

# Fur Harvesters

AUCTION INC.



## PELT HANDLING For Profit



**Proper Pelt Handling  
Begins with the Proper Equipment**  
[www.furharvesters.com](http://www.furharvesters.com)

*Official Publication of Fur Harvesters Auction Inc.*

# To Our Fellow Fur Harvesters

Pelt Handling for Profit has been created as a quick and easy reference for those trappers who want to maximize the value of their fur harvest. The tips included are based on information obtained from some of our best pelt handlers, with additional input from our team of experienced fur graders. The combined effort allows any trapper to properly prepare fur the way the international market wants it, leading to increased returns on your hard-earned catch.

A combination of hands-on experience and having the right tools will make the job of pelt preparation easier, faster and more rewarding. Our trap department stocks just about every fur handling tool that you are likely to

need, from certified traps to knives to boards to fleshing beams and more. Catalogs are available from Trans Canada Trapline Company, 1867 Bond St., North Bay, ON P1B 8K6, phone (705) 495-3511, fax (705) 495-4939, e-mail traps@furharvesters.com, or by clicking on the Trap Store tab on www.furharvesters.com.

We hope this quick and easy reference manual will assist you in obtaining the maximum value from your fur harvest.

Good luck on the trapline!

The FHA Team

## General Shipping Information

Over 11,000 trappers market their pelts through Fur Harvesters Auction Inc. annually. Our extensive agent network throughout Canada and the United States allows trappers to easily and economically ship their pelts to North Bay, Ontario. Your agent will obtain all the necessary permits and documentation required to ship your fur. While your fur is at our agent's premises or is on route to North Bay, your fur is insured against fire and theft.

### Shipping Instructions

1. All fur must be stretched and dried. Castoreum must also be dried and shipped in either paper bag or cardboard box. Never ship castoreum in plastic bags or plastic containers.

2. Shipping bags and identification tags are provided free of charge to FHA shippers. Please contact your local agent.

3. Parcel Identification: FHA provides a 2 part shipping tag. Attach the large portion to the outside of your parcel and insert the small portion of tag inside the bag. It's important that both tags are filled out correctly with your name, complete mailing address, phone number, and trapping license number. This information is used to process your fur cheque. On the reverse side state the species and quantities that are in the bag.

4. If you have more than one bag, only state the number of skins which are in each bag. Write your total number of parcels ( 1 of 5 etc.) on the information side of tag.

5. Beavers should be placed in bag flat, fur to fur, leather to leather. Never roll your beaver pelts.

6. Provinces or states have specific laws regarding furbearers. Please check with your local FHA agent or your DNR/MNR officials regarding rules that may affect you.

### Special Instructions for US Shippers

1. Due to US Fish and Wildlife rules, trappers cannot ship direct and therefore must ship through one of our receiving agents.

2. CITES Articles (Otter, Bobcat, Lynx): All pelts must be correctly tagged with the CITES tag through the pelt and properly sealed.

3. Please inform your agent of all CITES pelts when shipping. Package CITES pelts separately from your Non-CITES pelts.

4. There is a \$2.00 per pelt handling charge for CITES pelts.

# Fur Harvesters

## AUCTION INC.



This manual was written by trappers for the benefit of trappers. We encourage trappers to photocopy this manual and pass it on to fellow trappers. Additional copies can be obtained by contacting:

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Published June 2014



#### Cover Photo

Walker Black from Sebright, ON skinning a muskrat at FHA's Annual Trappers Convention

## Table of Contents

General Shipping Information .....	Inside Cover
Introduction .....	2
General Fur Handling Tips .....	3
Grading Terminology .....	4
Beaver .....	5
Beaver Castoreum .....	7
Beaver Tails .....	8
Beaver Table .....	8
Marten .....	9
Red Fox .....	10
Fisher .....	12
Lynx & Bobcat .....	13
Coyote .....	14
Grey Fox .....	15
Otter .....	16
Mink .....	17
Raccoon .....	18
Muskrat .....	19
Squirrel & Weasel .....	20
Opossum & Skunk .....	21
Wolf & Wolverine .....	22
FHA's Receiving Agents .....	24
How to Prepare Pelts for Taxidermy .....	Inside Back Cover



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# **Introduction** - Attending Fur Harvester's Convention is a great way to get tips.

Each year thousands of dollars are lost due to improperly handled fur. This manual has been developed by trappers and fur graders to assist trappers in achieving the best price possible for their fur by eliminating handling errors. There is a saying here at Fur Harvesters Auction that states: You can't turn a \$10.00 pelt into a \$100.00 pelt, but you can easily turn a \$100.00 pelt into a \$10.00 pelt. Hopefully by reading this manual, even the most experienced fur handler can pick up a hint or two to help them realize the maximum price for their furs.

## **EQUIPMENT AND TRAP PLACEMENT**

To begin proper fur handling, the trapper must use the proper equipment for the job. The proper size trap or snare for the targeted species is a must. A trap of inadequate power or quality will result in a poorly dispatched animal. This could lead to rubbed fur, cut pelts and reduced value. Traps should be dyed or dipped and checked to ensure they are performing properly. Rusty traps are not nearly as effective as dyed or dipped traps. Also, rust stains on pelts depending on their severity may cause them to be downgraded.

Next the trapper must look at where they set their traps. Make sure that when an animal is caught the fur will not become damaged by surrounding conditions. Set traps in such a manner that trapped animals will not come into contact with burrs, pine/spruce gum, excessive mud/dirt, become frozen to rocks, sticks, into ice, or be susceptible to mice who will chew off fur for nest linings. Using common sense and a little time in choosing trap placement can eliminate some fur damage even before the animal is skinned.

## **REMOVING ANIMALS FROM THE TRAP**

Special care must be taken when removing animals from traps and snares. If not careful, fur can be torn out which will damage the pelt. If an animal becomes frozen to the trap, take trap and all home to thaw out the animal. If an aquatic animal is partially frozen to the trap sometimes swishing the animal and trap in the water will loosen it from the trap. Do not try to force a snare off an animal's neck. Wait until the animal is flexible enough that the snare can easily be removed or cut from the animal.

## **FIELD CARE OF ANIMALS**

After the animal is removed from the trap make sure it is clean. If it is full of mud, wash it in water or hose it off. If there is ice or snow on the animal do not remove it from trap, allow it to melt off in a warm place. If the weather is below freezing place animals in a sack of some sort to keep them from freezing to the bed of your truck, to the rack of a four-wheeler or snowmobile. If carrying an animal without a pack sack, try to avoid walking it through burrs. Remove excess water by shaking the animal by the head or by squeezing it out with your hands. This will speed up the drying process which would allow the animal to be skinned sooner. Checking traps regularly during mild weather is another aspect of good fur handling. Some animals such as muskrats, marten and fox will go bad quickly in warm weather. Depending on your local trap checking laws traps should be checked every other day during mild fall days or where a trapped animal will be subject to direct sunlight. Checking often also eliminates the chance of the trapped animal being eaten by another animal or bird.

## **Marketing of Pelts**

**Beaver:** Open skinned, oval pattern.

**Mink:** Cased and fur in. It is recommended that saddle be left on but remove all grease from under the saddle.

**Otter:** Cased and fur in.

**Raccoon:** Cased and fur in.

**Skunk:** Cased and fur in.

**Opossum:** Cased and fur in.

**Muskrat:** Cased and fur in, do not overscrape, remove all surface grease but leave saddle on.

**Squirrel & Weasel:** Cased and fur in.

**Marten:** Cased and fur out.

**Fisher:** Cased and fur out.

**Lynx:** Cased and fur out.

**Bobcat:** Cased and fur out.

**Fox:** Cased and fur out.

**Badger:** Cased and fur in.

**Coyote:** Cased and fur out.

**Timber Wolf:** Cased and fur out, claw attached, ear cartilage out, lower lip on.

**Bear:** Open skinned, claws and head and pads attached, ear cartilage out.

**Wolverine:** Cased and fur out, claws attached, lower lip on.

**Seals:** Open skinned, oval pattern

# General Fur Handling Tips

## PELT SIZES

While it is never wise to over-stretch fur, there are times when pelts will be on the borderline between two sizes when they are placed on the board. Pelts shrink slightly in length during drying, so it may be to the trapper's advantage to stretch these borderline pelts just a little more to bring them up to the next largest size. To facilitate this, having the pelt sizes marked on our boards for each species may be helpful.

## FUR HANDLING AND MARKETING

Proper fur handling and orderly marketing mean more dollars in trappers' pockets. Specific pelting procedures for each furbearer are covered in the section pertaining to those furbearers, but there are important points that are common to all furbearers. Proper fur handling commences with setting the proper traps for each species to ensure clean captures and minimal damage.

## TRANSPORTING

Furbearers should be transported in clean burlap or nylon bags (eg. feed sack) to ensure that they remain clean and that blood or dirt from one animal is not transferred to another. Never place wet furbearers directly onto metal racks of ATV's or snowmobiles or the box of a pick-up truck in freezing weather. They will become solidly frozen and difficult to remove without doing major damage to the fur.

## CLEANING / STORAGE

In general, furbearers should be dry before pelting. Before pelting, furbearers should be brushed lightly with a proper fur comb to remove burrs, mats and dirt, which may stain the fur, and cause cuts in the pelting process. If the fur is badly soiled, it should be washed lightly with clean water and allowed to dry before pelting commences. If you cannot skin the animal shortly after harvesting or if you choose to rough skin pelts and flesh at a later date, they should be frozen to preserve quality. Place furbearers or pelts in plastic bags and remove as much air as possible. Tie tightly and place in a freezer. Pelts that are to be frozen should be rolled nose to tail, leather in. Thaw slowly to prevent hair slip before pelting or fleshing. After fleshing and drying, pelts should be shipped to market as soon as possible. If you must store pelts for long periods they should be placed in a freezer. For short periods of storage, keep in a dark, cool dry room. Pelts may be wrapped lightly in newsprint, stored in burlap or nylon bags or hung from hooks or rafters. Ship to market in clean bags or cardboard boxes, never in plastic bags.

## FUR COMBS

The proper use of fur combs will increase the value of your fur. Pictured here are a number of different combs and brushes available to fur harvesters. On the right is a stone fur comb in the coarse model; next is a regular pet brush, followed by a slicker dog brush. Furs should be combed at least 3 times: once before skinning, once more before you put the pelt on the stretcher and finally before you ship your fur to auction.



## SAWDUST

To help clean wet fur, a good tip is to have dry clean sawdust on hand. Sawdust will help clean the fur of any dirt and grease. Use the sawdust by covering the pelt and then comb the pelt out. The sawdust will soak up the extra moisture and dirt. If using sawdust during the fleshing process, make sure the excess is removed prior to drying your pelt.

## FANS

The use of a fan will help dry furs that are soaked and will also help dry the pelt once placed on a stretcher. It is safer to use a fan to help dry a pelt on the board than to use excessive heat. Using too much heat will cause the pelt to burn and become brittle.

**TIP: A good fur comb is as important as a good knife.**

# FHA Grading Terminology

## **GRADES (EXCEPT MUSKRATS)**

- SELECT:** Fully prime, above average in quality, texture and pelt preparation, no defects.
- I-II:** Prime pelt of above average quality and texture.
- GOOD II:** Slightly early pelt with well finished guard hair but lacking underfur.
- II:** Early or late pelt with incomplete guard hair and lacking underfur.
- III:** Very early or late pelt with poor finish, little or no underfur, dark coloured leather.
- IV & V:** Inferior pelt of little or no commercial value.

## **DEFECTS**

- GD SLT (Good Slight):** Good quality with small imperfections.
- SLT DGD (Slight Damaged):** Good quality with larger imperfections.
- GD DGD (Good Damaged):** Good quality with large imperfections.
- REG DGD (Regular Damaged):** Average quality with large imperfections.
- BDLY DGD (Badly Damaged):** Extensive damage, little or no value.
- Tainted:** Area of pelt has rotted, little or no value.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

- GD:** Good
- SLT:** Slight
- BDLY:** Badly
- RBD:** Rubbed
- GRSY:** Greasy
- S:** Singed
- LT:** Light
- RR:** Red Rim
- BR:** Brown
- ORD:** Ordinary
- DGD:** Damaged
- PT:** Part
- STND:** Stained
- HVY:** Heavy
- SH:** Straight Hair
- ASST:** Assorted
- DK:** Dark
- T/S:** Ticks and Scars

## **SIZES**

- 5X** Quintuple Extra Large
- 4X** Quadruple Extra Large
- 3X:** Triple Extra Large
- 2X:** Double Extra Large
- 1X:** Extra Large
- LG:** Large
- LM:** Large Medium
- M:** Medium
- S:** Small
- XS:** Extra Small

## **WEIGHTS**

	<b>BEAVER</b>	<b>RACCOON</b>	<b>RED FOX</b>	<b>MARTEN</b>
<b>Heavy (HVY)</b>	prime, very dense underfur, shearable	long nap length, deep underfur	long nap, deep underfur	deep, thick underfur
<b>Semi</b>	dense underfur, suitable for short shear	medium nap length, medium underfur	medium nap length, medium underfur	medium density or underfur
<b>Light (LT)</b>	lacks underfur, not ideal for shearing	coat, short nap	short nap, low underfur	low density, underfur

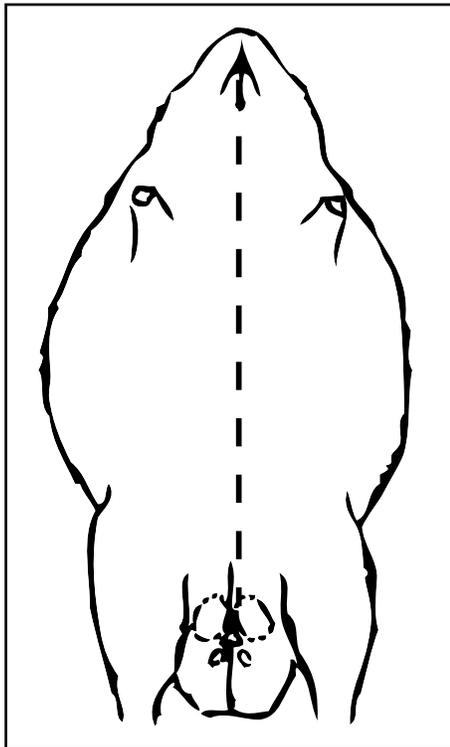
# Beaver - Open skinned, leg holes closed, cut off ears, trim nose & whiskers off.

Before skinning a beaver first make sure it is dry and clean. If the beaver needs to be dried it is best to lay it on its back on a grate or something similar so that air can circulate around the whole beaver. Putting a fan on the animal will speed up the drying process. Brush the beaver with a fur comb to remove any burrs, mud or mats.

The next step is to remove the feet. Very close to the fringe of fur above the feet on the front legs is the wrist joint. This joint can be felt with the finger and thumb and one cut across the joint with a sharp knife will sever the foot. To cut off the hind foot, first, bend the foot forward towards the belly of the beaver, bending it fully forward at the heel. With the foot held this way, cut across the cords at the back of the foot and keep cutting all around the foot with it still bent forward. A

snap sideways after this cut is finished will usually break the foot free from the leg.

The next step is to slit the pelt from the chin to the tail on the belly side in a straight line. Cut around the vent on both sides. Cut the pelt around the tail being careful not to cut too deep. Cutting deep will sever veins which will cause much bleeding. Leave the tail on as it will give you a place to carry the carcass once skinned.



**Slit the pelt from the chin to the tail on the belly side in a straight line.**

Note: Beaver castors, on both males and females, are found on each side and just forward of the vent.

These should be removed carefully with a knife or pulled free with the thumb and finger so the sacs are not broken, which would let the oil run out. They should be tied at the cords and hung until dry. The more care used in removing and drying, the more castors are worth. They are used in making scents and perfumes.

The pelt is then skinned back one side at a time to the back. When the legs are reached, do not slit them open but pull them through, pulling the hide off the way you would take off a sock. Be careful with the skinning knife around the legs because the skin is easily cut in these tender places. Skin the head carefully. Cut the ears off close to the skull. Skin around the eyes and nose and the pelt is free from the carcass.

## THE DRYING BOARD

The drying boards are made from a single sheet of 4'x8'x3/4" plywood. Cut the sheet into three pieces measuring 32"x48". The drying board should be marked as shown on our template. This is done on both sides of the board, giving you six stretching surfaces from one sheet of plywood. *The pattern templates are available at no cost from Fur Harvesters Auction.* Choose the line appropriate to the size of the pelt, and fasten the head and tail to the drying board with the fur side down. The nails which are used to attach the pelt should extend at least 1" above the pelt so that when the nailing of the pelt is complete, it can be raised off the board. This allows the air to circulate between the fur and the board (2" box nails work well). Place one nail behind the nose and one at the tail, and one at the mid-point on each side of the pelt.

**IMPORTANT!!** *The lines on the board should only be used as a guide to give you a consistent uniform shape.*

Using a tape measure, measure from the nail at the nose to the tail. Add this to the width measurement. The sum of the two will give you your GREEN size. Refer to size chart:

## DRIED PELT SIZE

3X-2X:	Over 65"	Over 165.1cm
1X:	60" to 65"	152.4cm to 165.1cm
LG:	55" to 60"	139.7cm to 152.4cm
LM:	51" to 55"	129.5cm to 139.7cm
MD:	47" to 51"	119.4cm to 129.5cm
SM:	42" to 47"	106.7cm to 119.4cm
XS:	Under 42"	Under 106.7

A beaver pelt will almost always shrink approximately 2" from the time you board it until you take it off. If the skin measures 61" GREEN, it is a 1X, but when it is dry it will most likely be a large size approximately 59" putting it down one size, at the upper limit of the LG size tariff.



Note:  
Nose and whiskers are removed.

It is important to use an oval pattern.

**TIP: Use 2 inch box nails when boarding beaver.**

# Beaver - Oval stretching pattern recommended

This is where the trapper makes or loses money depending on how they board the pelt. Always board the pelt 2" to 3" above the size tariff suited to the size of the pelt. The skin boarded at 61" GREEN, if it can be boarded 2" larger and still remain LOOSE on the board would remain in the 1X category. Two beaver pelts of exactly the same quality when boarded differently can easily sell for a \$5 - \$10 difference. Always remember that a freshly boarded beaver will almost always shrink 2 to 3 inches during the drying process. Both pelts will fall into the large category but the grade of the two could be quite different. An example of this would be as follows:

## SHEARABLE GRADES:

LG SEL B	\$40.00
LG I-II HVY B	\$34.00
LG I-II SEMI B	\$24.00

## NON-SHEARABLE GRADES:

LG I-II LT B	\$17.00
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The 56 inch beaver will have a far better chance of falling into one of the shearable grades than one at 59 inches. By boarding your beaver pelts properly, you will be getting the best quality grade possible. You will receive far more shearable grades by boarding your beaver loosely, than the person who stretches it tight. They may gain in size, but the market is demanding a shearable product.

Once you have determined your size, continue to nail the top half of the pelt to the board. Space the nails about 3/4" apart. When the top half is completed, continue to place nails at the same intervals along the bottom half of the pelt, until it has an even shape that follows the pattern on the board. This will help prevent over stretching which reduces the density of the fur and lessens its value.

The leg holes should not be left open because they give the pelt a rough appearance. It is preferred to sew the leg holes, but nailing them closed is also acceptable. After the leg holes have been closed, wash the leather lightly with water and some paper towels or cloth. This will remove blood stains and light grease. The leather will take on a creamy, whitish appearance. Next, lift the pelt up off the nails so the air can circulate under the skin. Many trappers who use boards prefer to do their fleshing after the pelt has been tacked to the board. This should be done before the leg holes are closed.

There are very few select pelts. A grade pattern is established primarily because all the pelts are intersorted. If you have a pelt worth \$50.00 you would not expect it to be put with pelts worth \$40.00 as the maximum you would realize would be \$40.00. This is what necessitates fine grading.

## DRYING

It is best to dry beaver pelts slowly. Temperatures of 55° - 65° degrees are desirable. Never put drying pelts near stoves or expose them to sunlight. As the pelt dries, wipe the leather from time to time with a clean cloth. This removes any grease which may run from the leather. A fan directed towards drying pelts will help speed up the drying time without damaging them.

## MARKETING THE BEAVER

1.	SELECT	
2.	I-II HVY XDK	Shearable
3.	I-II HVY DK	
4.	I-II HVY BRN	
5.	I-II SEMI XDK	
6.	I-II SEMI DK	Shearable
7.	I-II SEMI BRN	
8.	I-II LT XDK	Non-shearable
9.	I-II LT DK	
10.	I-II LT BRN	
11.	R/R XDK-DK	Shearable, Red
12.	R/R BRN	Stained Rumps
13.	BLACK'S	
14.	GDSLTD DGD XDK	Shearable
15.	GD SLT DGD DK	Slit Holes, Scars
16.	GD SLT DGD BRN	
17.	SLT DGD XDK	Shearable,
18.	SLT DGD DK	Multiple Holes,
19.	SLT DGD BRN	Scars
20.	REG SLT XDK	Non-shearable
21.	REG SLT DK	Multiple Holes,
22.	REG SLT BRN	Scars
23.	II'S	Early Caught Blue Leather
24.	GD DGD	30% Pelt Damage
25.	IV & DGD	50% Pelt Damage

## PRIMENESS IN BEAVER

The underfur of the beaver is almost absent in the summer. However, towards fall, these hairs start to grow. The last place on the animal where they finish growing is the back of the neck. In the fall, they are quite short. However a full prime skin will have under fur on the back of the neck, approximately 3/4" long. This is why when grading, the back of the neck is felt. The amount of resistance the hand feels in rubbing the beaver against the grain of the fur, indicates the density of the underfur. When it is very flat, it is called a II or III. As it comes into prime, the hair thickens and it can be classified as I-II HVY, SEMI or LT depending on how thick the fur grows. Once the full length of the hair has been reached, the fur and pelt start to become over prime. The beaver, because of its long stay in the house and sour feed source, has been using its body fat to produce fur and keep warm. Another defect which occurs in the spring is red rims (or rumps). This colour defect is caused by urine which burns and stains the belly fur of the beaver. It starts at the tail and progresses up the flanks. The red stain goes into the underfur causing the beaver to become less valuable for plucking and shearing. This is the reason fall beaver are much more desirable than spring pelts.

# Beaver Castoreum - Ensure castor is completely dry before shipping.

A trapper can realize a greater profit from their beaver harvest by properly removing the castoreum or scent gland.

## REMOVING THE CASTORS

Remove the castors right after skinning the beaver. The castors are located right above the vent hole and can easily be removed with the help of a knife and your fingers. Make a cut about 2 inches above the vent hole; you will see the castor glands, one on each side. Be careful not to cut or tear the castors. Try to remove the glands clean of any extra membranes or fat. Do not ship oil glands as there is no market for them.

## DRYING THE CASTOR GLANDS

Castor glands naturally have a high moisture content. The end user wants the flesh inside each pod, not the water content. Once you have removed the castor hang them to dry at 60- 70°F. The humidity level in your skinning/drying room affects the amount of drying time needed to properly dry each pod. Humidity levels are high in the spring months, therefore they will take longer to dry. The pod should be dry to touch, 7 days minimum with ideal low humidity conditions.

After 2 days open them up to allow the center to dry between the castors. After the pod is dried it should be stored in your freezer. As you get closer to your shipping date the pods will need to be taken out of the freezer and thawed. The pods will need to be dried again by either placing them on cardboard and or re-hanging them.

Because castor glands will continue to shrink once your shipment arrives at our warehouse the company will deduct shrinkage. The amount deducted for shrinkage will be greater if the shipment is received in a wet condition caused by the glands not being properly dried.

## SHIPPING CASTORS

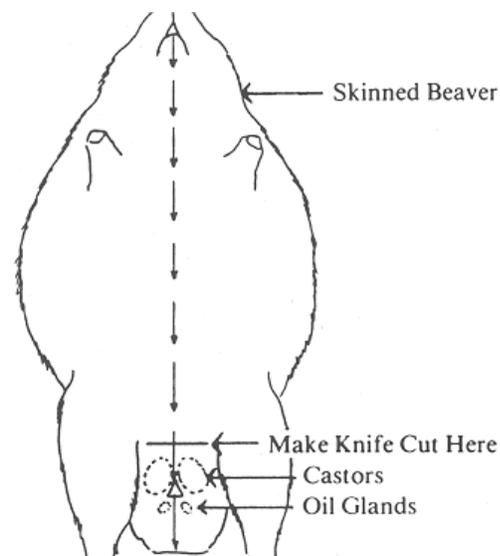
Shipping castors is easy. Just place in an onion bag or paper bag and include it with your fur shipment. Larger shipments should be shipped in a cardboard box. Place in the bottom of your fur bag. It is a good idea to use a paper bag even if you have them in an onion bag. NEVER SHIP CASTOR IN PLASTIC! Castor needs to breathe, Castor shipped in plastic will cause rot. Rotten castor are not saleable and will be declared no-value and will be disposed of.

**CASTOREUM IS SOLD BY THE OUNCE BASED ON A PRICE PER POUND**

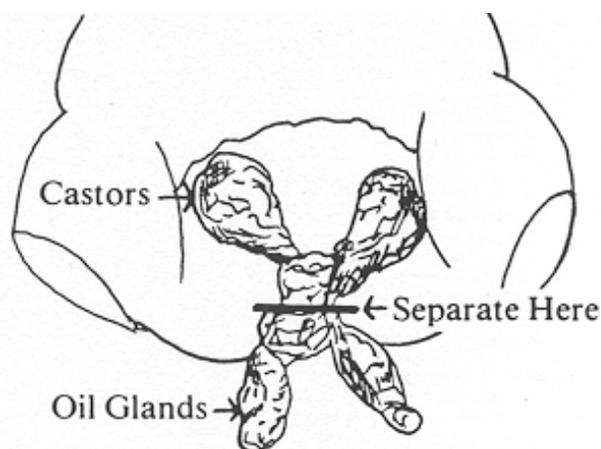
## GRADES

- No. 1 Castoreum pod is big and full, generally brownish in colour.
- No. 2 Castoreum pod is darker in colour and not as full.
- No. 3 Castoreum pod is virtually empty and very dry.

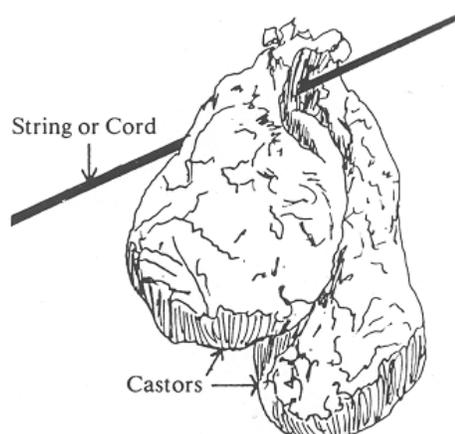
The greatest value for castors is realized when they are handled properly. By properly handling castors, you can increase the profit from your beaver harvest.



**Make a cut about 2 inches above the vent hole.**



**Do not ship oil glands**



**TIP: Ship castors in paper bag - not plastic bag.**

# FHA Beaver Pattern

The use of the FHA oval beaver pattern ensures consistently uniform pelts in each size. Beaver pattern templates are available to our shippers by request at no charge by contacting Fur Harvesters Auction at 705-495-4688, or by e-mailing your request to [fha@furharvesters.com](mailto: fha@furharvesters.com). Each of the seven patterns can be transferred from the paper template to heavy cardboard (Fig.1) and kept for future use. All seven templates can be made by simply using one beaver pattern. To use the patterns, mark the mid-point of your beaver board on each side and draw a cross on the board. Then trace around the edge of the template representing 1/4 of the oval pattern (Fig. 2). Continue to do this until the entire oval has been traced onto your board (Fig. 3). Continue with each of the seven patterns until the board is complete (Fig. 4).

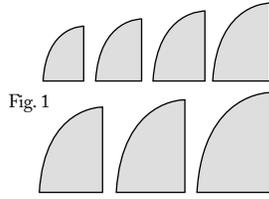


Fig. 1

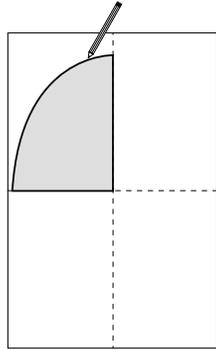


Fig. 2

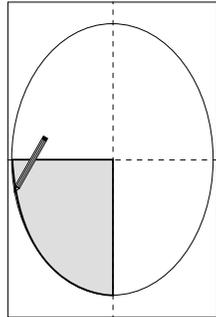


Fig. 3

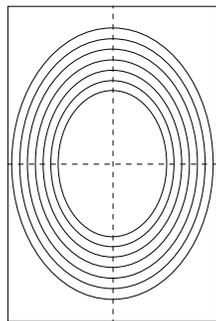
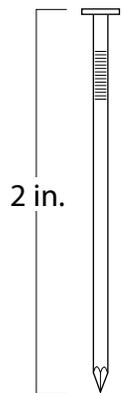


Fig. 4

\*Tip – The use of different coloured markers, e.g. red, blue, green, to mark the patterns on your board will greatly assist in choosing the correct line on which to nail your pelt.



2 in.

## Box Nails

Box nails are almost identical to a common nail; however, they have the diameter of a finishing nail, they are easier to nail into the board and are easier to remove. The advantage of a box nail compared to a finishing nail is that a box nail has a bigger head like a common nail.

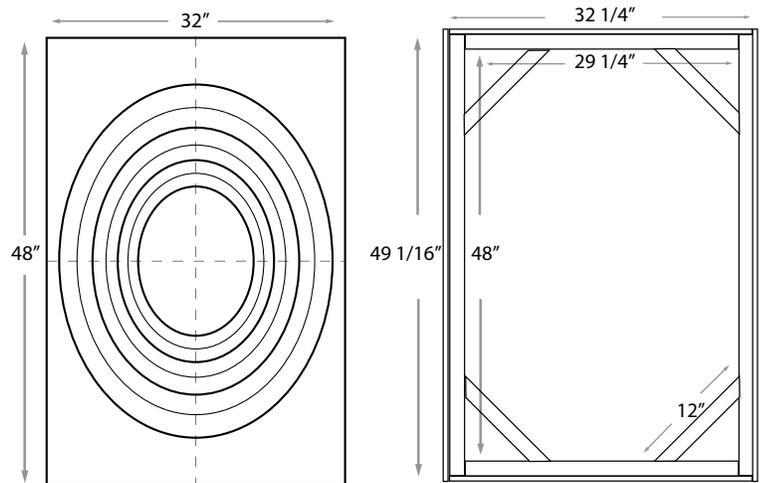
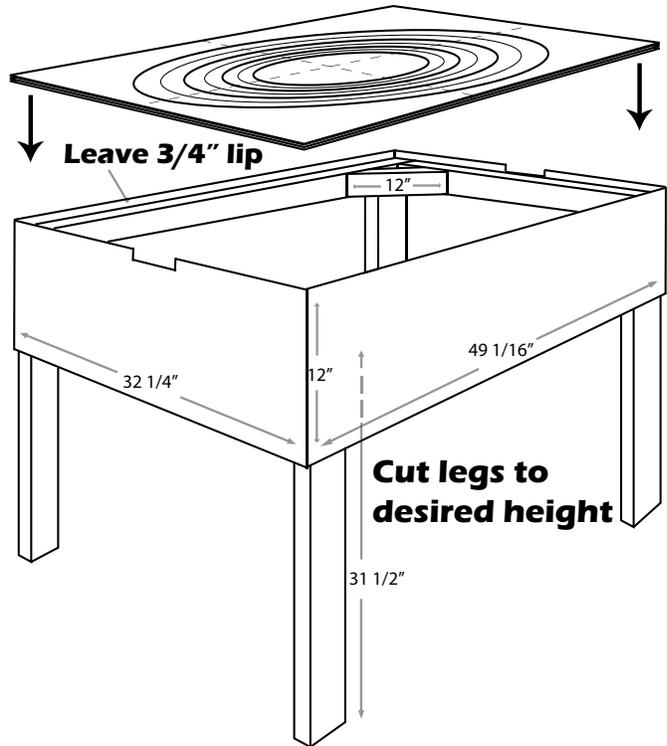
Actual Size

# Beaver Table Assembly

The following beaver table is a simple, inexpensive design, which allows you to utilize both sides of a board. The beaver board is used as the top of the table and can be easily reversed and the next beaver can be nailed to the opposite side.

Materials for building table only:

- 1 sheet of 4'x8'x1/2" plywood
- 4 pieces of 2"x4"x8'
- 30 1 1/4" Wood Screws
- 20 3" Wood Screws



**For best results, use a 4'x8'x3/4" sheet of plywood. This will produce 3 boards at 32"x48". Trace pattern on both sides of your board.**

# Marten - Cased fur out, front legs in, lower lip off.

Proper pelt handling for marten begins with using top-notch equipment on the trapline. The use of conibears for harvesting marten is much more effective if the traps are dyed and waxed and have strong springs. Weak springs cause rub marks and rusty traps cause stains on the pelt, which downgrade the pelt.

Marten should be pelted as quickly as possible to avoid tainting on the belly and back area. This is especially important when harvesting in the fall when the temperature is above 50 F or 10 C. If tainting occurs, the value of the pelt goes from top to bottom. When graders see a taint mark, they must downgrade the pelt.

## PELTING

When pelting a marten, it is very important to brush the pelt from head to toe before skinning. Make sure the marten is completely dry and clean of any dirt.

The first cut begins at the front paw. Cut from the paw to the elbow on both front legs. Next, cut from the hind foot to the opposite foot. Make sure this cut is on the belly side of the vent hole. This will add almost one inch to the pelt length. Next, pull the pelt from the carcass until the legs are clear. You must remove the tailbone. The best way is with a tail puller. Next, pull the pelt towards the front legs. When the pelt is pulled forward, the front legs can easily be pulled free because of your initial cut. The pelt will easily pull off the carcass until you reach the ear cartilage. Cut close to the skull then trim around the eyes and nose.

## BOARDING

When boarding marten, it is very important to use the proper board size. A male mink board would be preferred for all marten, keeping the overall appearance of a large auction collection consistent. Northern regions (Northwest Territories, Yukon, Labrador, and Northern Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba) should use only the larger board. Marten that are improperly boarded, too narrow or too wide will be sized accordingly.

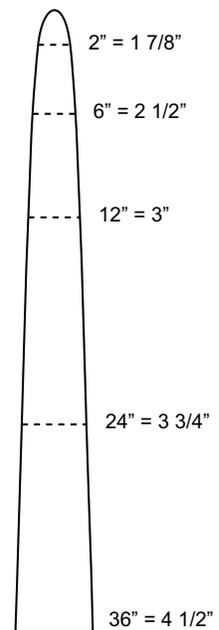
To begin boarding the pelt, mark your board with the proper pelt lengths: 16", 18", 21", and 23". This will help you decide how to board the pelt for proper size. Remember the pelt must pass the sizing line when dried and turned to be in that size.

Pull the pelt down the board to the marks, tail side up. Pelts are measured from the tip of the nose to the base of the tail. Begin to pin the base of the tail first. Remember to pin past the sizing line when the pelt is fur in on the board. If you pin on the line, the pelt will shrink as it dries and you will lose size. Pin at least 6 places with pins. Do not over stretch the tail. Turn the pelt over and pin out the hind legs - opposing the tail. Again, do not overstretch the legs. If you overstretch the legs, you thin out the fur on the back of the pelt. Check for any holes or damages that need to be sewn up. When sewing holes, remember to sew as you would a beaver leg hole, this gives a much cleaner looking repair.

Clean off any excess fat around the belly and front legs. Pin out the front legs using cardboard. This is to allow the legs to dry before turning the pelt. Make sure the legs are dry before turning and leave them inside. This helps prevent damage during the drumming process. The last thing to do when working with the pelt is to cut off the lower lip. This helps the auction house attach the identification tag on the pelt.

Allow roughly 4 hours to dry or until the pelt is dry to the touch. Remove all pins and reverse the pelt starting at the nose. Push the pelt until you can reach the nose coming through, and then carefully pull the pelt until the fur is completely out. Replace the board, being careful to slide the board in without tearing the pelt. Re-pin the tail and legs using only a few pins. Leave on the board for two days to ensure pelt is completely dry. Carefully brush the pelt after turning and again after removing it from the board. Store in a cool dry place before shipping.

## Marten Board Size Board Length = 36 inches



## Marten Pelt Size

<b>2X</b>	<b>Over 23"</b>	<b>Over 58.5cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>21" - 23"</b>	<b>53-58.5cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>18" - 21"</b>	<b>46-53cm</b>
<b>MD</b>	<b>16" - 18"</b>	<b>41-46cm</b>
<b>SM</b>	<b>Under 16"</b>	<b>Under 41cm</b>

# Red Fox - Cased fur out, front legs in, claws off, lower lip off, ear cartilage out.

While most fur harvesters do a good job of putting up their red fox, a surprising number of them use boards that are the wrong size.

In today's marketplace, a wise fur producer uses every advantage available to maximize his bottom line. The techniques we are presenting in this article will help you to improve your finished product by increasing fur density, ensuring the largest size is attained and by giving a more uniform finish.

In the wild fur business, fur comes into the auction house in every size and shape under the sun. This causes problems for both graders and buyers. Because there is so much variation in the size, the fur harvester loses out.

The first step in handling your fox is to have the proper equipment. You need to have a proper skinning knife, draw knife, fleshing beam, skinning gambrel, push pins, drying board, sawdust, paper towels, a good fur comb and a tail stripper.

**Important Note: Fox are known rabies carriers, therefore always use surgical gloves. Wash hands and equipment in warm soap and disinfectant after working on a fox. Never skin any animal that you think was sick.**

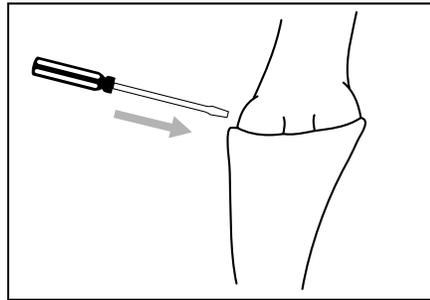
## PELTING

The first step in pelting your fur is to brush from the head to tip of the tail. Remove any dirt or mats as completely as possible. Do not attempt to cut out mats. Next, lay the fox on the table and grasp the front paw. Cut from the paw to the elbow joint in a straight line. The next step is to cut from the hind leg to the belly side of the vent hole. Cut from the paw to the vent hole using the natural fur line (white and red colour of the fur). Cut completely around the vent. By using your fingers, work around each leg separating the hide. Place the fox in a skinning gambrel. By using an adjustable set up, one can raise and lower the fox to whatever level is required. A good set up helps save on back pain and increases production.

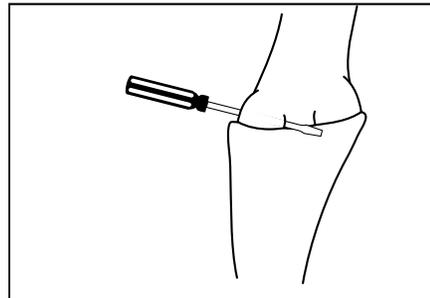
Using a tail stripper, free the tail from the tail bone. Begin working the pelt forward toward the front legs. Ensure that when skinning a male fox that the penis bone is cut out. When you have worked the pelt all the way down to the front legs, again use your fingers to pull the pelt free of the front legs. Using your knife, ring around the front paws when you have freed them from the pelt.

Pull pelt down toward head. Ensure that your knife is sharp. Gently pull the pelt forward toward the eyes, again cutting close to the head. Finally, cut the nose and bottom lip off the pelt. If pelt is bloody or dirty, wash it in cold water and mild soap. Remove excess water before boarding.

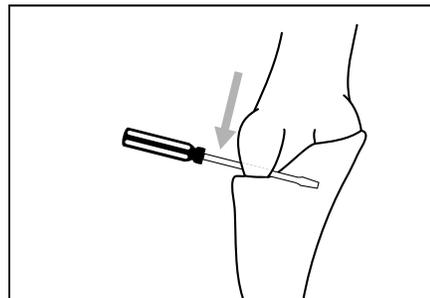
## How to remove cartilage from the ears of the fox, coyote, lynx and bobcat.



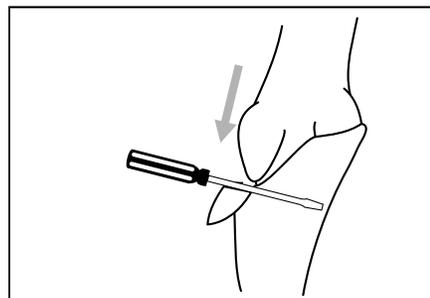
Skin fox down to ears as usual.



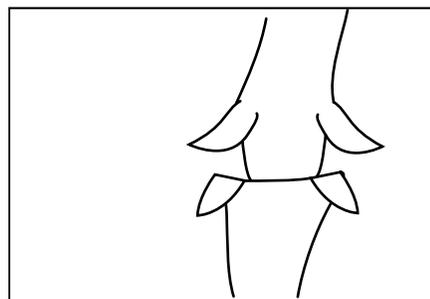
Insert screwdriver between ear and skull.



Pull straight down until the cartilage and fur pull apart.



The cartilage remains on the carcass and the back of the ear remains on the pelt.



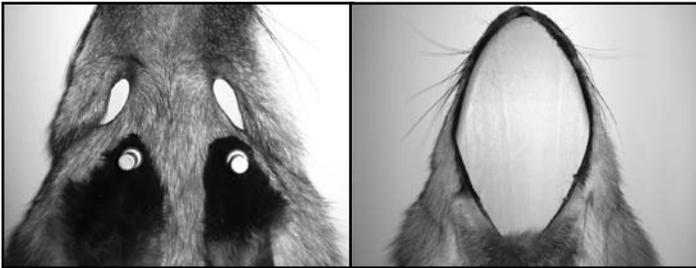
Repeat this process for the other ear and skin the rest of the pelt down to the nose.

## Red Fox Continued - It is always a good idea to wear skinning gloves.

### BOARDING

To start with, we recommend the use of only one size board. The board must be 60" long and 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" wide, gently tapered from shoulders to nose. The use of a properly sized board is of great importance for a uniform overall finish. The proper size board for fox will enhance the density of the fur and increase the length of the pelts.

A big concern at the auction house is the different widths of the pelts coming to market. Some fur harvesters use boards as wide as racing paddles. These pelts have been improperly stretched. The buyers do not want pelts in a lot that do not look similar.



**Ears Pinned Forward**

**Lower Lip Removed**

The problem with a split board is that when you open it up at the bottom, you are thinning out the fur on the flanks. Also, length is lost because you are forcing the fur wider and back up towards the head. The problem with wire stretchers is that some fur harvesters turn the fox before it is dry. When the fox is turned around, the wet skin comes in contact with the metal causing hair slip. Also, the fur harvester cannot pin the fox properly.

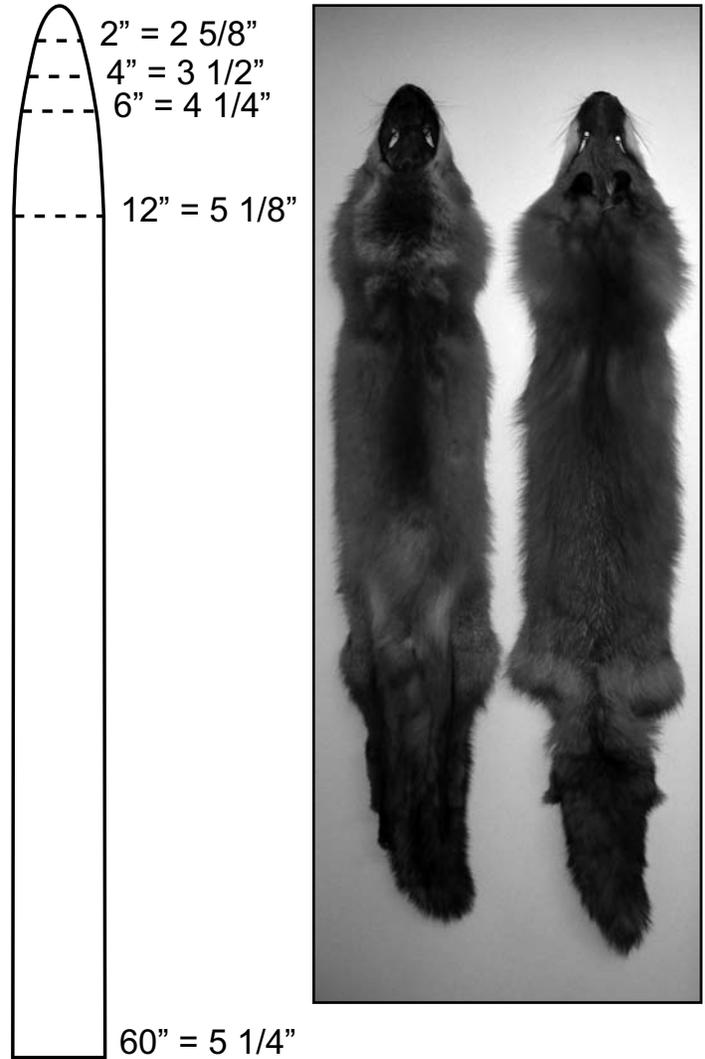
The first step in boarding your fox is to place the pelt on the stretcher, fur in. Centre the eyes and ears on the board in line with the tail. Gently tap the bottom of the board on the floor to push the nose and head as far down on the board as possible. If the fox is excessively fat, you will have to flesh it on a beam before placing it on a stretcher. Be very careful when beaming a fox as the pelt is not as tough as that of a raccoon or beaver. Be sure to use plenty of sawdust to absorb the grease and fat. Next, split the tail from the base to the tip using a tail splitting guide and a sharp knife. Pin the tail down using 5/8" push pins.

Next, pin the front and rear legs opposite the tail. Pin the legs wide and short. In order to pin out front legs, you will have to make small stretchers or you can use squirrel stretchers.

Finally, cut the lower lip from the pelt. Make sure that the pelt is centered on the board and the legs are opposite the tail. Use a small belly wedge to help in turning the pelt. Give the edges of the fox a quick brush to separate the fur from the leather. Allow pelt to dry for 8 to 12 hours at a temperature between 50° to 60°F. Do not over dry or use excessive heat. After the pelt is dried, turn it fur out. Be careful to centre the pelt on the board. Leave front legs inside with the skin. Pin tail and hind legs on the board. Allow to dry for another two (2) to three (3) days at a temperature of 55°

to 65°F. Carefully brush the fox from head to tip of tail when you first turn the pelt and once again when you remove it from the board. When shipping your fox pelts, please ensure all claws are removed. Ship in a flat position. Do not ship between furs that are fur in, as the grease will damage the fur of your fox pelts.

### **Red Fox Board Size Board Length = 60 inches**



### **Red Fox Pelt Size**

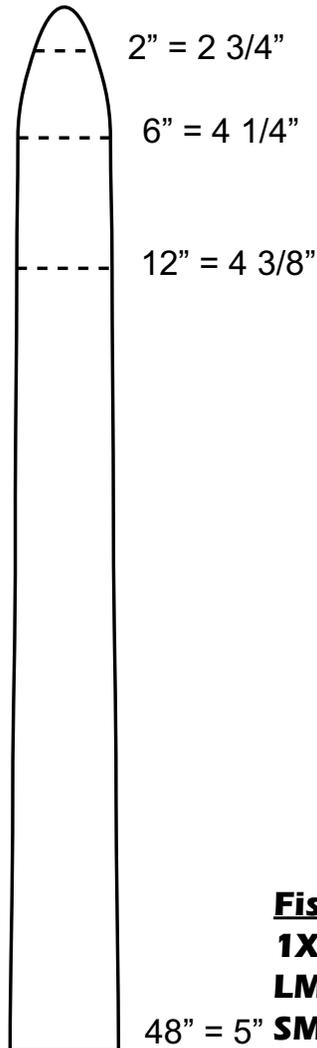
<b>2X</b>	<b>Over 34"</b>	<b>Over 86 cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>32" - 34"</b>	<b>81-86cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>28" - 32"</b>	<b>71-81cm</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>Under 28"</b>	<b>Under 71cm</b>

**TIP: Leave front legs inside. Ensure they are dry before turning.**

**Fisher** - Cased fur out, front legs in, lower lip off, saddle removed.

## Fisher Board Size

**Board Length = 48 inches**



The fur must be dried and combed before skinning takes place. This removes water, dirt, burrs and matted fur. Never attempt to remove spruce gum or pitch from a fisher pelt if it fails to come off during combing.

Fisher are case skinned. Cut across from the hind foot pad to the other. Pull the bone out of the tail using a tail puller and slit the tail open on the underside. The feet and claws are not to be left on the pelt. Cut the ears free at the skull. Cut the fur free around the eyes, lips and nose. Scrape all flesh and fat from the pelt before boarding the skin. Fisher generally have more fat and a fleshing beam is the preferred method by many trappers in handling large males.

Place the pelt, fur in, on a standard board and fasten neatly using 5/8" push pins. Pins or a piece of fine screen can be used to fasten the tail in an open fashion to allow drying. Fisher pelts are marketed fur out, thus the pelts must be turned from leather out to fur out, similar to red fox. Once the leather has partially dried. Turn the pelt using the same procedure as the fox until the pelt is reversed. To turn the fur out, grasp the nose and carefully pull until the pelt is reversed. If it has dried too much, simply soften leather by means of a damp towel.

### **Fisher Pelt Size**

<b>1X-LG</b>	<b>Over 28"</b>	<b>Over 71cm</b>
<b>LM</b>	<b>25" - 28"</b>	<b>63.5-71cm</b>
<b>48" = 5" SM</b>	<b>Under 25"</b>	<b>Under 63.5cm</b>

## Fleshing Beams and Skinning Tools



In order to achieve good fur handling results, there is absolutely no substitute for the right tools. **Trans Canada Trapline Co.** has a complete line of fur handling equipment, everything from fleshing knives to fleshing beams. Visit [www.furharvesters.com](http://www.furharvesters.com) to view our catalogue.

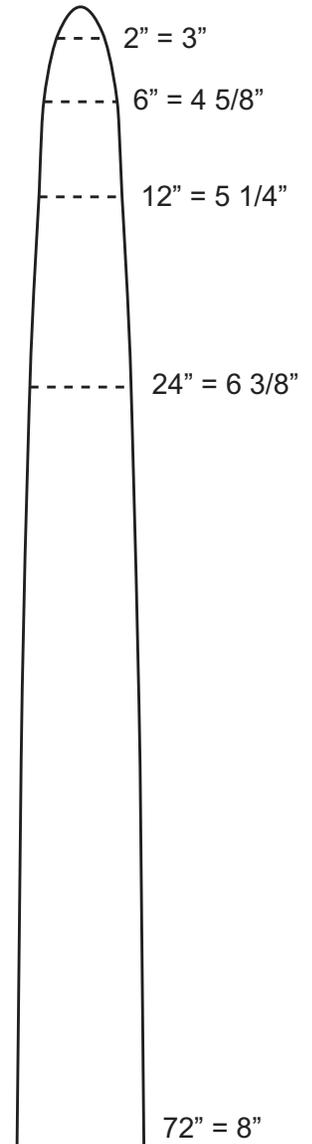
# Lynx & Bobcat - Cased fur out, front legs in, lower lip off, ear cartilage out.

Lynx and bobcat are valuable furbearers which can realize a very good value for the fur harvester when properly handled.

Great care should be taken right in the field to ensure the skins are going to receive their full potential price. Use the best harvesting tools possible and check your traps often. Damage caused by improperly set snares or allowing the cat to freeze to the ground can lower the price. Care should be used by placing your catch in a clean burlap bag right in the field and by pelting the animal as quickly as possible. Before skinning the cat, ensure that it is clean and dry, comb the cat completely to remove any dirt or blood. The use of clean dry sawdust will help in cleaning the fur of any mud or dirt.

Cats are cased skinned. Start at one hind leg and cut across to the other leg on the belly side of the anus. Pull the pelt away from the flesh with your fingers, until you have exposed the flesh around the tail bone and belly. Use your tail stripper to remove the short tail bone. Split the tail. Peel the pelt down to the front legs and skin them out. Next, skin down to the ears and eyes, finishing off with trimming the nose cartilage close to the hide. Remove the lower lip. Board pelt after removing any excess fat or grease. Remember to sew any bullet holes or tears at this stage. Using mink boards, pin the front legs to dry. Allow about 24 hours for the pelt to dry then turn the pelt fur out and place back on the board until dry. You can pin the ears flat to the head. Once the pelt is dry, give the skin a good combing with a slicker style brush. We recommend one size board for both lynx and bobcat.

## Lynx & Bobcat Board Size Board Length = 72 inches



### Lynx Pelt Size

<b>1X</b>	<b>Over 39"</b>	<b>Over 99cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>35" - 39"</b>	<b>89-99cm</b>
<b>LM</b>	<b>34" - 35"</b>	<b>86-89cm</b>
<b>MD</b>	<b>31" - 34"</b>	<b>78-86cm</b>
<b>SM</b>	<b>Under 31"</b>	<b>Under 78cm</b>

### Bobcat Pelt Size

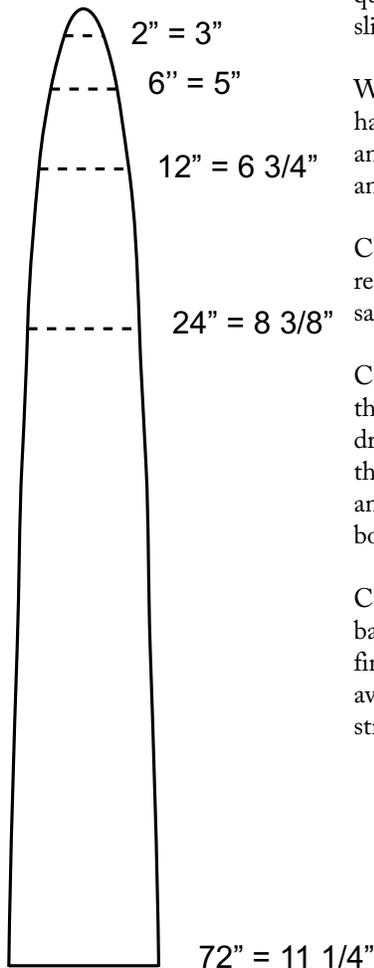
<b>3X</b>	<b>Over 44"</b>	<b>Over 112cm</b>
<b>2X</b>	<b>40" - 44"</b>	<b>102-112cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>36" - 40"</b>	<b>91-102cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>32" - 36"</b>	<b>81-91cm</b>
<b>MD</b>	<b>28" - 32"</b>	<b>71-81cm</b>
<b>SM</b>	<b>Under 28"</b>	<b>Under 71cm</b>

**TIP: Wear skinning gloves to protect yourself.**

**Coyote** - Cased fur out, front legs in, lower lip off, ear cartilage out.

**Coyote**

**Board Length = 72 inches**



The handling of coyotes is basically the same as red fox except that the animal is much larger and requires more effort in the skinning process. The most important factor in the handling of coyote is to skin them as quickly as possible. The belly on a coyote will quickly taint causing hair slip and a nasty odour.

When skinning a coyote, the use of an adjustable skinning gambrel to hang the carcass will greatly aid in the pelting process. Remember to clean any dirt or blood from the pelt using sawdust or wash it with cold water and a mild soap.

Coyote are very susceptible to mange. The use of surgical gloves is highly recommended. After skinning, always wash hands with a disinfectant, the same as when handling fox.

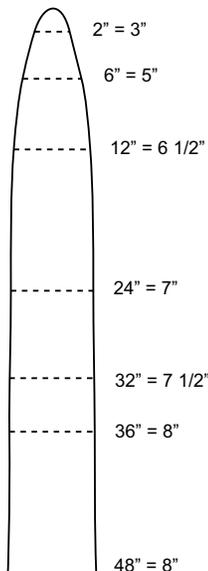
Coyote pelts are used for trim and garments. The pelts are skinned without the feet and claws. Remove the tail bone and split the tail to ensure it dries. Remove the ear cartilage, as done for fox. Before boarding, ensure the fur is dry, combed free of any burrs or mats and that you have removed any extra fat or grease. If the pelt has any bullet holes or cuts, sew before boarding.

Coyotes are dried fur in for about 24 hours then turned fur out and placed back on the board until completely dry. Remember to give the coyote a final combing with a slicker brush before shipping. Slicker brushes are available at most pet supply stores. We recommend one-size wooden stretchers for coyotes.

**Coyote Pelt Size**

<b>3X</b>	<b>Over 46"</b>	<b>Over 117cm</b>
<b>2X</b>	<b>42" - 46"</b>	<b>107 - 117cm</b>
<b>1X-LG</b>	<b>36" - 42"</b>	<b>91 - 107cm</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>Under 36"</b>	<b>Under 91cm</b>

**Badger** - Cased fur out, lower lip off.



**Board Size**

**Board Length = 60 inches**

Badger are used mostly for trim in the fur trade. We recommend a badger be cased skinned and sold fur out. You can use a raccoon board to stretch the pelt.

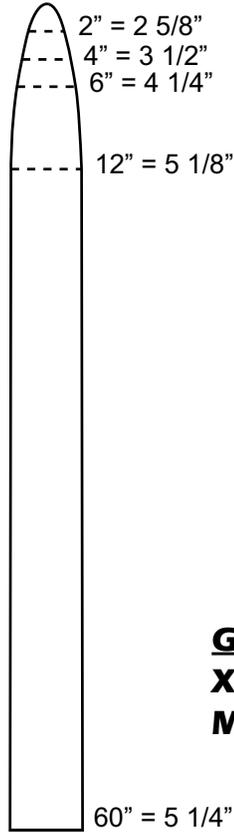
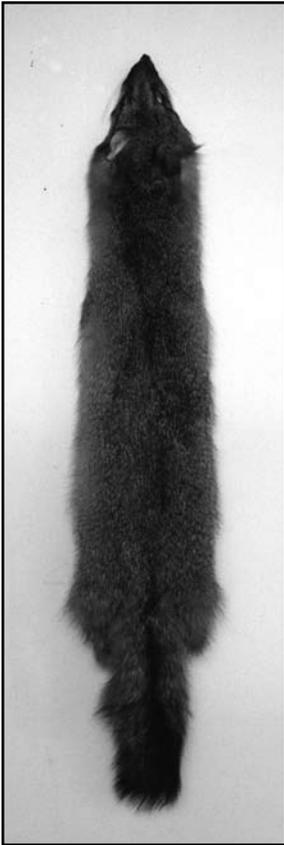
Please Note: Badger need to be properly fleshed as they have a heavy saddle.

**Badger Pelt Size**

<b>3X</b>	<b>Over 32"</b>	<b>Over 81cm</b>
<b>2X</b>	<b>29" - 32"</b>	<b>74 - 81cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>27" - 29"</b>	<b>69 - 74cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>24" - 27"</b>	<b>61 - 69cm</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>Under 24"</b>	<b>Under 61cm</b>

**Grey Fox** - Cased fur out, front legs in, lower lip off, ear cartilage out.

**Grey Fox Board Size**  
**Board Length = 48 inches**



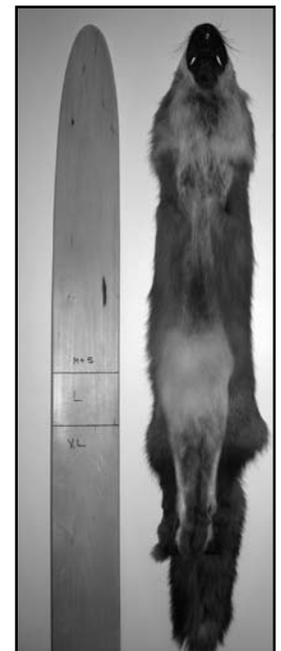
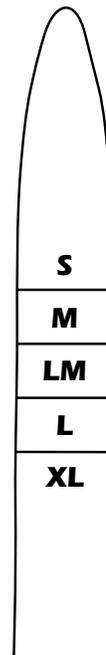
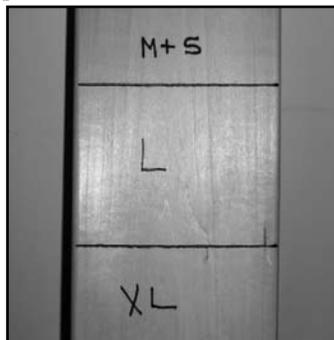
Grey fox are skinned the same way as a red fox, but must be fleshed. Grey fox have a heavy saddle that must be removed before being placed on the board.

**Grey Fox Pelt Size**

<b>XL-LG</b>	<b>Over 28"</b>	<b>Over 71cm</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>Under 28"</b>	<b>Under 71cm</b>

**Mark the pelt lengths on your boards**

You will have noticed that the recommended sizes for stretcher boards and the pelt sizes are marked on each page beside the image of the pelt. In order to achieve the best results we recommend that you mark the pelt sizes on each board.



This will allow you to properly stretch each pelt at the best possible size. Do not over stretch the pelt, rather stretch to achieve the proper length. Remember that pelts shrink slightly in length when they dry. Pinning something directly on the line will result in losing a size. Ensure you pin over the line, enough so that it retains its size. You can not make a medium pelt into a large pelt, or make a large pelt into an extra-large pelt, without over stretching. This tip is about pinning borderline skins.

**TIP: Mark the pelt lengths on stretching boards.**

# Otter - Cased fur in, inspection window.

Most fur harvesters find otter one of the most difficult furbearers to handle. The first step in handling an otter is to have the proper equipment. The basic tools required are a sharp skinning knife, a draw knife, fleshing beam, skinning gambrel, 5/8" push pins, water bottle with a spray nozzle, a fur comb and a sharp pair of scissors along with clean saw dust and paper towels. The most common grades that a fur harvester sees on his fur cheque are singed and straight hair. We all want to have straight haired otter but most of us end up with singed otter. Singe is a form of hair damage. It occurs naturally in otter that are harvested late in the season. Singe also occurs in the handling of otter after you harvest the fur bearer. The first step in avoiding singe begins out on your trap line. Make sure to keep the otter wet, clean and out of the heat. Place the otter in a clean canvas or burlap bag. Do not allow it to freeze to the boat or vehicle you are using. The next problem one can encounter is placing the otter too close to heat. Be careful not to place the otter too close to the heater in your vehicle or to thaw in front of the wood stove. Both of these can cause singe on the fur.

## PELTING

Begin by wetting down the otter with water using the spray bottle. Wet the otter from head to tail with a light spray. Avoid skinning the otter when it is completely dry. After wetting the fur, brush from head to tail removing any dirt or mats. Place the otter on the skinning gambrel. Using a sharp knife, cut from the hind foot to the tail side of the vent hole, and repeat for the other leg. Next, cut from the bottom of the vent hole to the tip of the tail. Using your knife, carefully cut around the tail. Once you have the base of the tail free, you will be able to pull the fur free of the tail. You must be very careful not to get grease on the pelt. Continue to skin the pelt down towards the front legs. When pulling the pelt from the carcass, allow the saddle and fat to stay on the pelt. Pull front legs through. Pull pelt forward until you reach the ear cartilage. Carefully cut ears close to head. Continue to skin until free of the carcass. Once the rough skinning is complete, place the otter on the fleshing beam. Ensure that the fleshing beam is lightly sprayed with water. Slide the pelt completely down on the beam and lightly cover with sawdust. Using a sharp knife, cut the saddle around the head. Next, using the draw knife, begin fleshing the saddle towards the tail. As the saddle peels off, cut the larger pieces off with your skinning knife. You will find that the fatter the otter, the easier it is to flesh. As you near the tail, be careful when trimming off any saddle or fat, using paper towels to clean up any grease. When fleshing, be careful around the belly area. You will find the tail section difficult to flesh using your draw knife, therefore, use your skinning knife carefully to finish off the tail. Once the fleshing is completed, clean off any excess grease using paper towels.

## BOARDING

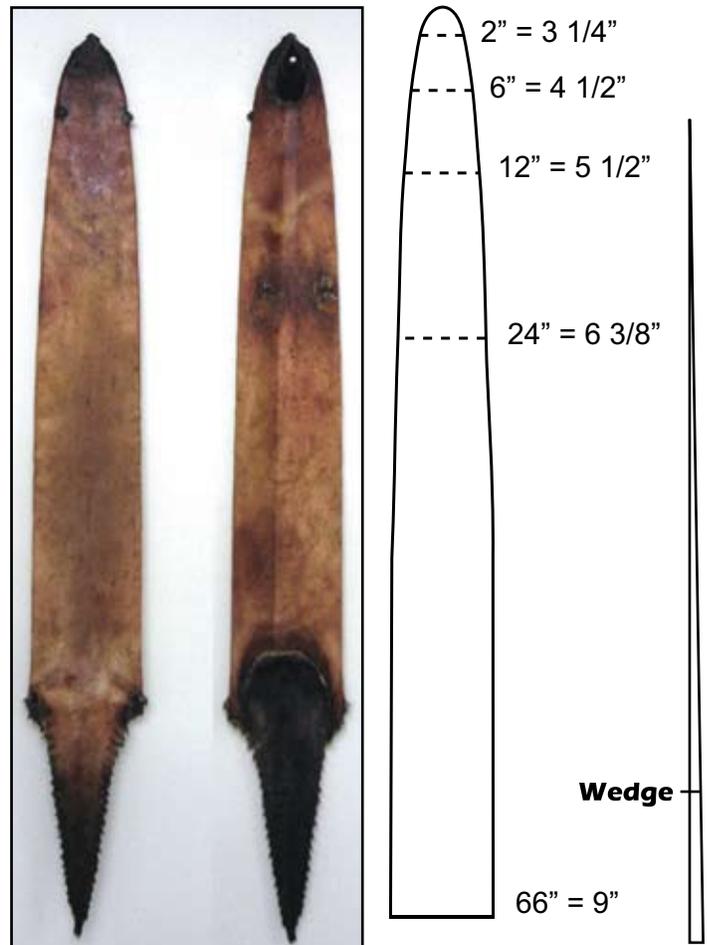
The next step in the handling process is the boarding. Again, we strongly recommend the use of a solid board. Make sure you use a belly wedge. Place the otter, fur in, on the board. Centre the pelt on the board making sure the tail is opposite the front legs. Push the head completely to the top of the board. Gently tap the board until the pelt is snug. Begin pinning the tail onto board. Push as much fur into the inspection area as possible. Now pin the back legs onto the tail side of the board. The next step is to trim the belly area with your skinning knife. By pinning your otter in this method, the inspection area will already be formed and by trimming the belly area you will have a perfect window. Next, sew the front legs closed. The next step is to cut off the lower lip. This is important when you are shipping to the auction house. This is where the ticket identifying your pelt is stapled. Finally, insert the belly wedge and allow to dry for three or four days at a temperature of approximately 55°F. Every second day, wipe off excess grease and oil from the pelt. After the pelt has dried, remove from the board. Be careful not to run your hand over the inspection area. This can cause otter to singe. Tuck the tail inside the pelt to protect the inspection area from singing.

### Otter Pelt Size

**1X** Over 38"  
**LG** 34" - 38"  
**LM** 32" - 34"  
**MD-SM** 30" - 32"  
**XS** Under

<b>1X</b>	<b>Over 38"</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>34" - 38"</b>
<b>LM</b>	<b>32" - 34"</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>30" - 32"</b>
<b>XS</b>	<b>Under</b>

## Otter Board Size Board Length = 66 inches



# Mink - Cased fur in, saddle left on, inspection window.

The very first step, as with any pelt handling, is to have a clean, dry mink, free of mud, burrs and dirt. If your mink is completely dry, one must pay attention to singe. Lightly dampen the pelt before removing it from the carcass. The best method is a spray bottle. Adjust the spray to a fine mist. Do not soak the pelt, but rather dampen the fur until it is moist when touched.

## SKINNING THE MINK

Begin by removing the front legs. This makes the job easier when trying to pull the pelt free later on. Next, cut from one back leg to the other. The cut is on the belly side of the vent hole. Place the one leg in some form of holding device and pull on the other leg. You will notice a natural line follows across from paw to paw. By using this method, the fur harvester gains two things: increased length and the inspection area is enhanced. Both help improve the price paid. Remove the tail bone using a tail stripper. Proceed to pull the pelt down towards the front legs. If the mink is a male, you must remove the penis bone. After pulling the pelt down to the front legs, work your fingers between the leg and body. Pull the leg through. When the front paws are already removed, this step is much easier. Finally, pull the pelt clear of the carcass using a knife to cut the ears, eyes, and nose free.

## FLESHING

Before pinning the pelt with 5/8" push pins, it must be fleshed of fat and grease. Place the pelt on the board or fleshing beam with each hind leg on opposite sides of the board. Remove fat from the front leg area with a dull knife scraping the fat forward toward the leg hole. Do not remove the red saddle. The saddle on mink protects the skin from over scraping which can cause hair root damage. A mink with the saddle removed usually brings \$2 to \$3 less than a mink with the saddle on. If the saddle has excess fat under it, gently scrape the saddle pushing the grease and oil out.

Next, turn the pelt so the legs are opposite the tail. Make sure the pelt is straight on the board. Tip: Place the length measurement for the mink on your boards. This way, you know what size pelt you're working with.

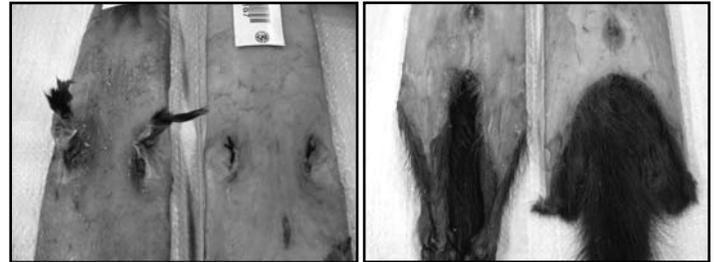
## BOARDING

When boarding a mink we recommend a solid wood stretcher. Use a male board for males and a female board for females. Putting males on female boards to gain size will result in the skin being downgraded in size. Mark the sizes on your boards so that you don't over-stretch the hide.

Scrape the fat and grease from the belly area. Remember to wipe the fur clean of any excess oil with a paper towel. Mink fur can be singed so be careful. Follow that by pinning the hind legs on the back of the board with the tail. Check the board measurement with the pelt, match the best line with

<b>Male</b>	
<b>Mink Pelt Size</b>	
<b>2X</b>	<b>Over 23"</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>21" - 23"</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>19" - 21"</b>
<b>LM</b>	<b>17" - 19"</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>Under 17"</b>

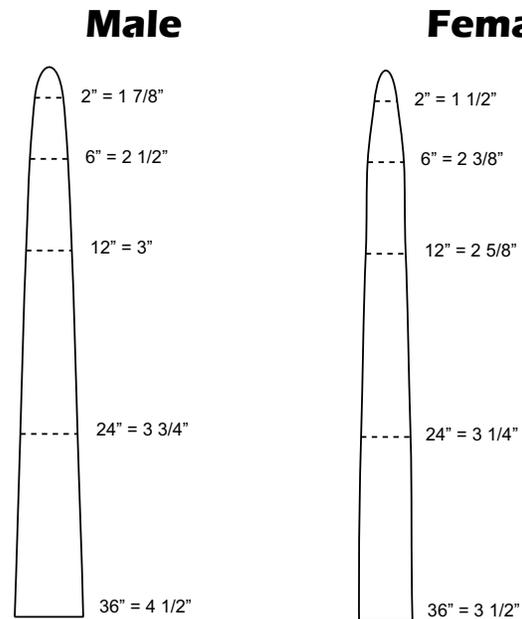
the pelt size. Begin pinning the tail in a slight pleating method. What you want to do is push as much fur into the inspection area as possible. You can use push pins, wire mesh, cardboard or whatever works best for you. Cut a piece of fur out of the belly side to enhance the inspection area. Next, tuck the front legs inside the pelt. Insert a belly board so that when the pelt dries it can be easily removed from the stretcher. Finally, hang the pelt up with nose down allowing the oil to run down toward the head. Allow two or three days at 55°-60°F for drying. Remove from board and store in a cool dry place until shipping.



**Incorrect vs Correct Leg Handling**      **Incorrect vs Correct Inspection Window**

## Mink Board Sizes

**Board Length = 36 inches**



<b>Female</b>		
<b>Mink Pelt Size</b>		
<b>1X</b>	<b>Over 19"</b>	<b>Over 48cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>17" - 19"</b>	<b>43-48cm</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>Under 17"</b>	<b>Under 43cm</b>

**TIP: Tuck front legs inside the pelt.**

# Raccoon - Cased fur in, inspection window.

Because of the fat, it is often easier to rough skin a raccoon and flesh it afterwards. Start skinning by slitting down from the heel of each hind paw. The cut should pass 5 cm (2 inches) below the vent. This is the most important cut, sometimes called the money cut. Using a tail stripper strip the tail by pulling downward. On big raccoons, it may be necessary to split the tail part way down. Skin down to the front legs and cut the fur free at the wrist. Skin carefully around the neck and cut the ears close to the skull. Continue down, cutting around the eyes, lips and nose, until the pelt becomes free. Leave the lower lip on the carcass. Pelts can be frozen and fleshed at a later date. If this is done the pelt should be turned fur out and rolled starting at the tail. This way when the pelt is thawing it can be hung by the nose and allowed to unroll as it thaws.

## FLESHING AND DRYING

Pelts should be cool before attempting to flesh. Pull the pelt onto the fleshing beam and scrape until all the fat and flesh is removed. It is especially important to scrape all the gristle from the ears and the back of the neck. Do not over scrape. Try to keep the grease off the fur during fleshing. Sawdust can be used to soak up excess grease. Ensure that all the sawdust is removed before the pelt dries. The toughest part of fleshing a raccoon is the neck. Sometimes, scoring the gristle with a knife, just below the ears, will help you get started.

The tail must be split and fleshed!!! Pin the tail out so that it can dry properly. In the case of wire stretchers use large paper clips to hold the tail open so it will dry. Sew or push pin the holes that may appear in the pelt. Care should be taken not to over scrape pelts, especially early blue pelts where the hair roots can be damaged.

Wipe the fleshed pelt with a dry cloth. Make sure the fur is completely dry before placing it on a standard drying board. Insert a belly board to aid in removal of the pelt from the stretcher when it dries.

## STRETCHING RACCOON

Clean wire frames and solid boards are suitable for drying raccoon. Northern heavy type raccoon, New York, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, and Iowa look good on wood boards, while semi heavy and coat type look better on wire stretchers. Smaller sizes and northern raccoon also will look better on wire. Make sure the pelt is centered properly on the stretcher. All raccoon should be put up leather out. Raccoon are marketed leather out. Refer to the board size chart in the appendix for proper wooden stretcher size. Mark raccoon sizes on your boards to prevent over-stretching.

### Raccoon Pelt Size

<b>4X</b>	<b>Over 35"</b>	<b>Over 89cm</b>
<b>3X</b>	<b>32" - 35"</b>	<b>81-89cm</b>
<b>2X</b>	<b>29" - 32"</b>	<b>74-81cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>27" - 29"</b>	<b>69-74cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>24" - 27"</b>	<b>61-69cm</b>
<b>LM</b>	<b>22" - 24"</b>	<b>56-61cm</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>Under 22"</b>	<b>Under 56cm</b>

## CUTTING THE WINDOW

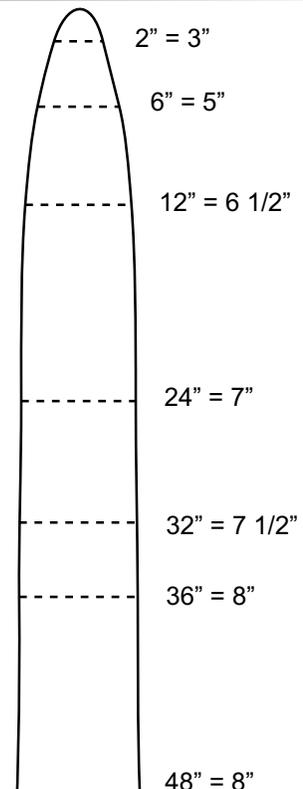
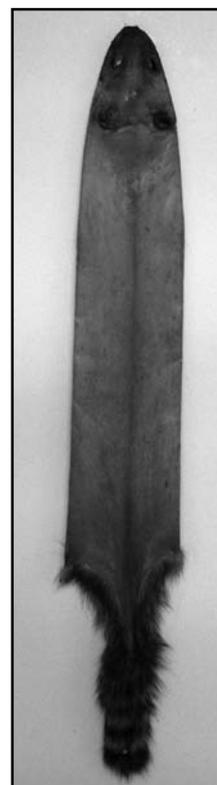
On a male, cut the window up to just below the penis hole. On a female, cut the window to the lower two teats. Keep your window narrow - the flanks are very important when the manufacturers make the garments. If the window is made too wide, it can hurt the value of the pelt. The window should be made right after the pelt is put on the stretcher, never when the pelt is dry.



## TAKING THE RACCOON OFF STRETCHER

Wipe the raccoon first with a rag or paper towel to remove excess wet grease. Remove the pelt from the stretcher and comb out the inspection area.

## Raccoon Board Size Board Length = 48 inches



# Muskrat - Cased fur in, saddle left on.

Before skinning, the muskrat must be completely dry to eliminate rotten and damaged skins. Pelting should be done with a long, thin, sharply pointed blade approximately 3.5" to 4" in length.

The pelt must be dried and combed before proceeding. However, if skinning is done on the trapline and you intend to board it later, the pelt should be turned with the fur out and rolled for transportation. Later in your home or shed, it must be hung until dried and cooled before fleshing.

## SKINNING

Prepare to skin by either laying the muskrat on its back or by hanging it from its tail from over head, with its tail nearest your knife hand. Grasp the right foot and make a straight cut from the base of the heel to the tail. Continue to push the knife through the underside of the tail and cut up leaving 1 to 1<sup>1/2</sup> inch of tail attached to the belly fur. Turn the muskrat around and repeat procedure meeting at the tail incision. You will notice the line where the fur from the back (longer) meets the belly fur (shorter).

The 1 to 1<sup>1/2</sup> inch of tail left on the skirt of the belly prevents the pelt from tearing when it is mounted on the wire stretcher. Free the back side of the muskrat leaving the same amount of tail skin as done on the underside.

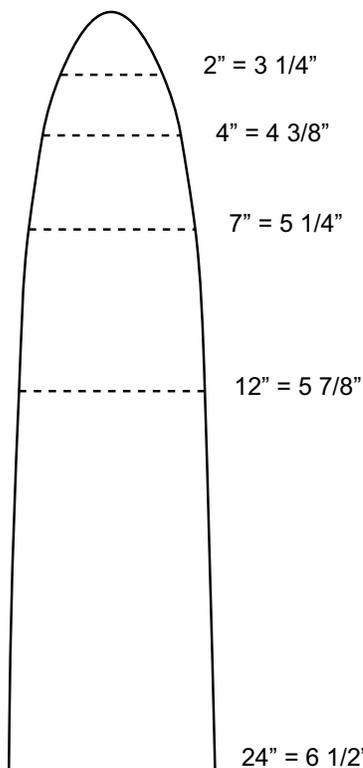
Now, with these cuts completed, work your hand up the back between the pelt and the flesh. Work the pelt over the head, cutting the ears close to the skull and with care around eyes and mouth. Next pull the front feet through the pelt and carefully work the pelt away from the belly down to the tail.

## FLESHING AND STRETCHING THE MUSKRAT

Only excess fat and meat should be removed. The saddle must be left on. Removal of the saddle will leave your rats papery and with less value. We recommend using wire stretchers as it makes each muskrat a uniform fit. However, wooden stretchers can be used. As with all pelts, make sure the pelt is centered properly on the stretcher. Pull the pelt down snugly on the wire frame. Insert the tension hooks into

the tail leather. Put most of the pressure on the belly hook. This keeps the pelt snug on the stretcher yet allows the back where the fur is graded to be left loose so over-stretching is reduced. Make sure the nose does not slip over the end of the stretcher. Use a clothes pin or a nail through the nose. Wipe off excess grease with paper towel or cloth.

## **Muskrat Board Size Board Length = 24 inches**



**Wire stretchers are also an acceptable method of putting up muskrat.**

### Muskrat Pelt Size

<b>3X</b>	<b>Over 17"</b>	<b>Over 43cm</b>
<b>2X</b>	<b>15 1/2" - 17"</b>	<b>39-43cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>14" - 15 1/2"</b>	<b>35.5-39cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>13" - 14"</b>	<b>33-35.5cm</b>
<b>MD</b>	<b>11 1/2" - 13"</b>	<b>29-33cm</b>
<b>SM</b>	<b>10" - 11 1/2"</b>	<b>25-29cm</b>
<b>XS</b>	<b>Under 10"</b>	<b>Under 25cm</b>

**TIP: For mink & muskrat, the saddle should be left on.**

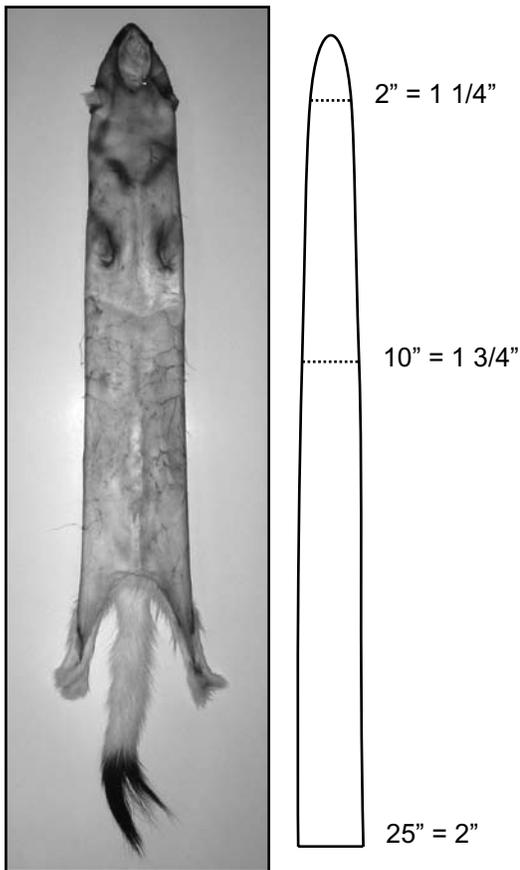
# Weasel & Squirrel - Cased fur in, front legs in, lower lip off.

Weasels and red squirrels are easy to skin and are ideal to learn the basics of proper skinning and pelt preparation. Using a sharp knife, cut in a straight line from one hind foot to the other. Cut across to the anus, be careful not to cut too deep because this releases oil and scent. Use your fingers to work the pelt loose from the hind legs.

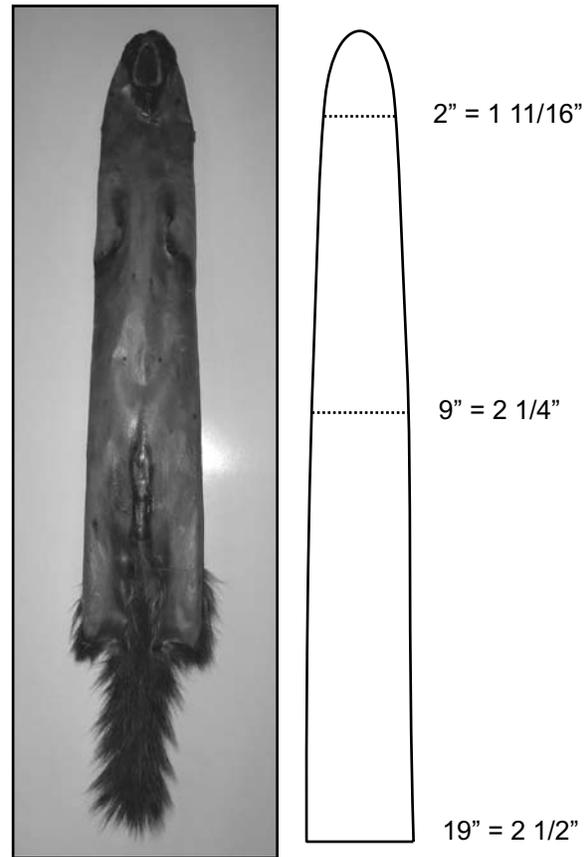
Free the bone from the tail and pull the pelt down over the flanks. Although they are easy to skin, the flesh shows a tendency to stick to the body at certain points and may require a small cut. Continue

to pull the pelt down over the shoulders, being careful not to tear the pelt by using too much pressure. The flesh on the underside of the shoulder will stick to the pelt and should be cut free. This will reveal the elbow joints of the front legs. Pull the front legs through, skin carefully around the eyes, ears, lips and nose and remove the pelt from the carcass. Place the pelt fur down on the board, using a tack to fix each hind foot in place. Remember to split the tail. Hold the base of the tail in position with a piece of screen.

## Weasel Board Size Board Length = 25 inches



## Squirrel Board Size Board Length = 19 inches



### Weasel Pelt Size

<b>3X-2X</b>	<b>Over 15"</b>	<b>Over 38cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>13" - 15"</b>	<b>33-38cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>11" - 13"</b>	<b>28-33cm</b>
<b>MD</b>	<b>9" - 11"</b>	<b>23-28cm</b>
<b>SM</b>	<b>Under 9"</b>	<b>Under 23cm</b>

### Squirrel Pelt Size

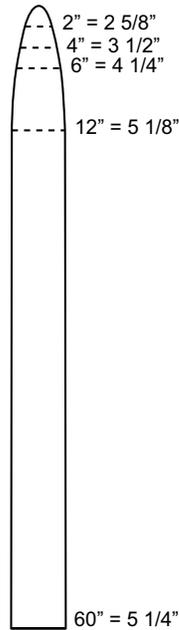
<b>3X-2X</b>	<b>Over 10 1/4"</b>	<b>Over 26cm</b>
<b>1X-LG</b>	<b>9 1/4" - 10 1/4"</b>	<b>23.5 - 26cm</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>Under 9 1/4"</b>	<b>Under 23.5cm</b>

# Opossum & Skunk - Cased fur in, inspection window, lower lip off.

Opossum and skunk are handled cased skinned and sold fur in. When skinning opossum, be careful around the belly area as it can easily tear. Skin opossum basically the same way as you would a raccoon but stretch on a fox board 5 1/4" wide. Both skunk and opossum need to be fleshed to remove the excess fat and grease.

## Board Size

**Board Length = 60 inches**



**Cased skinned & fur in, handled in the same fashion as a raccoon.**

### Opossum & Skunk Pelt Size

<b>2X</b>	<b>Over 29"</b>	<b>Over 74cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>27" - 29"</b>	<b>69-74cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>24" - 27"</b>	<b>61-69cm</b>
<b>MD-SM</b>	<b>Under 24"</b>	<b>Under 61cm</b>

**Skunk**

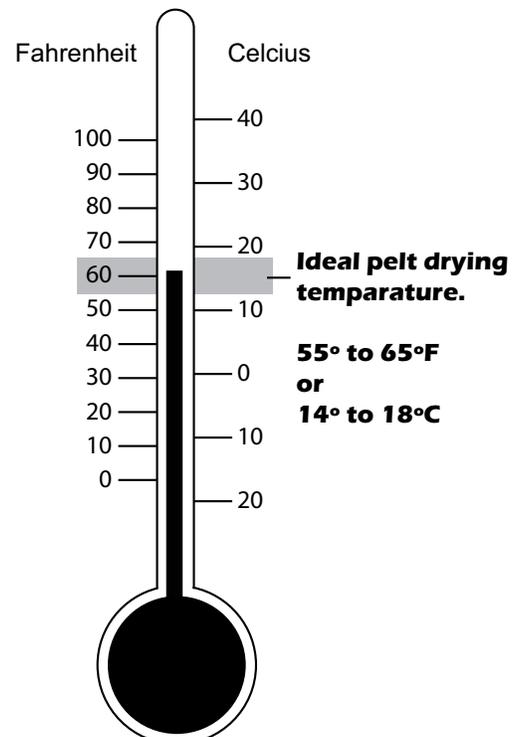
## Proper Drying and Handling

There are many factors that a fur harvester has no control over: the weather, the market prices, the number of fur-bearers in their catch. Two very important factors that we have direct control over are the proper handling and the proper drying of our harvest. You can not make a \$10.00 pelt into a \$100.00 pelt but you can very quickly turn a \$100.00 pelt into a \$10.00 pelt.

We are so busy preparing for the trapping season we sometimes forget to make sure we have a good set up for skinning and drying our catch. It is extremely important to have a controlled and constant temperature to dry the pelts. We recommend a constant heat source at 55 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit or 14 to 18 degrees Celsius.

The level of humidity is also a key factor in drying pelts. Too much and you will see mold on your catch. A good method to overcome this is the use of a dehumidifier.

One last method to aid in the drying of fur is a fan. Use the fan to circulate the air in your fur processing room. The use of a fan is a safe way to speed up the drying process.



**TIP: The use of clean sawdust will help when fleshing pelts.**

# Wolf & Wolverine - Cased fur out, lip on, claws on, pads on.

In order to properly skin and stretch wolves and wolverines a fur harvester has to understand the end use for these species. In the case of wolves you have to be prepared to handle a large fur bearer with the proper equipment. Skinning and stretching an animal that can weigh over 100 lbs can be a challenge right from the start. Knowing how to prepare the right pelt for the taxidermy market can take in excess of 5 hours per pelt. Before you invest that much time and effort make sure the skin is worth the effort. Size, fur quality, colour and character of the pelt must be considered before investing the time it takes to skin the pelt for the taxidermy market.

Should the wolf be small under 48 inches, caught early in the season before the pelt is prime or rubbed and damage by the snare you may want to skin the animal the same as a coyote or fox skin. Too many pelts are sent to market that are inferior skins and poorly prepared.

If the wolverine is poorly caught with heavy damage to the pelt again you may want to consider skinning for the trim market.

## HARVESTING

It is important right from the start to harvest the targeted species with the most up to date methods that will produce a pelt that is not damaged by the harvester. Care must be taken right from the start to ensure the skin is handled in the field correctly. You should have a clean fur bag or pack sack ready to place the animal in. If you must dispatch the animal in the field be careful of the blood leaking onto the carcass. Rather than use a head shot I recommend shooting the animal in the chest with a .22 caliber. This method has proven to cause less damage to the pelt and is a quick humane way to dispatch.

## SKINNING

The proper method to handle both species is to case skin them. Extra care must be taken to skin out each paw complete with all claws and pads. The anal opening should be left on the pelt and the ears must be complete with the ear cartilage separated. The lips must be carefully skinned close to the jaw line and split to allow the complete lip to dry properly. The nose must be carefully skinned and complete, even the eyes take extra care to include as much material as possible.

You can rough skin the pelt and freeze it in order to give you more time to work the pelt properly later. Care must be taken to ensure the pelt freezes quickly.

## SKINNING THE PAWS

Each toe must be skinned down to the last knuckle and the claws left fully attached to each pelt. The main pads on each foot must be cleaned of all the fat. The use of a sharp knife or a sharp pair of scissors are good tools to aid in this step. You should have a pocket when finished. Make sure you leave the main pad on each paw intact. The best money is paid for complete wolves; this includes the complete foot with all claws and pads attached. The best method is to make a pouch with the claws and pads. Split the leg down to the main pad then carefully skin out the rest. Allow about



**Each toe must be skinned down to the last knuckle and the claws left fully attached.**



**The main pads on each foot must be cleaned of all the fat.**

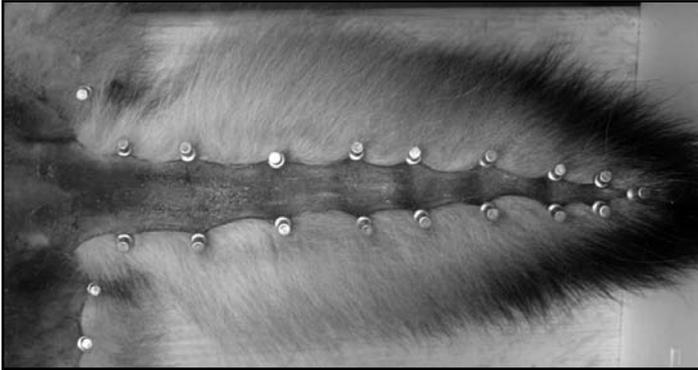


**Make sure you leave the main pad on each paw intact.**

one day drying and then turn out and fill it with borax or sawdust until its dry. You can also stuff the foot with paper towels, this helps the foot keep its shape and shows it in the best possible manner. Just remember to remove the stuffing before shipping.

## TAIL

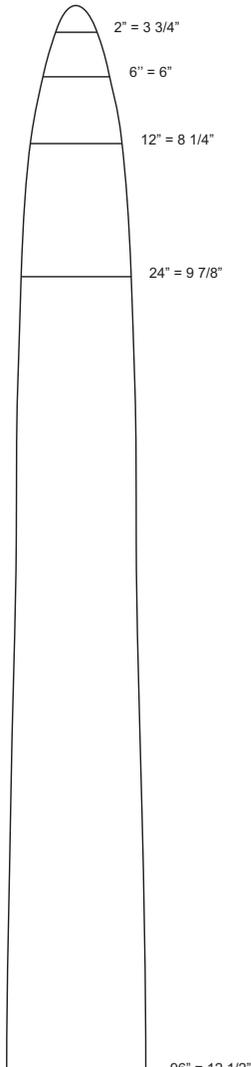
Split the tail the full length, be extra careful not to damage the tail with a slip of the knife. A complete tail is important to the pelt.



**Spilt the tail the full length.**

## Wolf Board Size

**Board Length = 96 inches**



## EARS

On wolves extra care must be used around the ears to properly separate the inner ear cartilage from the back of the ear in order to make sure it dries without tainting. Properly handling the ears is again extremely important to the finished pelt. The whole ear must be complete.



**One of the most important jobs on a wolf is to separate the ear cartilage.**



**Complete ear cartilage separated from ear but still attached.**

## Wolf Pelt Size

<b>3X</b>	<b>Over 66"</b>	<b>Over 167.5cm</b>
<b>2X</b>	<b>60" - 66"</b>	<b>152-167.5cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>54" - 60"</b>	<b>137-152cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>48" - 54"</b>	<b>122-137cm</b>
<b>MD</b>	<b>42" - 48"</b>	<b>106.5-122cm</b>
<b>SM</b>	<b>Under 42"</b>	<b>Under 106.5</b>

## Wolverine Pelt Size

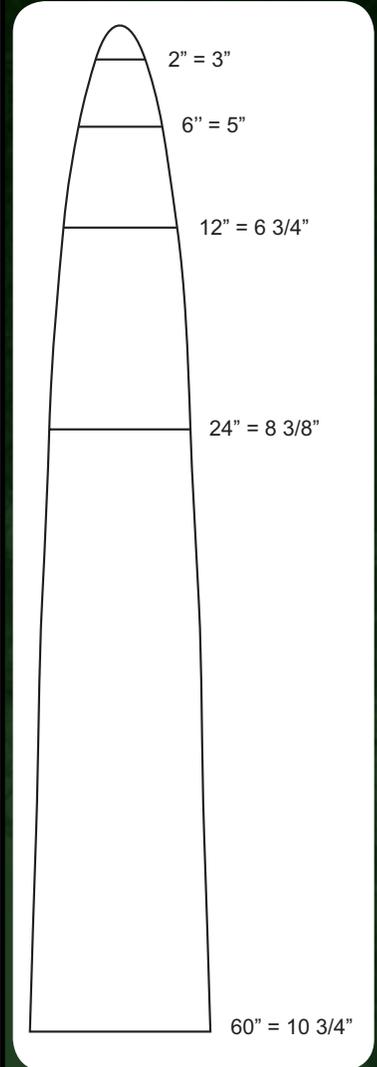
<b>4X</b>	<b>Over 41"</b>	<b>Over 104cm</b>
<b>3X</b>	<b>38" - 41"</b>	<b>96.5-104cm</b>
<b>2X</b>	<b>35" - 38"</b>	<b>89-96.5cm</b>
<b>1X</b>	<b>32" - 35"</b>	<b>81-89cm</b>
<b>LG</b>	<b>Under 32"</b>	<b>Under 81cm</b>



# How to prepare pelts for taxidermy

## Wolf ~ Wolverine ~ Bear

### Wolverine Board Size



**Be careful near the eyes, leave as much skin as possible attached to the hide.**

**Lower lip on. Leave as much lip on as possible.**

**Front legs out with pads & claws attached. (see image below)**

**Leave anal opening attached to the pelt.**

**Tail is split and pinned open.**

**Complete with all claws attached.**



