

TRAPPING SATISFACTIONS OF MISSISSIPPI TRAPPERS¹

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Abstract: Five-hundred twenty-seven trappers from a sample of 1000 responded to a mail survey designed to determine the reasons why they trap and the values that they associate with trapping. About 62 percent and 27 percent of the respondents indicated that sport and income, respectively, were the primary reasons that they trapped. Response to the question, "Why do you trap?" was significantly associated with age ($P < 0.01$), experience ($P = 0.01$), and proportion of income derived from trapping ($P < 0.01$). Ranking of seven dimensions of trapping satisfaction indicated that skill was the most important value associated with trapping followed by nature, income, exercise, escapism, hunting or fishing privileges, and food.

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Trapping of wildlife has been a controversial issue throughout the United States during the last decade. Referendums have been introduced in several states to prohibit the taking of animals with leghold traps. There is currently such an effort being mounted by fox and raccoon hunters in Mississippi. In most instances, the prohibition of leghold traps would virtually eliminate trapping as a management tool. The rationale of these movements has generally been that trapping is cruel and inhumane and that trappers are interested only in the financial exploitation of wildlife. Even so, there have been few studies on trapper characteristics (Jansen 1967, Warren 1975, Penkala 1978) and trapper attitudes (Kellert 1979, Samuel and Bammel 1980). As part of the 1977-78 Mississippi trapping harvest survey, we included questions to examine the reasons why individuals choose to engage in the trapping of wild animals and the values that they associate with trapping.

METHODS

Names and addresses of 1000 trappers were selected at random from the 1977-78 file of 2,742 resident trapping license receipts. The initial June, 1978 mailing consisted of the questionnaire, a cover letter and a stamped return envelope. Three weeks after the initial mailing, a postcard reminder was mailed to nonrespondents. A second reminder consisting of a cover letter, the questionnaire and a stamped return envelope was mailed to nonrespondents 6 weeks after the initial mailing.

Responses to the question, "Why do you trap?" were analyzed by Chi-square (Conover 1971) to detect associations of response with age, years of experience, trapping effort and proportion of income derived from trapping. Trappers were asked to choose an answer to this question from a list of responses (Table 1).

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Table 1. Summary of 527 responses to the question "Why do you Trap?" from the 1977-78 Mississippi Trapping Harvest Survey.

Response	Frequency	Percent of respondents
Sport	108	24
Income	61	13
Predator or nuisance animal control	41	9
Primarily sport, but also income	175	38
Primarily income, but also sport	64	14
Other	9	2
No Response	69	—
TOTAL	527	100

In a separate question respondents were asked to rank the importance of seven dimensions of trapping satisfaction. The dimensions were nature, escapism, skill, food, exercise, income and hunting or fishing privileges. Mean rank was used to judge the overall importance of each dimension of trapping satisfaction (Beattie 1978).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Usable (complete and legible) questionnaires were returned by 527 (53%) licensed trappers. When asked, "Why do you trap?", sport was the primary reason given by 62 percent of the respondents and income was the primary reason given by 27 percent of the respondents (Table 1). About 24 percent and 13 percent indicated that sport and income, respectively, were the only reasons that they trapped. Age of the respondent and years of trapping experience were significantly associated ($P < 0.01$) with the reason given for trapping (Tables 2 & 3). As the age and experience of respondents increased, income took on more importance while sport took on decreasing importance. Trapping effort was not significantly ($P > 0.05$) associated with response. The proportion of income derived from trapping, as expected, was significantly associated ($P < 0.01$) with response (Table 4). Persons who derived considerable income from trapping tended to value its sporting qualities less.

Table 2. Frequency of 458 responses to the question, "Why do you trap?" by age of the respondent from the 1977-78 Mississippi Trapping Harvest Survey.

Response	Age (years)			
	≤ 18	19-30	31-49	≥ 50
Sport	10	28	25	45
Income	0	4	9	48
Predator or nuisance animal control	2	11	11	17
Primarily sport, but also income	14	57	49	55
Primarily income, but also sport	7	15	16	26
Other	0	3	2	4

$X^2 = 46.93$ w/ 15 d.f., $P < 0.01$.

Table 3. Frequency of 454 responses to the question, "Why do you trap?" by experience of respondent from the 1977-78 Mississippi Trapping Harvest Survey.

Response	Trapping experience (years)			
	1	2-5	6-10	≥ 11
Sport	15	42	14	36
Income	6	20	3	32
Predator or nuisance animal control	11	15	1	13
Primarily sport, but also income	15	77	24	58
Primarily income, but also sport	4	27	10	22
Other	2	5	1	1

$X^2 = 29.14$ w/ 15 d. f., $P = 0.01$

Table 4. Frequency of 383 responses to the question, "Why do you trap?" by proportion of respondent's income derived from trapping from the 1977-78 Mississippi Trapping Harvest Survey.

Response	Proportion of income derived from trapping			
	< 0.25	0.25-.50	0.51-.75	> 0.75
Sport	74	5	1	4
Income	32	7	9	5
Predator or nuisance animal control	28	1	3	1
Primarily sport, but also income	122	18	9	5
Primarily income, but also sport	27	14	13	5
Other	7	0	0	0

$X^2 = 62.98$ w/ 20 d.f., $P < 0.01$

Skill was the dimension of trapping satisfaction given the highest mean rank, followed by nature, income, exercise, escapism, hunting and fishing privileges, and food (Table 5). Skill, nature and income were the only dimensions that were ranked as the most important by major portions of the respondents. Considered collectively, skill and nature were ranked as most important by 62 percent of the respondents while income was ranked as most important by 19 percent of the respondents.

Table 5. Summary of 451 responses to the question ranking 7 dimensions of trapping satisfaction from the 1977-78 Mississippi Trapping Harvest Survey.

Dimension	Mean ¹ rank	Percent of respondents ranking most important
Skill	2.2	43
Nature	2.6	19
Income	3.5	19
Exercise	3.7	6
Escapism	4.3	4
Hunting or Fishing Privileges	4.7	7
Food	5.3	2

¹ Importance decreases as mean increases.

CONCLUSIONS

Licensed trappers in Mississippi trap primarily for sport. This conclusion is strengthened by the mean rank of responses concerning seven dimensions of trapping satisfaction. Young, inexperienced trappers tend to place greater value on the sporting dimension and less value on the income dimension of trapping than older, more experienced trappers. It appears that an individual's income affects his perception of values associated with trapping, as the proportion of income derived from trapping was positively associated with the ranking of the income dimension.

Wildlife managers should be aware of the benefits derived from trapping by those who engage in this activity. The enjoyment of developing the skills necessary to trap a wild animal and being close to nature far outweighs the value associated with the financial gains from trapping. This information, along with sound biological data on the species to be trapped should be primary considerations in management decisions.

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