

2007 TRAPPER TRAINING PROGRAM FINAL REPORT

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Introduction

This is the sixth year of the North Slave Trapper Training Program. The program follows the traditional season of a trapper. The season begins in the fall when fish are hung for bait. The trapper then prepares equipment for the trapping season, which goes from freeze-up to spring thaw. During that time period, a trapper concentrates on trapping marten, mink, lynx and fox from mid November to end of February. The spring trapping season for beaver and muskrat goes from March to late April when the snow melts. The winter season ends with break-up and spring duck hunting and muskrat trapping in open water. Throughout the season, trappers hunt caribou and moose, snare rabbits and net fish for food for themselves and their dog team.

This report covers the activities that took place in Unit 3 of the Trapper Training Program between January and March 2007.

Unit 3 introduced students to the effects of forest fires on furbearer populations. Traps are set and track counts are done to document differences between burned and unburned areas. This work complements the summer fire research program, which includes small mammal surveys and vegetation plots to document re-growth of trees and plants.

This unit also introduced students to Dogrib and Chipewyan cultures and teaches respect for the land and animals, survival skills, traditional knowledge about the environment and the concept of sharing.

Methods: Unit 3 – Trapper Training (January-April 2007)

Junior Trapper Training

A three-day training session was held with 16 Grade 5 French Immersion students from Sissons School in Yellowknife. On March 13, 2007, half the students did a day trip with snowmachines to set 7 marten traps in the area south of Kam Lake. On March 14, 2007, the other half of the student went out and checked the traps. As the trapping season was closed, the safeties were left on the trap and a frozen marten and mink were put into the traps to show how the animals are caught. On March 15, 2007, the marten was skinned and stretched in the classroom, a necropsy was conducted and the students had a fur garment fashion show to see how the pelts are used.

A two-day muskrat trapping session was run with the same class on April 11 and 12, 2007. Fourteen students were pulled out on toboggans and snowmachines to Baker Island and spent two days learning to set and check traps, skin and stretch muskrats and cook and eat muskrats. Two teachers and two parents also participated. Students slept in two unheated, wall tents that were put up by the North Slave Young Offenders. A heated tent at the site was available to dry clothes at night. The last evening, a fire feeding ceremony was conducted by Danny Beaulieu to teach the youth how to give thanks for safe travel and successful trapping.

Bliss Lake Trapper Training Program

From January 16 to March 1, 2007, ENR North Slave Region ran the sixth year of the Trapper Training Program at Bliss Lake. Preparation for the 2007 North Slave Trapper Training Program included redoing the ceiling in the main cabin, building a smokehouse and putting up a radio tower to hit the repeater to be able to talk to the North Slave office without having to use the satellite phone. This work was done by the North Slave Region fire crew in August 2006.

As well, fish were hung in October 2006 (Unit 1) and meetings were held with ENR officers to discuss the program, activities and schedule for the winter. Gear was hauled out to the facility in the first week of January. To run Unit 3, ENR North Slave region provided use of the Bliss Lake facility, eight snowmachines, six toboggans, 60 traps, 50 marten boxes, several wolverine boxes and traps, fish nets, fur stretchers and other trapping and fishing equipment. A television/VCR unit was also taken out in order to show videos to participants on trapping and hunting.

This year, participants came from the North Slave Young Offenders Facility, Sir John Franklin High School, K'alemi Dene High School, St. Pat's High School. A 4-day session was run with each group (Appendix 2). Chaperones provided their own snowmachines.

The intent of the Trapper Training Program was to teach older youth (over the age of 14) to trap and learn about on the land survival techniques and traditional knowledge. No students under Grade 9 participate in this session, as they are not strong enough to handle traps or equipment, such as snowmachines.

Unit 3 also includes assessing the effects of fire on the local furbearer population by comparing the catch between 21 traps that are set in a burned area and 21 traps set in an unburned area. As well, the marten carcasses are collected and provided to Dean Cluff for later DNA evaluation and stomach content analysis to see if there are differences due to habitat. This year, the carcasses were necropsied during Wildlife Week (April 2007)

Activities

The daily activities for each session are listed in Appendix 2.

Trapping (Danny Beaulieu, Edward Doctor, Suzanne Boucher, Roger Fraser, Raymond Bourget, Janice Ziemann)

On their first evening, students were shown a video on the *Agreement on International Humane Trap Standards* that explains why humane traps are being used. During each session, students were shown the different types of approved humane traps and snare that meet the requirements of the *Agreement on International Humane Trap Standards* and students had to learn how to set the traps. On the trapline, students were shown how to make sets for different types of furbearers (marten, mink, wolverine). During the first week, a lot of wolverine tracks were seen. Because wolverines are known to steal fur from traps, two wolverine traps were set on each line. The students checked the traps along the trapline and learned how to reset any traps where animals were caught or the trap was sprung. Tags were attached to any furbearers caught to indicate the species, sex, date and trap location. Trapped animals were brought back to the cabin and students were taught how to skin, stretch and dry the hides. Students learned about shipping to auction houses and what factors are considered in grading and setting the fur price. Students were also told about the Fur Pricing Program.

Fire Effects on Trapping (Danny Beaulieu, Suzanne Boucher, Roger Fraser, Raymond Bourget, Janice Ziemann)

Students were told about the role fire plays in the boreal forest, starting with the components that make fires start, and what are the different factors that determine how fire is going to behave in an area. To investigate the effect of fire on fur bearing animals, 21 traps (intended to catch marten, mink or weasel) were set along one 10 km long trapline in the burned area and unburned area, respectively. One change this year was that all traps were nailed about 1 meter up on a tree. This prevented snow from accumulating on the traps, which previously were set at the base of trees. The traps in the unburned area were set on January 17 and in the burned area on January 18 and checked weekly. In 2007, fur was caught every week until all traps were picked up on February 28.

One week was cancelled because of cold weather and other factors for Sir John Franklin School. ENR staff and Edward Doctor ran the traps that week.

In total, 14 marten, 2 wolverine and 1 squirrel were caught in the unburned area and 8 marten and 2 mink were caught in the burned area (Appendix 3).

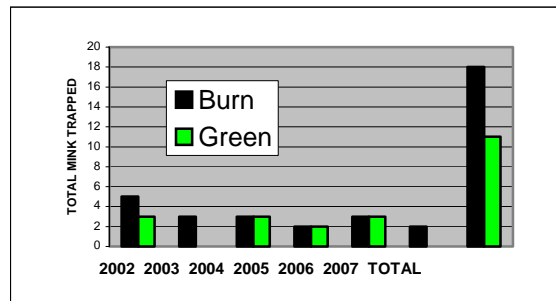
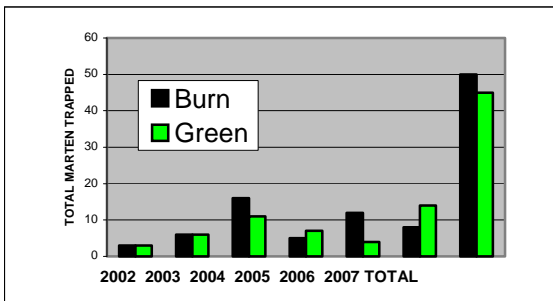
In comparison to previous years, this is the first year more fur was caught in the unburned area than the burned area. This is likely due to the change of plants

that are growing back. The burned area is now 9 years old and in the vegetation plots, there is now less grass and other foods for prey species.

Two track counts were conducted this year in the unburned (green) and burned areas (Appendix 4). Track counts were done along a 6 km stretch of trail in each area. As in previous years, there were more tracks from prey species (mice, hares, squirrels, etc) in the burned area than the unburned area. However, in contrast to previous years, there were two differences. First, the most abundant prey species overall was mice and second, for the first time there were less hares in the burned area.

Results: Six Year Summary

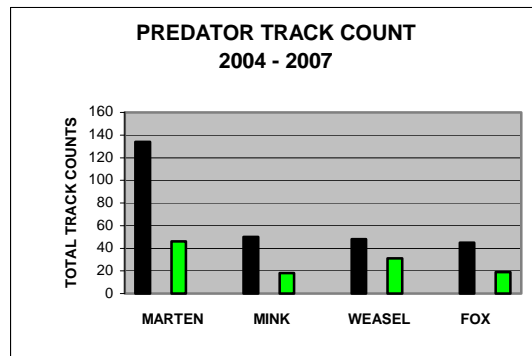
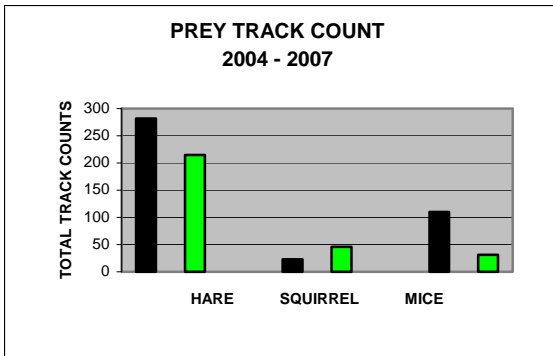
It is now 9 years since the fire. Traditional knowledge would say that there should now be less difference between the burned and unburned areas. The results from 2007 indicate that for the first time, slightly more fur was caught in the unburned (green) area (Graphs 1 and 2).



Graph 1: Total Marten Trapped

Graph 2: Total Mink Trapped

However, the winter track counts still show overall there is more prey and predators in the burned area (Appendix 4; Graphs 3 and 4). This is consistent with my personal experience when my trapline burned and my father and grandfather’s experience with fire on their traplines.



Graph 3: Track Counts of Predators

Graph 4: Track Counts of Prey

Firearm Safety and Chainsaw Safety (Danny Beaulieu, Suzanne Boucher, Roger Fraser, Janice Ziemann, Raymond Bourget)

When time permitted, firearm safety was explained and shown to the students. The proper ways to hold, store and load a rifle were demonstrated. During these sessions, all students had a try at shooting a rifle at a target.

All students were taught how to use the chainsaw safely before cutting wood. However, in most cases students did not handle the chainsaw.

Hunting (Danny Beaulieu, Edward Doctor, Modeste Sangris and Roger Fraser)

During most sessions, a video on caribou hunting was shown. Everyone thought this video was well done and worth seeing.

However, unlike other years, there were no caribou or moose in the area and no hunting occurred. Students were also told about the low numbers of caribou and the need for conservation.

Wilderness Safety and Traditional Knowledge (Danny Beaulieu, Edward Doctor, Modeste Sangris, Roger Fraser, Raymond Bourget, Suzanne Boucher, Janice Ziemann)

Wilderness safety included giving the students some examples of what equipment would be needed or useful if out in the bush for either short or long periods of time. The students were required to learn or help others to light a fire. They were shown good places to start a fire and what materials in the bush are easily flammable.

The students were shown how to set a fish net under ice and identify the different species of fish in Bliss Lake. Students also learned how to make a water hole and helped with bringing water to the cook.

The students were taught how to be respectful to animals and to give thanks to the Creator for what they have received from the land, water, for safe travel on the land and lakes and when killing animals for food. Students heard about traditional use of hides and bones as well as stories. The last evening, Modeste Sangris conducted a fire feeding ceremony.

Sample Collection and Analysis (Dean Cluff, Brett Elkin)

Tissue samples were obtained from all carcasses collected during trapper training activities and provided to the Regional Biologist, who will ship samples for monitoring environmental contaminant loads to a laboratory for analysis. Genetic samples (DNA) will be stored for future genetic diversity studies. Sex and age ratios, reproductive rates, specific parasite loads and diet will be

assessed from examination of carcasses. The results will be provided to the Yellowknives Dene Band.

Other Activities (Danny Beaulieu, Edward Doctor, Modeste Sangris, Roger Fraser, Raymond Bourget, Suzanne Boucher, Janice Ziemann)

Students helped to cut wood for the stoves in the cabins and tents. They were taught how to gas up and put oil into the snowmobiles as well as how to drive snowmachines properly. A video on driving snowmachines was shown to the younger groups of students as many had never driven snowmachines before. Students were also taught how to load and hitch up toboggans. Like previous years, there were some accidents resulting in damage to the snowmachines because students are inexperienced. This is to be expected. Students learned to identify tracks made by different animals. Snowshoes were provided by ENR and students learned how to use snowshoes on trails around camp. All students learned how to set and check rabbit snares.

Expenditures for Unit 3 - Appendix 5

Recommendations

Unit 3

1. Other trapping methods, such as snares for lynx, fox, and wolf, should be set.
2. Only students eligible for a General Hunting License (as these are the only people who can be trappers in the NWT) or seeking a career in renewable resource management should be in this session.
3. Students should learn about the traditional method for traveling on the land by dog team. Students would also learn about feeding and caring for dogs while on the land.

For Bliss Lake Facility

1. Fire crews should spend 10 days cleaning up the site (e.g. dig new outhouse holes), paint the building inside, and insulate and put ceilings onto the 3 small cabins.
2. Twelve drums of gasoline should be slung out by helicopter.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Elder Modeste Sangris who provided everyone with interesting and priceless traditional knowledge.

Special thanks to Edward Doctor for loaning us the use of his trapline and for his assistance in teaching students how to set traps and travel on the land.

The support of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation for this program is acknowledged.

Thanks to DIAND's Community Impacts Monitoring Program (CIMP), North Slave Region and Forest Management for providing funding.

Appendix 2: List of Daily Activities

Unit 3

Four Day Session

Day 1	Travel to Camp Chainsaw safety and cut wood Get the camp ready Set nets for fish Fire ecology (ZF-29) Demonstrate how to handle quick kill traps safely
Day 2	Teach firearm safety Run traps in unburned area Make fire, lunch on the trapline Set rabbit snares Pull fish nets Clean fish and make dry fish Teach respect for land and animals (Elder) Skin and stretch pelts
Day 3	Run traps in burned area Make fire, lunch on the trapline Go snowshoeing and set rabbit snares Cut wood Skin and stretch pelts Talk about the day and story telling (Elder) Fire feeding ceremony
Day 4	Break camp Gas up snowmobiles and load toboggans Travel home

APPENDIX 3: Amount of Fur Caught 2007

<i>Date</i>	<i>Unburned</i>	<i>Burned</i>
January 24/07	4 Marten - Trap # 2, #3, #5 and #2	
January 25/07		2 Marten – Trap # 5 and #11
January 31/06	3 Marten – Trap #5, #6, #13	
February 01/07		1 Marten - Trap #16 1 Mink – Trap #3
February 07/07	3 Marten – Trap #6, #9, #17	
February 08/07		1 Marten – Trap #11
February 13/07	1 Marten – Trap #3 1 Wolverine – between Bjiss Lake and Trap #1	
February 13/07		2 Marten Trap #7, #21
February 21/07	2 Marten – Trap #5, #21 1 Squirrel – Trap #2	
February 22/07		1 Marten – Trap #7 1 Mink – Trap #11
February 28/07	1 Marten – Trap #21 1 Wolverine – between Trap #20 and #21	
February 28/07		1 Marten – Trap # 14
Total	14 - Marten 2 – Wolverine 1 - Squirrel	8 - Marten 2 - Mink

APPENDIX 4: Track Count 2007

(Track count was done two times, burn track count Bliss Lake, Sparrow Lake and southeast and unburn track count Bliss Lake, Cabin Lake and southwest)

Date	KM.	Burn	Unburn
January 30/07	0 - 1	Ermine - 6 Ptarmigan – 20 Snowshoe hare – 2 Squirrel – 2 Mice – 20	Marten – 1 Squirrel – 1 Snowshoe hare – 6
	1 - 2	Mice – 22 Ptarmigan - 14	Marten – 1 Mink – 1 Snowshoe hare – 1
	2 - 3	Marten – 1 Mink – 3 Squirrel – 2 Ptarmigan - 4	Squirrel – 1
	3 - 4	Marten – 3 Mink – 6 Mice - 4 Ptarmigan - 6	Marten - 1 Mice - 22
	4 - 5	Marten – 2 Mink – 3 Ptarmigan - 8	Marten – 1 Mink – 1 Squirrel – 2
	5 - 6	Ermine - 1 Marten – 1 Mink - 2 Snowshoe hare – 2 Mice – 2 Ptarmigan - 12	Marten – 1 Snowshoe hare – 3
TOTAL		Ermine – 7 Marten – 7 Mink - 14 Snowshoe hare – 4 Ptarmigan – 44 Mice – 48 Squirrel - 4	Marten – 5 Mink - 2 Snowshoe hare – 10 Squirrel - 4

Date	KM	Burn	Unburn
February 28/07	0 - 1	Mice – 12 Snowshoe hare – 3 Squirrel – 2	Marten – 1 Fox – 3 Snowshoe hare – 10 Ermine – 1 Squirrel – 2 Ptarmigan - 15
	1 - 2	Fox – 2 Mink – 1 Marten - 4 Snowshoe hare – 4 Mice – 24 Ermine – 4 Ptarmigan - 10	Fox - 1 Mink – 1 Snowshoe hare – 2 Ptarmigan - 20
	2 - 3	Marten – 3 Mice – 12 Squirrel – 1 Ptarmigan – 12	Marten – 1 Fox – 1 Squirrel – 4 Ptarmigan - 5 Snowshoe hare – 3
	3 - 4	Marten – 2 Fox – 1 Mice – 10 Ptarmigan - 8	Mink – 1 Fox – 1 Snowshoe hare – 3 Mice - 11
	4 - 5	Fox – 1 Marten – 2 Mink – 1 Mice – 4 Wolf - 1	Marten – 1 Mink - 1 Snowshoe hare – 12
	5 - 6	Ermine - 1 Fox – 1 Marten – 6 Mink – 1 Snowshoe hare – 2 Ptarmigan - 20	Snowshoe hare – 15 Mink - 2 Fox – 1 Squirrel – 1 Ptarmigan - 3
TOTAL		Ermine – 5 Fox – 5 Marten – 17 Mink - 3 Snowshoe hare – 9	Ermine – 1 Fox – 7 Marten – 3 Mink - 5 Snowshoe hare – 45

		Ptarmigan – 50 Mice – 62 Squirrel – 3 Wolf – 1	Ptarmigan – 43 Mice – 12 Squirrel – 7
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