

Trapping Now

with an eye to the future

By Joe Albert
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Wells, Minn. — Scott Landherr is a trapper.

He's not really new to the game — he's been pretty intense about the whole thing for the past three years — but there was a long period of time when the 33-year old, who trapped smaller stuff as a kid, focused on other pursuits (bowhunting, in particular).

Then he moved, sought other types of experiences in the outdoors, and welcomed a baby boy to the family. Running traps, he figured, was a good

up the sport of trapping again, he read about and grew concerned about the fight over dogs getting caught in Conibear traps. Some wanted Conibear traps banned. Others didn't want to hear about changing the way they used them.

As he looks across the landscape and processes what he sees, he figures the end result will be something no trapper wants — the banning of Conibear traps.

"There's a compromise to this whole deal," Landherr said. "It doesn't have to be me against you, or you against me. There's no reason you can't compromise a little bit."

In Landherr's mind, compromise comes in a plywood box — loaded with two 160 or 220 Conibear traps.

The front and back of the box features a 9-inch by 12-inch square opening. That opening is placed against the ground. Then there are tapered cuts that allow the traps to be set inside the box.

"The traps are set back inside the box at least 10 inches," Landherr said. "The law says seven inches, but the farther back, the better."

Landherr leaves four to six inches

between the traps, and loads that area of the box with bait.

"For bait, I've used cat food and molasses, but I've started shying away from cat food or anything fishy because then you stay away from catching skunks and cats," he said. "Lately, I've been using just kind of a flour-based dough with molasses and vanilla in it — sweets. I try to run a lot of the sweets and stay away from the fish."

But the key to Landherr's box is that animals have to work to get trapped, given the opening amounts only to about five inches.

"I got the idea of making a coon crawl in there," he said. "He's lower to the ground and will crawl on his belly and crawl into something. They have to get down and get in. That makes it more dog-proof, especially for a smaller dog."

Landherr has two Labs, neither of which — including the 40-pound yellow — has been able to get into the box. He's tested it on five or six other dogs, too, and they haven't been able to get in.

"A beagle could maybe get in, or a smaller Brittany (spaniel)," Landherr said. "But I don't think it would be able to get them behind the head."



Landherr makes his "dog-proof Conibear boxes" out of plywood. The openings are big enough to catch raccoons, but small enough, he says, to exclude most dogs. He uses 160 and 220 Conibears in the boxes.



Landherr spends a lot of time trapping with his 3-year old son, Cash (above). Part of Landherr's motivation for creating a "dog-proof Conibear box" is so youngsters like his son will be able to use Conibears in the future.

way to spend some time in the outdoors with his kid, which, he learned, also was a good way to get his wife to sign off on the hours spent away from home.

There can be money in trapping, of course, which is sort of what Landherr, who lives in Wells in southern Minnesota, had in mind when he built what he called a "dog-proof Conibear box," which, as its name implies, is designed to prevent dogs from getting caught in traps.

But it wasn't long before he decided the best route was to just let people know about it. Call it his contribution to the future of the sport he loves.

"I thought maybe it was something I could sell," said Landherr, on the road to pick up more trapping supplies. "But that doesn't do any good if the Conibear gets banned."

Which brings us to the crux of the story.

Landherr always has been an outdoors kind of guy — the bushy beard he wears just solidifies the persona — but as he drew back to his roots and took



Scott Landherr trapped as a youngster, and the 33-year-old has become more active in recent years, targeting animals ranging from raccoons to beavers (above).

Photos by Joe Albert/courtesy of Scott Landherr

I think it would slap their nose. And that's better than being dead."

Dog guy

Landherr has no interest in trapping an animal he's not targeting. It slows him down. So from a purely economic and non-emotional standpoint, it costs him money if he catches a cat, or dog, or opossum, or skunk.

But as a guy who grew up with dogs, he can't imagine finding his canine in a Conibear.

"I have pheasant hunted all my life, and my dad used to pull me in a sled on pheasant trips starting when I was 2 years old," Landherr said. "I don't think my dad missed a Sunday of pheasant hunting in 25 years or more. That's just what we did every Sunday."

So, of course, he's grown up with dogs.

"We always had bird dogs," Landherr said. "I knew what Conibears were, and I feared them, too. But then when I used them to trap, I realized how efficient they are, and that the animal doesn't suffer."

He wants the traps around, but fears those who want them banned will win, if things continue on their current path. After all, his 3-year-old son Cash enjoys checking traps with Dad, who deposits his fur checks into Cash's savings account.

"Maybe he can buy a nice truck or something when he gets to be 16 years old," Landherr said.

But above all, he wants his son to grow up with the ability to trap, if that's what he wants to do. After all, trapping's about much more than just killing raccoons and other animals and selling the fur.

"After you get into trapping, you just look at things in a different way," Landherr said. "You're constantly walking around with your eyes on the ground. You're constantly searching for the small things. Looking down at the ground and seeing, 'something came here, and there's a reason he walked around that.' That's what makes it cool — just the exploring part of it."



Landherr's dog-proof boxes allow for the use of two Conibear traps in each. It's not uncommon for him to score a double and catch one raccoon in each trap.