

BASIC
FUR MANAGEMENT PLAN
STILLWATER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Justification

The production of muskrats merits a high priority in the management of the Stillwater Wildlife Area. There is a definite obligation to produce revenue for the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District from the harvest of surplus furbearing animals. In accordance with the terms of the three-way agreement "the Service and the Commission agree to make every effort, commensurate with the primary objectives, to improve the area for fur production The removal of all surplus furbearers shall be accomplished under a share-trapping program which the Service agrees to administer. Under such a program, which shall provide for a reasonable division of the furs or the proceeds therefrom between the District and the trappers in accordance with local practices, the Service shall issue all necessary trapping permits, giving priority to qualified local residents; dispose of the District's share of the furs; receive on behalf of the District, the revenues therefrom,..... :

The only furbearer which occurs at the present time in harvestable numbers is the muskrat. Therefore, the terms furbearer and muskrat must be considered synonymous.

Method of Fur Harvest

The annual harvest of muskrats shall be accomplished on a share-trapping basis. Local men who are qualified will be employed under special use permit to do the trapping. Each trapper will be assigned a definite territory or unit of marsh and a quota of muskrats limited to the number of animals which are considered surplus on that unit. At periodic intervals during the trapping season, the fur will be divided between the Government and the trapper with each party receiving a fair and proportionate share. Following the fur division, the share received by the Government on behalf of the District shall be shipped to the designated Auction Company where it will be disposed of at public sale.

Trapping Territories

The Stillwater marsh shall be divided into 5 trapping units (see attached map). The unit boundaries follow natural, or structural, division lines, so are not equal in area, however, each includes sufficient acreage to provide adequate trapping for one individual when the marsh becomes fully productive. During periods of low population it will be necessary to combine some of these units. In fact the need for combining units will frequently arise. Our water management plan, which calls for the periodic drying of marsh pools in order to facilitate the control of undesirable plants and fish, will at times

limit the productivity of certain trapping territories. Also, until such time as our marsh development program is complete, periods of water shortage will prohibit maximum muskrat production in the shallow marginal areas.

The necessity for combining trapping units requires a certain flexibility in the unit system, but it does not eliminate the need for having such established territories. Having a series of units with well established boundaries will eliminate a possibility of future confusion. It is much easier to combine or eliminate temporarily, definite units than it is to create new units which may involve reapportioning of the entire marsh area.

We should qualify the above statements by saying that it may become advisable, in the future, to relocate some of the unit boundaries. We lack a background of experience on the Stillwater marsh and, therefore, may not be entirely accurate in our estimation of the potential productivity of certain units.

Trapping Unit No. 1. This unit includes the Stillwater Point Reservoir and Foxtail Channel north to "D" Dike. At the present time this is not an economic unit. The marsh consists of approximately 950 acres, primarily cattail growth. It is all new marsh land which has not reached the stage of maturity required for heavy productivity. The Reservoir, too, has a widely fluctuating water level which is not a desirable factor. On the other hand, development plans call for the flooding of new areas along Foxtail which will add appreciably to the marsh acreage. This unit is potentially capable of producing sufficient muskrats to provide trapping for one man.

Trapping Unit No. 2. The Nutgrass Unit. This territory includes approximately 1,900 acres of alkali bulrush and cattail. It is too large for one trapper, especially since, under proper management, which will include permanent water and high water levels during the winter, it should become our most productive marsh. It can probably be handled, though, by one trapper and assistant. The area has definite structural or natural boundaries as a whole but lacks physical features or natural division lines which could be used to subdivide it into smaller units.

Unit 2 is bounded on the north by the Nutgrass Dike, on the west by Swan Lake and Pintail Bay Dikes, on the south by "D" Dike and on the east by the mainland.

Trapping Unit No. 3. The smallest of the territories in terms of emergent growth which covers some 550 acres. Marsh increment is to be expected, however, following the impoundment of Pintail Bay. This territory consists of the Pintail Bay and Swan Lake development areas.

The unit is bounded by Swan Lake and Pintail Bay Dikes on the east, by the CR Dike on the south, the Willow Lake Dikes on the West and the mainland on the north.

Trapping Unit No. 4. This territory includes the marsh units of Lead Lake and Tule Lake. It contains about 800 acres of plant growth, mostly cattail. Deep water, (up to 4'), which is characteristic of much of this area as well as trapping unit 5, provides a margin of safety for the muskrats during hard winter freezes and tends to prevent the population fluctuations that appear to be typical in other, shallower, parts of the marsh.

The unit is bounded on the south by the Canvasback Gun Club, on the east by the mainland, and on the north and west by the CR Dikes.

Trapping Unit No. 5. The Millan Channel - Willow Lake Area; similar to Unit 4 in possessing deep water marsh and being highly productive of muskrats. The territory contains 1,300 acres of emergent growth. It is bounded on the west and north by the mainland, on the east by the Willow Lake and CR Dikes, and on the south by the Canvasback Club.

Other Marsh Areas. No trapping will be possible on the Indian Lakes or Pelican Island while they remain in their present condition. Both areas are heavily overgrazed, and Pelican Island does not have a permanent water supply. An amendment to this plan will be prepared if and when muskrat production in these areas increases.

Selection of Trappers

The trapping territories are intended to be one-man units under normal conditions. We may encounter periods of extremely high population density, though, which will require greater trapping pressure. Such an exigency can be met by permitting the trappers to use assistants. An assistant or trapper helper will be employed by the trapper and need not require a separate trapping permit, however, he must be a person acceptable to the Refuge Manager. No more than one helper may be employed by any trapper permittee.

The duties of a helper will be twofold: He will assist in the skimming and handling of the fur; he may also be permitted to do some trapping, particularly in outlying areas of marsh which are not easily reached by the main trapline. In the event of a population irruption, when control measures are imperative, the assistant may have to assume the unofficial status of a trapping partner.

Several criteria will be used in selecting from the list of trapper applicants. These include:

1. Previous trapping experience.
2. Residence, with highest priority going to those living nearest the marsh.
3. Possession of the necessary equipment, including an automobile and boat, or ability to get this equipment.
4. References of personal character.
5. Type of job held by applicant. We feel that seasonal workers

should be employed when available in preference to men holding permanent jobs.

Trapping Equipment

Because of the distance between the marsh and residential areas a car, or truck, will be an essential part of the trapper's equipment. He must also furnish a boat, trapping equipment, and all provisions and supplies needed in conducting the trapping operations.

It will be permissible for the trapper to establish a camp at a designated place in the marsh. Any camp must be of a temporary nature and must be completely removed from the Stillwater Wildlife Management Area and the camp site satisfactorily cleaned up within two weeks following the close of the trapping season.

Handling the Fur

The trapper or his assistant will be required to skin the muskrats and flesh, stretch and dry the pelts in accordance with approved practices. Until such time as we have adequate facilities for taking care of the furs, the trapper will also have to be responsible for storage. If the trapper drives to and from the Stillwater Management Area each day, he shall be required to stop at the Service Building at the end of each trap day in order to have his catch checked by refuge personnel. If the trapper camps on the Management Area, his catch must be checked on those occasions when he leaves the Area. Otherwise, it will be inspected at indefinite intervals in the field and at division time.

Each trapper will be required to make a daily report of his muskrat take.

Dividing the Fur

The fur will be divided on a 50:50 basis with the trapper receiving half and the Government half. Divisions of cured pelts will be made once a week during the trapping period.

The fur shall be divided on a quality basis using at least three grades. It will be permissible for the trapper permittee to grade the fur, but in this event the Government will select its share of the fur.

Disposition of Carcasses

There is no known market for muskrat carcasses in the vicinity of Fallon, therefore, the trapper will be required to bury all carcasses.

Trapping Season

The State of Nevada has set the period of November 1 to March 15 as the trapping season. Within this framework, however, the County Game Management Boards are empowered to set such limitations as seem desirable. At present the full period is open in Churchill County, and, because of the everpresent factor of muskrat damage to irrigation structures, it seems doubtful that any decrease in length is to be expected.

We do not favor using the entire period of the open season unless, or until, an overabundance of muskrats requires extended trapping. November 1 is a little early to start trapping for many of the muskrats caught at this time will be small or unprime. March 15 is too late, except during prolonged winters, for by this time breeding will have started.

There is some argument for a long season since freezing of the marsh will curtail or prevent trapping. The ice here is usually too thick to permit the use of a boat but not thick enough, except for brief periods, to permit travel on foot. The average period when ice can be expected to give trouble in the marsh is November 26 to February 13.

Until such time as our muskrat population does require heavy trapping, we feel that a season extending from November 15 to February 28 will be adequate and satisfactory.

Other Regulations

The harvest of furs on the Stillwater Wildlife Management Area will be administered in accordance with all State laws and regulations.

Each trapper must possess not only the \$1.00 general trapping license but also the \$10.00 special muskrat license.

There seems to be little State regulation of trapping practice, though the Fish and Game Code does state that "it shall be unlawful to at any time molest or destroy, or attempt to molest or destroy, any muskrat nest." This is interpreted to mean that trapping in muskrat houses and in bank dens is prohibited.

Removal Quotas

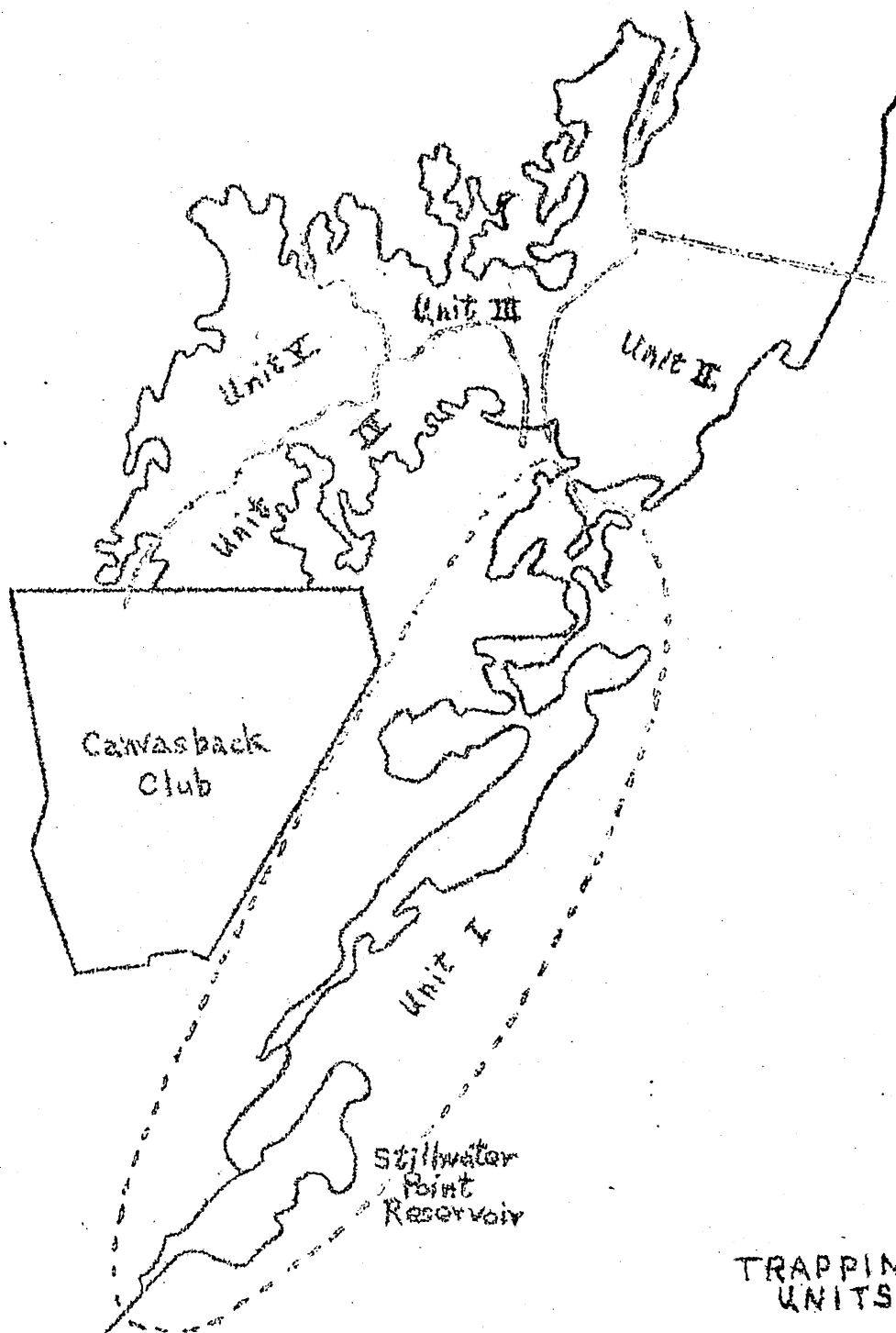
Trapping quotas shall be based upon information secured during a pre-season muskrat census. Both the State and the Service will cooperate in this census. Here, also, the three-way agreement states that "the Service and the Commission will annually conduct a joint survey of the muskrat population which will be the basis for a joint determination of the number of such furbearers to be trapped during each season."

In general, the harvestable quota shall include only those muskrats which are surplus to the breeding stock required to maintain a population commensurate with the carrying capacity of the marsh. This may be altered under certain conditions. In the event of disease, trapping should be heavy enough to thin out the population in an effort to retard the spread of the infection and also to get as much revenue as possible from animals which will otherwise be lost. When units are scheduled for dewatering as many animals as possible should be removed except along the periphery adjacent to other marsh areas. It may be necessary, also, to overtrap local areas in order to minimize damage to dikes, structures, etc.

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Approved by
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memo dated
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TRAPPING
UNITS