

HOW TO RELEASE AN ACCIDENTALLY TRAPPED LYNX

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The purpose of this document is to provide trappers and others (e.g., DNR staff) with information on options for releasing an accidentally trapped lynx (or another animal). In the lower 48 states, the Canada lynx is currently a federally threatened species. While the likelihood of a lynx capture is low, it's imperative that trappers be prepared for such an event. Special trapping regulations are in place in our "Lynx Zone" ([Avoid trapping lynx | Minnesota DNR \(state.mn.us\)](#)) that help minimize the chances of catching or killing a lynx; they at least occasionally occur outside this zone so all trappers should be aware of the potential and prepared to lawfully and effectively handle the situation. This document is not intended to provide information on identifying lynx or lynx sign, but we emphasize 3 important points:

- Information on distinguishing lynx and bobcats can be found in this brochure [HOW TO AVOID INCIDENTAL TAKE OF LYNX \(state.mn.us\)](#)
 - You can obtain additional information on areas where lynx may be more likely to occur by contacting your local DNR Wildlife Office [Wildlife area offices | Minnesota DNR \(state.mn.us\)](#) or a local U.S. Forest Service Office ([Superior National Forest - Offices \(usda.gov\)](#) , [Chippewa National Forest - Offices \(usda.gov\)](#)).
 - It is important to remain vigilant daily for signs of lynx (e.g., tracks in snow, trail camera detections) in the areas you are trapping.
- ➔ If a lynx is dead in your trap, you are required to report the take to a conservation officer within 24 hours and may not possess or transport the animal without prior authorization.
- ➔ If you capture and release a lynx, you are required to report the catch to a conservation officer within 24 hours of the taking but are encouraged to do so as soon as possible.
- Try to leave the site undisturbed after the release and note or collect any potential genetic samples (e.g., a scat, hairs found on the trap or at the site) in the area that could be used to confirm the animal was indeed a lynx, not a bobcat or lynx-bobcat hybrid.

STOP – Stop, Think, Observe, Plan

- Be prepared every day with the tools necessary for a proper/safe release. See checklist at end.
- If possible, try to have a second person present (friend or family member, fellow trapper, conservation officer) to assist with the release, for both your safety and improved efficiency of the release.
 - **If no friend/relative is available to assist, try contacting your local DNR Wildlife office at their number found at the link above.** If you can reach them, they may be able to assist or locate a conservation officer who can. Be sure to have their numbers stored in your phone or otherwise handy while you are out trapping.
 - To ensure you are not agitating the animal, remain a sufficient distance away if you are awaiting assistance.
 - If you are unable to find assistance within a reasonable time (e.g., 1 hour), it is recommended that you proceed with your attempt to release the animal (assuming you are prepared) rather than having the animal spend additional time in the trap.
- Quickly assess the animal's apparent condition and the location/position of the trapping device on the animal (both which may influence tool or release method choices). Also assess how much freedom of movement the animal will have when trying to 'corner' it.
- Assess the local site for objects that could cause animal injury or release complications (e.g., large rocks, sharp sticks, saplings) and remove or avoid those while working to restrain the animal.
- Be sure you have all tools deemed necessary before you begin your attempt to release the animal. Having to repeatedly start over adds stress and risk of injury.
- Remain quiet/calm and move slowly as you approach the animal for the release.
- If the animal is in a snare or cable restraint, especially if around the neck, it is very important to 'corner' the animal as quickly (but safely) as possible to prevent lunges that could tighten the cable, and to use release methods that do not require the cable to remain taut with pressure on the animal while you attempt to cut the cable.
 - **ONLY cut a snare/cable restraint in a manner that ensures it falls completely free of the animal** (i.e., somewhere on the loop inside the lock).
- NEVER ATTEMPT TO 'STUN' AN ANIMAL, 'CHOKE IT DOWN', OR APPLY EXCESSIVE COMPRESSION TO THE NECK OR CHEST CAVITY AS A WAY TO IMMOBILIZE IT FOR RELEASE.

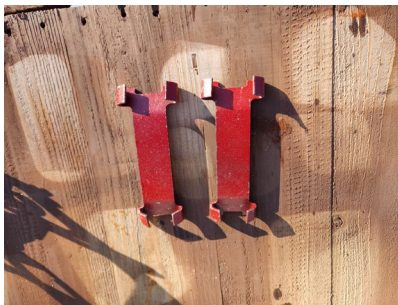
Trap Setting 'Accessories'

Compressing trap springs to set a trap is often much easier than doing so to detach a trap from a live animal. For example, you may normally be able to compress the springs on a foothold trap with your hands when the trap is placed on your leg for leverage, but that will not be possible when the trap is attached to the animal. Even using your feet to compress the springs, which usually requires the trap to be upright, may not be possible (e.g., trap is off the ground wrapped around some brush) or advised (i.e., injury could occur from bending the animal's foot awkwardly to make the trap upright to step on). All of this can be further complicated when you are doing a release by yourself. For example, you may be trying to control or hold a notched release board or catchpole while also trying to compress trap springs or cut cable. Hence, tools not normally needed to set traps may be beneficial during a release, and we mention a few trap setting tools below.

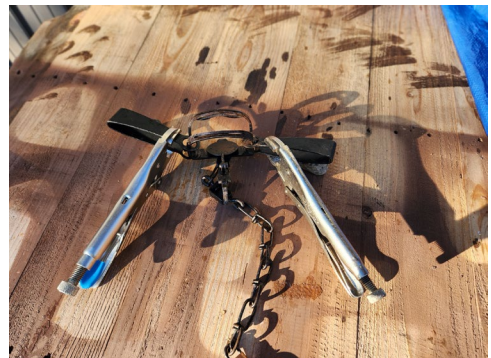
Foothold Trap Setters

Many types of foothold trap setters are available with desired style dependent on the trap model (e.g., trap size, longspring versus coilspring), so be prepared for all the trap styles you have deployed. Setters will usually make it easier to compress the springs if you are unable to do so by hand or with your feet. Common examples of foothold trap setters are shown below. Locking style setters, including standard vice grips, can be particularly handy for longspring footholds because they may allow 1 hand to remain free (e.g., to hold a notched board or catchpole) and compression of one spring at a time; we are unaware of locking style setters for coilspring foothold traps (but see box on the Wildcat of Idaho release tool below).

Coilspring Trap Setters:



Locking Longspring Trap Setters:



Snare or Cable Restraint Cutters

With rare exception (e.g., some snowshoe hare snares), snares and cable restraints are constructed with multi-stranded cable; **standard wire cutters will not (or will take a very long time to) cut cable. Rather, specialized cable cutters are necessary and should be carried by any trapper using snares or cable restraints.** Two examples are shown below, 1 spring-opened and the other manual.



Bodygrip Trap Setters

Although bodygrip traps are designed to be lethal, it remains possible that a lynx could be captured in a bodygrip trap by the foot or some other unexpected situation. Hence, bodygrip setters should always be carried by any trapper using these traps. Though there are many styles of setters, in animal release situations we strongly favor the use of 'locking setters' because they reduce (left example below) or eliminate (right example below) the amount of time that both hands must be removed from your restraining tool (e.g., a notched board or catchpole) to compress the springs and secure the safety latches.



While the above trap setting tools will often be desirable or even necessary, releasing a wild animal requires additional equipment that allows the trapper to control or safely isolate the animal while detaching the trap. We discuss a range of approaches, some pros/cons or caveats of each, and the situations where each method may be preferred.

Using A Net

Nets have been used less frequently in typical trapping situations than other methods but are popular among animal control specialists, zoos, and other captive animal facilities. **Using a net to restrain a captured animal may offer the greatest flexibility and ability to quickly prevent the animal from lunging or being able to swat or bite at you once subdued.** It can also be used in water situations, for example in securing a captured otter that may need to be released.

With properly designed capture nets, the animal quickly becomes entangled in the net and has limited range of movement, which leads to a safer release for you and the animal. Although a fishing net can be used, most are not ideal as they do not have deep or flexible enough netting to entangle the animal rapidly or effectively. Specialized animal handling nets also typically have a cinch cord that allows you to close the opening once the animal is in, a flexible net hoop that allows it to be pinned flat against the ground while still standing (as opposed to having to lay the net flat on the ground), and many have zippered ends that allow easy release also from the back of the net after the trap is detached. **Usually, once the animal is entangled, the net does not even need to be firmly held or otherwise secured as the animal will be unable to stand or run away, thereby making it more suitable for use by just 1 person.**

- ➔ **When choosing a net, we strongly recommend a professional animal control model, but a standard fishing-type net can be effective if the netting is deep and flexible enough to entangle the animal effectively.**
- ➔ **Once an animal is inside the net, it is still desirable, perhaps necessary, to have a heavy blanket or a small version of a notched board (see example below) with which to isolate a portion of the animal to compress trap springs or cut cable.** Mesh diameter on most nets is sufficient to allow the cutting of a cable without damaging the net, and most trap setters, if needed, can likely still be used through the net.



- ➔ **Nets can be used for removal of any trap type. They, along with catchpoles, may be best for removal of snares/cable restraints** because they do not require the animal to be pinned with the cable taut to access/cut the cable, reducing risk of further noose constriction.



Using a Catchpole

Catchpoles are a common handling tool; they are like Y-poles (see box below) except that the end has a closed loop that can be tightened on the animal. Some require manual release of the loop (i.e., pushing the cable back through the pole) while others have spring-loaded loop release knobs. Some also have a swiveling end to accommodate a restrained animal that rolls. We believe that poles in the 4-6' length with spring-loaded release mechanisms and a swiveling head are superior to those lacking such features, but any pole may work.

- ➔ **Great caution is needed to ensure you do not overtighten the noose on the animal's neck, especially with felids like lynx and bobcat (and some mustelids like otters); risk of restricting blood/air flow is greater with these species.** As such, we recommend that you also try and get 1 front leg through the noose to prevent overtightening on the neck, though this may reduce the ease/speed of releasing the pole from the animal. If you cannot get 1 leg in the loop, try to keep the noose closer to the shoulders than the base of the skull.
- ➔ **In most circumstances, but especially if you are doing a release with a catchpole by yourself, we advise you consider tying a long small-diameter rope to the end of the catchpole and then to a tree or 'drag' to prevent the chance of having the animal run off with the pole if you lose control after the trap is detached; an animal may quickly lunge (away, or even towards you) after the trap is detached, risking your loss of control of the pole.**
- ➔ Once on the animal, the head of the pole is usually pinned to the ground to try and prevent the animal from moving, but in so doing **it remains critical to ensure any downward pressure on the loop is not transferred to the animal's throat area, which can depend on whether it is laying on its belly, side, or back.** Pay close attention to this, especially if it takes you some time to detach the trap. **Immediately loosen the noose if the animal appears to exhibit labored breathing or is losing consciousness.**
- ➔ **Catchpoles can be used to release an animal captured in any trap type.**
 - **If in a foothold trap and you are by yourself,** we encourage you to use your feet to compress the trap springs, thereby allowing you to keep both hands on the pole. If not possible, stepping on the pole to free 1 or both hands will be needed depending on foothold trap type and any trap setters you have with you.
 - **If in a snare or cable restraint and you are by yourself,** you will need to secure the pole by either stepping on it, holding it in 1 hand, or having it pinned against your body while you cut the cable.
 - **If in a bodygrip trap by the foot and you are by yourself,** you will need to secure the pole by stepping on it or pinning it to your body if both hands are needed for your bodygrip setters, or hold the pole in 1 hand if you have a 1-handed bodygrip setter.



Using A Tote or Sled

Although not designed for animal release, standard storage totes or snowmobile/ice fishing sleds can be used to restrain an animal in a trap. Notches may be cut out of the side or corner of the tote/sled (see red circled area in figure below) that allow the restrained foot to be outside the tote for trap removal. This allows maximum downward pressure on the tote (e.g., sitting on it) to prevent the animal from lifting the tote. Alternatively, no notch need be cut, and the corner/side can just be lifted while the restrained foot is pulled out, but then excessive downward pressure should not be applied to the tote to avoid leg injury. Some sleds also have a natural curvature near the front (see example on right below) that may create a sufficient gap without having to cut a hole. Totes/sleds can be used to store trapping gear, thereby not becoming dead space in the truck. We believe totes or sleds that are 1.5-2'W X 3-4'L X 1-2'H will normally suffice, but larger is not a problem other than space and portability concerns.

Because this method requires getting close to the animal, and possibly trying to throw the tote over it, additional features can be added that increase tote control and keep you at a safer distance. For example, as shown below, a simple joist hanger can be bolted to the tote, allowing a 2X2 removable pole to be connected for better control (and may serve as a handle to pull the tote in to the trap location if further off the road).

- ➔ **Totes/sleds offer a safety advantage because the animal is completely separated from the trapper while the trap is detached. They also offer a dark secluded space which can keep the animal calm and from making lunges that could result in injury.**
- ➔ **Totes/sleds can work for any trap type but may be less suited for removal of a snare or cable restraint (i.e., you can't likely pull the animal's head or body outside the tote to cut a cable). However, a cable groove and cutting hole can be cut up on the side of the tote or sled, much like that shown in the "Using A Notched Board" box below, which may allow a cable to then be cut when the animal is under the tote/sled. This would require the tote be pushed so the animal's neck or body is pressed tightly against the tote over the cutting hole, so exercise caution to avoid loop tightening.**



Using A Notched Board

Notched boards or shields provide a partial barrier between you and the animal, and if you remain mostly behind the board, can produce a calming effect on the animal. The board is positioned so that the trapped limb is on your side, with the animal on the other side. **Although desired size can be a matter of personal preference, we believe that boards/shields that are 2-3'W X 3-4'H will be best, with the notch ~4" at the base and tapered to 3" at top. Handles should be attached to the board (example shown below) for better control and to ensure your hands remain behind the board,** and various types of 'pegs' can be attached at the bottom (example shown below) that help dig into the ground and hold the board more stable if the animal makes lateral movements. However, depending on trap type, 1 or both hands may need to be taken off the board (unless a second person is present) to detach the trap, thereby posing some risk that the barrier falls over and exposes you to injury risk from the animal.

→ Notched boards can be used to release an animal from any trap type.

- If in a foothold trap and you are by yourself, we encourage you to use your feet to compress the trap springs, thereby allowing you to keep both hands on the board.
- If you are unable to use your feet, foothold trap setters may come in handy. You will need to take both hands off the board (leaning it against your head or body) to simultaneously compress the springs on a coiled spring trap. For a longspring trap, locking setters (e.g., 2 vice grips) may allow you to keep 1 hand supporting the board while using the other hand to compress 1 spring at a time.
- **If trying to release an animal from a snare or cable restraint, a modification to the board, specifically a 12-24" long groove with an ~4" circular hole at the top (see red highlighted area in figure below), should allow the cable to come up the board and a hole for cable cutters to access and cut the cable.** The board may need to be laid down over the animal if it is not standing.
- If in a bodygrip trap by the foot and you are by yourself, you will need to remove 1 or both hands from the board to use locking bodygrip setters or to compress springs by hand.



Using the 'Wildcat of Idaho' Foothold Trap Release Tool

This is a specialized tool that can compress the springs on either longspring or coil spring foothold traps from a safe distance and can be adjusted on site to fit the size of any foothold trap.

- ➔ No other restraining equipment or barriers are required, but this tool does not restrain or limit the animal's movement during the process so an additional restraining tool may be necessary if the animal is not 'cooperative'.
- ➔ It will work best when the trapper has a straight-on angle to the animal's captured foot, and with minimal obstruction between the pole end and the animal (~ 6 feet).
- ➔ It is not capable of or intended for releasing an animal captured in a snare or cable restraint, or by the foot in a bodygrip trap.



Using a Y-Pole (or 'Animal Grabber')

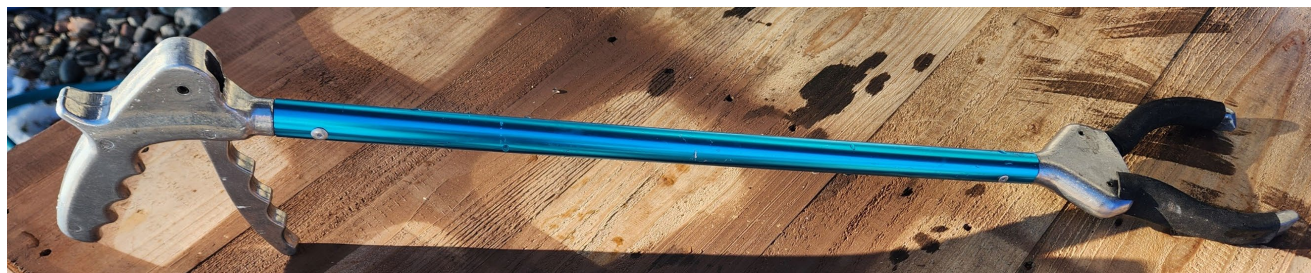
Y-poles can be made from tree saplings if available at the site. Many commercially made poles can be purchased from trapping or animal control supply businesses, including extendable poles which allow more flexibility for the situation or site at hand. Y-poles can either be used to pin the animal to the ground while a trap is removed, or just as a 'prod' or barrier to try and keep the animal at bay while removing the trap.

- ➔ If used to pin the animal to the ground (by the neck or body), it is important that the Y 'arms' are long enough to ensure you do not (overly) compress the animal's neck or body, but not so long that the animal can easily escape the Y.
- ➔ This method is less preferred than those discussed above but can be used if the animal is small or very calm or if there is a second person who can control the Y-pole.
- ➔ If only 1 person is present, Y-poles are only suitable when you can maintain adequate control of the pole/animal, such as:
 - when you can keep both hands on the pole and release a foothold trap with your feet
 - when you can control the pole/animal with 1 hand or your body and cut a cable restraint/snare
 - when you can control the pole/animal with 1 hand or your body and use locking setters (e.g., vice grips) to compress/lock the springs on a longspring foothold trap, or locking setters to compress and latch bodygrip springs 1 at a time).



We note that an 'animal grabber' or 'animal control tong' is another tool much like a Y-pole, but with a squeezable trigger allowing the C- or Y-shaped end to close around the animal (see below). Constant pressure must usually be applied to the trigger, otherwise it is like a Y-pole. They are made in various lengths depending on company, with 3-5' probably best for most situations.

- ➔ In general, all points discussed above for Y-poles also apply to animal grabbers or tongs.



Using a Blanket or Coat

In the absence of other equipment and if unable to quickly locate assistance, you may be able to use a heavy blanket or heavy coat to cover the animal and release the trap or cut a snare/cable restraint; a large heavy blanket will be preferable to a coat or tarp.

- **The method is only likely to work if you can keep the animal very calm or its movement is very restricted.** Otherwise, a coat or blanket provides minimal restraint or barrier between you and the animal, making it difficult to constrain animal movement and exposing you to more risk of injury.
- **If used, this method can work for all trap types.** Depending on trap size and your strength, foothold trap springs can be compressed by hand through the blanket/coat. If foothold trap setters are needed, a snare/cable restraint needs to be cut, or a bodygrip trap needs released from a foot, the captured area on the animal will need to be exposed outside the blanket/coat; alternatively, you could cut a hole in the blanket for easier access to the trap springs.



It is never desirable to have to improvise a method or fabricate a ‘tool’ on site. You will have to evaluate each situation to determine the best release method depending on trap type, amount of physical obstruction in the catch area, the animal’s freedom of movement, its behavior (i.e., calm or aggressive), and other circumstances. **We emphasize that having equipment with you that allows you the choice of multiple release methods will always be wise because having to leave to get additional equipment will take time and potentially add stress or risk of injury to the animal.**

Videos demonstrating many of these release methods can be found on the internet, though not all videos demonstrate safe or proper procedures. Additionally, businesses that sell products that can be useful or necessary for a release (e.g., trap setters, catchpoles/Y-poles, animal handling nets) often have demonstration videos or staff willing to discuss proper use of the products they make or sell. Trapper meetings and online forums can also provide opportunity to learn more. **We encourage you to pursue additional knowledge of release methods and tools from all these sources.**

Summary Suggestions and Animal Release Checklist

- ✓ **Names/Numbers of people to contact if you need assistance releasing an animal.**
- ✓ **Heavy-duty longer gloves** – always wise when releasing a wild animal.
- ✓ **Heavy Blanket** - whether as an emergency method (e.g., forgot other tools at home or they broke while using) or as a useful ‘support tool’ (e.g., to cover part of animal that is restrained in a net), having a large heavy-weight blanket with you while checking traps is a wise idea.
- ✓ **Hand Saw or Hatchet** – in case there is an emergency need to make a Y-pole from a tree sapling, or to remove problematic brush in the catch area.
- ✓ **Trap Setters** – coiled spring traps, long spring traps, bodygrip traps – be prepared based on the types of traps you have set and don’t assume you won’t need them to compress trap springs.
- ✓ **Cable Cutters** – a ‘must have’ if you deploy snares or cable restraints.
- ✓ **Catchpole** – A catchpole is not always the best tool, but it is a versatile tool and can be used with any trap type; we recommend you always have one along. Also carry a longer rope that can be tied to the pole end and then to a solid object (e.g., nearby tree, drag) to reduce the risk of losing control of the pole once the trap is detached.
- ✓ **In addition to the above, have the tools necessary to implement one other release method, whether it be considered a preferred or second (non-catchpole) choice.** We recognize that the preferred option can depend on many variables, some unpredictable, and that it also depends on whether you are alone or a second person is available. Whichever method you go with, consult the boxes above for details and extra tools that may be needed for using that method. **Our recommendations for a preferred/second choice are:**
 - ✓ **If you only have foothold traps deployed (or for an animal caught by the foot in a bodygrip trap):**
 - ✓ **If by yourself**, we favor either a professional animal handling net or the tote/sled method. The Wildcat of Idaho release tool can also be very effective in the right situations (i.e., a calm animal or one with limited range of movement, and 6’ of unobstructed straight access to the trapped foot).
 - ✓ **If a second person is present**, we still favor the same as noted above, but add that a properly designed notched board can be a very safe and effective method with a second person.
 - ✓ **If you have snares or cable restraints deployed**, whether with or without foothold or bodygrip traps, we recommend you carry a professional animal handling net. A notched board or a tote/sled, assuming each has been altered to include a cable groove and cutting hole, may also work well.

Please check back periodically as updates may be made to this document. If you have questions or wish to offer suggestions for improvement, contact john.erb@state.mn.us.