

# **My Experiences in Furbearer Management**

*By Sonja Schmelzeisen*

From the time I was small I was always provided with the opportunity to spend time outdoors. Whether we were out on the trapline setting coyote snares and checking our beaver sets, or even just at home preparing the hides for the next fur sale. My family always made sure I knew not only where my food came from but also the importance of protecting the land it grows from. Because of these strong foundations I have been allowed to set deep connections with the land I harvest my fur and meat from. Furthermore, providing me with a set of skills that is sadly disappearing in our culture today. Throughout the years I have spent countless hours on our beaver river trapline. Engaging in activities like Hunting, trapping, maintaining, and Participating in our family's business that is trapping and fur preparation. The set of skills that I have learned from these experiences is broad and has allowed me to participate in a number of activities that I would otherwise have missed.

During my youth I was able to collect a number of certificates including my hunters ed and trappers ed. My great success in these courses would open my opportunities and pave the way for me to take the trip of a lifetime, a full ride scholarship to the narrow lake conservation camp from the Alberta fish and game association. The two summers I spent attending their two-week camp allowed me to expand my knowledge in regular and restricted firearm safety and handling, pleasure craft operating and boat safety, and basic survival skills (including building a shelter, using flint and steels, and making various types of cinding). In the end I was able to obtain courses like my restricted firearms, firearms acquisition, and my pleasure craft operating licenses. Although there is still much more for me to learn in this field, I am very grateful for my experiences in the furbearer management field.

My learned skill set from my years working and helping with my grandfather's custom skinning and fur preparation business has allowed me to be able to participate in several trapper rendezvous, speed skinning competitions (These include beaver and muskrat). Over the years I have spent a lot of time participating in the ATA's (Alberta Trappers Association) activities. And have been fortunate enough to be able to attend many of their rendezvous events along with my family. I appreciate what the ATA has done in order to protect our likely holds as trappers and hope that they continue to operate for many years to come.

Through my experiences I have learned that a trapper does much more than just ketch and trap animals. Trappers are equipped with an entire arsenal of skills and talents that allows them to make a living and be successful in their industry. Trapping and furbearer management is a way for people to develop a very unique connection to the land animals and plants that thrive there. And for most it is a way for them to maintain their wilderness heritage and engage with Canada's magnificent wildlife.