was hard for people to believe because I was a trapper. Who better to speak and step up to the plate than trappers who understand what is involved in the everyday life of these critters and what is needed to sustain them. If all you have been able to see in all this last couple of years is that it is going to cost you more to keep your trapline or that it is such a hassle then I hope I have explained this all in a way you can relate to or at least inspired you to step out of your dot and get involved in learning more of where we are going.

We have enough to do and have some excellent ideas of how to get there. We could use your support. If you are going to turn against us, at least be informed and make your decision from the facts not the rumors. What is your trapline really worth to you? What are you prepared to do to bring this industry into good standing? Any man I ever met that could walk the forest and understand the wildlife in it, seemed to have that natural ability to understand nature in such a way that it was like a part of him and his integrity reflected in that.

My phone number is in the magazine, my email address, etc. Get involved, and help us move into the future. Every one of us is busy! You are not alone there. The convention is in June. It is always in June. People are always busy then. If you want a future in trapping and give a damn we need you. Take the time and drive up to Grande Prairie to the convention and look into my eyes and talk to me and the executive and see face to face that we are there working hard for the future. Yep, it will cost you money God damn it! It costs us all, but do it and get involved and show your support!!! See you in June!