



# Muskrat Control - What a landowner CAN do in South Carolina

**Hunting/Shooting:** The normal hunting season for muskrats is Thanksgiving Day until March 1. However, a free depredation permit can be issued to landowners that do not have a hunting license (see Depredation Permits). A permit is required for anyone to hunt or shoot muskrats at night.

- **Rifles can be extremely dangerous when fired into water** and have a tendency to skip (ricochet) off the water's surface. **Rifle bullets may travel 1 to 2 miles after ricocheting off the water's surface.** Use of a 12 or 20 gauge shotgun with shot sizes from #4 down to BB should be acceptable. Larger shot such as buckshot, may have too few pellets to be effective due to the small size of muskrats.

**Trapping:** The normal trapping season for licensed trappers is Dec. 1 - Mar. 1. **HOWEVER**, a property owner may obtain a free depredation permit to trap outside of the normal trapping season and/or without a trapping license (see Depredation Permits).

### Legal Traps:

- **Body-gripping traps** (Commonly known as Conibear traps): Recommended size is the #110 or #120. No baits or lures allowed. Must be set in a water or slide set and in the vertical position only. **Note:** use care when using Conibear traps – they are designed to quickly and humanely kill the muskrat and close with significant force. Always use the attached safety hooks when setting Conibear traps (see Figure 1 at right). While smaller body-gripping traps can be set by hand, setting tongs are available to make this task easier. A Conibear safety gripper is also recommended. Both can be purchased from trapping supply companies.
- **Snares:** Snares are legal in water sets only.
- **Foothold traps:** (recommended for experienced trappers only). Size must be smaller than 6 1/2" inside jaw spread for water sets and 5 3/4" for land sets (see Figure 2). Generally much smaller foothold traps such as the #1 coilspring or the #11 longspring are used. These traps have inside jaw spreads of approximately 3 3/4". Foothold traps should be used only as a submersion set and can be used with multiple foothold traps on a floating log submersion set (see figure 3 below).
- **Live traps:** (cage traps). *The relocation of live muskrats is illegal!*

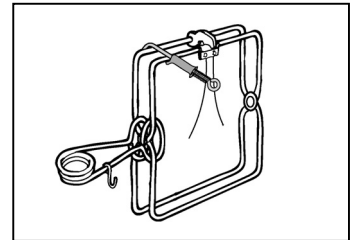
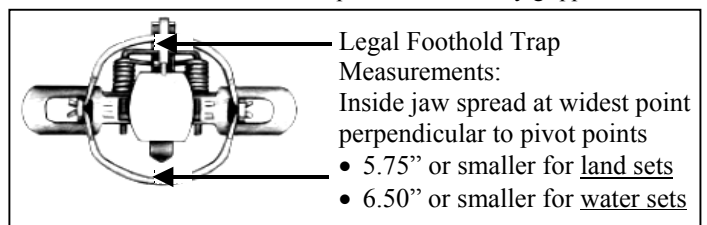


Figure 1. #110 Body-gripping trap (Conibear) diagram shown in the set position with safety gripper attached



Legal Foothold Trap Measurements:  
Inside jaw spread at widest point perpendicular to pivot points

- 5.75" or smaller for land sets
- 6.50" or smaller for water sets

Figure 2. Measuring foothold traps

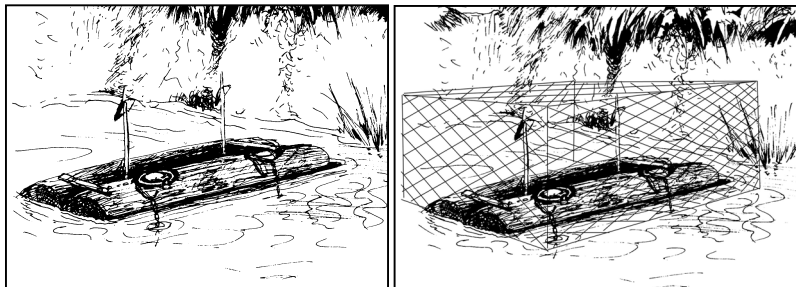
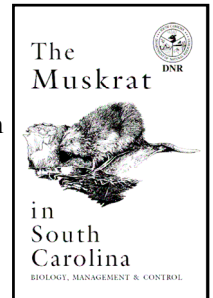


Figure 3. Floating log set with excluder cage and without. The excluder must be entered from below the water and can help reduce non-target catches.

DNR publishes a separate Muskrat brochure with biological information and additional control tips. This is also available online at: <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/muskrat/muskrat>



**Depredation Permits:** A depredation permit allows a property owner (or his designee) to trap or shoot damage-causing muskrats without any kind of license or season restrictions. The permit is FREE and available from any of DNR's offices or conservation officers. These permits may also be obtained over the phone. This permit will be good for one year for a specific site (such as Mr. Smith's farm).

**The 100-yard Exemption:** Within 100-yards of the property owner's residence (so long as you are still on your own property), muskrats may be trapped or shot (if it is legal to discharge a firearm at the property's location) **WITHOUT ANY KIND OF LICENSE OR PERMIT**. This exemption applies to the property owner or his designee (such as a friend, relative, or any other person designated by the property owner).

**Depredation Permits to shoot at night:** A depredation permit to shoot muskrats at night **MUST** be obtained from a local DNR conservation officer. If you do not know a local DNR officer, contact the DNR at 803-955-4000 or 1-800-922-5431 and ask to have a local DNR officer contact you.

**Non-Lethal Options:** These options are for reducing muskrat damage without removing the muskrat.

- **Aquatic plant control:** Controlling aquatic vegetation may encourage muskrats to leave the area.
- **Wire Barriers:** Fences, fencing, and wire can also prevent muskrats from entering an area or damaging docks. Buried wire or rip rap on dam faces and gradually sloped dams (3:1) with spillways large enough that prevent water levels from rising more than 6 inches can help deter further burrowing and/or lessen damage.

**Wildlife Control Operators (WCOs):** For those property owners that wish to pay someone to trap muskrats for them, the list of Wildlife Control Operators is available from any DNR office or online at <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/nwco.html> . These companies and individuals perform wildlife control services on a contract-fee basis. WCOs are not DNR employees and are not affiliated with the DNR. It is important to ask for references before hiring a WCO. Have all fees and guarantees in writing.

**Questions:** about muskrats, legal issues, control techniques, trapping advice, or anything else muskrat-related, contact the DNR Furbearer Project at 803-734-3609.