

ENFORCEMENT OF FURBEARING REGULATIONS

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Proc. Ann. Conf. S.E. Assoc. Fish & Wildl. Agencies 33: 791-792

The harvest of fur bearing animals is done by several methods. Primarily, the two that we deal with are hunting and trapping.

In some parts of the world man still traps animals for food and clothing, while in our country the majority trap for profit or for sport, primarily for profit. For instance, in 1978 the retail stores in the United States sold \$210 millions worth of fur.

Trapping skills are passed from generation to generation. An experienced trapper can enter an area virtually unnoticed leaving hardly a trace of his presence.

The enforcement of trapping regulation is probably the toughest job that a conservation officer encounters. It requires long hours, a keen eye, and lots of patience.

I recently encountered a case in my area which involved 3 out of state trappers, who violated 8 different trapping regulations in our state.

This case transpired in my county 10 thru 14 January 1979. On 10 January at 1600 hours, I received a report from a bird hunter that two of his bird dogs had been caught in steel traps, on game management land, near Cross Hill. We agreed to meet at this location in about 30 minutes.

Upon arriving there we found that the traps had been removed. The man told me that the traps had been tied with wire to a small log. I assured him that we would continue to check the area for traps.

Officer B. Hedrick of the North Carolina Wildlife Department contacted me later that day. He told me that J. Shaver and R. Hunsucker from Albemarle, North Carolina, were in Laurens County trapping foxes, somewhere near Cross Hill. After giving me a description of the men and their vehicles he said he would like to make this a joint effort and catch them in violation of the Lacey Act.

Officer Hedrick informed the federal authorities and the chief of law enforcement in South Carolina.

We started our investigation the next day. On 11 January at 0700 officer D. Berry and I went back to the area to try to locate the 2 subjects or other traps.

When we approached the area where the dogs had been caught in the traps the day before, we observed a Chevrolet pickup, with North Carolina license plates, parked in the woods. We checked the registration of the vehicle and found it registered to R. B. Hunsucker, Albemarle, North Carolina.

As we continued to patrol the roads in the area we found the first trap set near a secondary road. In this same area we found 8 to 10 locations where traps had been recently set and removed. We continued our search for the subjects or other traps but were unable to locate either. At dark we returned to the first trap to see if it was still there.

On 12 January Officer Berry and I were joined by federal officer G. Swain. We returned to the first location where the trap was set and made photographs of it. We, along with 2 other officers, continued to patrol the area in search of the subjects. During the morning Officers Berry, Swain, and I found a second steel trap and 8 to 10 locations where traps had been removed just hours before.

At dark we checked both traps to see if they were still set and then we returned to Clinton to meet with a federal officer, Ron Bailey, and North Carolina officer Billy Hedrick. During our meeting we received information that a third subject, Richard Hinson, was involved with the other 2 subjects and that all 3 would probably be returning home the next day.

On 13 January at 0600 officers Davis and Bailey set up a surveillance on the highway that the subjects would have to travel in order to return to North Carolina. Officers Berry and Swain staked out the locations of the traps so that they could see if anyone returned to them. Officer Hedrick and I patrolled the area to see if we could locate the subjects. At 100 hours officer Berry informed me that a subject had picked 1 trap up and they had photographed him. Thinking that they were preparing to leave

for home we returned to Clinton to set up additional surveillance. At 2200 hours we received information that the subjects would not leave for home until the next day.

On 14 January, we returned to our stake-out positions. At approximately 0830, all 3 subjects, in separate vehicles, came through Clinton traveling towards North Carolina. At this time, one of the federal officers took up surveillance in his vehicle. We next saw the subjects about 40 miles from their home. We continued surveillance into Cabarrus County where they became suspicious and split up. A few minutes later, Mr. Shaver was stopped by the North Carolina Highway Patrol. Officer Davis and I arrived moments later. I advised Mr. Shaver of his rights and obtained his consent to search his vehicle. The search revealed 3 steel traps, one of which contained the toe of a raccoon. Mr. Shaver then revealed to us that he was involved in illegal trapping activities in South Carolina.

A short time later, R. Hunsucker was apprehended by North Carolina officers when he arrived at his home. The search of his vehicle revealed 41 steel traps, 1 gray fox, and 1 raccoon. He also admitted that he, J. Shaver, and R. Hinson had been in South Carolina trapping.

We then proceeded to R. Hinson's residence, where he was also apprehended by North Carolina officers. He also admitted to being 1 of 3 subjects guilty of illegal trapping in South Carolina. He had in his possession 80 steel traps, 12 fox pelts, 2 foxes, 2 opossums, a rabbit, a squirrel and trapping related items.

Jerry Shaver pleaded guilty to violation of the Lacy Act in federal court and was sentenced to pay a \$750 fine and ordered to do no trapping for 1 year. He pleaded guilty in North Carolina state court to unlawful possession of parts of fur bearing animals, and was found guilty. He was sentenced to 30 days in jail, suspended and fined \$75 and ordered not to hunt or trap anywhere in the United States for 18 months. He also received 18 months active probation.

R. B. Hunsucker and R. Hinson pleaded guilty in federal court to violation of the Lacy Act. They were fined \$500 and ordered not to trap for 1 year. They also pleaded guilty in North Carolina state court to unlawful possession of game animals. Each was fined \$100, plus 30 days in jail, suspended to 1 year probation. They also had their hunting and trapping rights suspended for 1 year and their license taken by the court.

The 3 defendants have a total of 45 warrants outstanding on them in South Carolina. They could be fined up to \$3,500 each and have their hunting and trapping privileges suspended for 1 year.

As you know, all trappers and hunters are not criminals. This happens to be a case where trappers took unfair advantage of their trapping privileges.