

STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Notice of Agency Rulemaking Proposal

AGENCY: Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Advertise: April 29, 2026

CHAPTER NUMBER AND RULE TITLE: Chapter 17 - Furbearers and Trapping

TYPE OF RULE: Routine Technical

PROPOSAL FILING NUMBER:

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is proposing changes to Chapter 17 rules to open an early raccoon trapping season, adjust the areas open or closed to beaver trapping, make minor changes to the definition of rat traps that are used primarily for weasel trapping and to the definition of bait. Please contact the agency contact person for a complete copy of the rule proposal.

**PUBLIC HEARING:** May 18, 2026 @ 4:00pm - IFW, 353 Water St, Room 423, Augusta. An online option via Microsoft Teams will also be available. Please contact the agency contact person for log in information.

**COMMENT DEADLINE:** May 28, 2026

**CONTACT PERSON FOR THIS FILING:**

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**CONTACT PERSON FOR SMALL BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT:** Click or tap here to enter text.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT ON MUNICIPALITIES OR COUNTIES:** None anticipated

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY FOR THIS RULE:** 12 MRS Section 10104, 12251

**SUBSTANTIVE STATE OR FEDERAL LAW BEING IMPLEMENTED:** Click or tap here to enter text.

**AGENCY WEBSITE:** www.maine.gov/ifw

**EMAIL ADDRESS FOR OVERALL AGENCY RULEMAKING LIAISON:**

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Choose one of the following:

*The summary provided above is for publication in both the newspaper and website notices.*

Please approve the bottom portion of this form and assign the appropriate AdvantageME number.

STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

**Rulemaking Fact Sheet**

(see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1))

**Agency:** Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

**Name, Address, Telephone Number, and Email Address of Agency Contact Person:**

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**Comment Deadline(s):** May 28, 2026

**Principal Reason(s) or Purpose for Proposing this Rule** [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(A)]: The Department regularly adjusts furbearer hunting and trapping regulations in response to emerging scientific information, changes in hunter and trapper participation, biological data, and to clarify rule language when necessary. We are proposing changes to open an early raccoon trapping season to coincide with the early fox and coyote season to allow additional opportunity. As in previous years, we are proposing to open or close certain areas to beaver trapping in response to landowner requests. We are also making minor changes to the definition of rat traps that are used primarily for weasel trapping, and to the definition of bait.

**Is Material Incorporated by Reference into the Rule** [see 5 M.R.S. § 8056(2-A)]? No

**Analysis and Expected Operation of the Rule** [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(B) & (D)]:

Definition of Bait

The proposed changes expand the definition of bait to include any object that mimics or replicates animal matter.

Early Raccoon Trapping Season

The proposed changes open an early trapping season for raccoons during the same time as the early fox and coyote trapping season. There are no changes to additional restrictions for the early raccoon, fox, and coyote trapping season.

Beaver Closures

We are proposing to update the current list of beaver trapping closures to accommodate the wishes of private landowners on whose land the trapping activity would occur. Townships or portions thereof are opened and closed on an individual basis to manage local beaver populations within the general season framework. This year, per landowner requests, changes include the additional closure of 2 portions of towns and the opening of 3 portions of towns to beaver trapping during the 2026-2027 season.

Weasel Traps

The proposed changes broaden the materials that a rat trap is made of, which can be used to target weasels and red squirrels. In addition to wood, the proposed changes include plastic, or other similar solid material-base rat trap. There are no changes to the placement of rat traps, which must be recessed in a wooden box with an entrance hole no larger than 2 inches in diameter.

Format Revised 11/7/2025

**Brief Summary of Relevant Information Considered During Development of the Rule (including up to 3 primary sources relied upon)**[see 5 M.R.S. §§ 8057-A(1)(E) & 8063-B]: Definition of Bait: Bait is currently defined in C. 17 as *animal matter including meat, skin, bones, feathers, hair or any other solid substance that used to be part of an animal*. Any bait set within 50 yards of a foothold or killer-type trap *must be covered to prevent it from being seen from above, and it must be covered in such a way as to withstand wind action and other normal environmental conditions*. The intent of the bait rules was to prevent non-target animals from getting caught in traps. The availability of replica fur, bones, or other similar materials does not meet the current definition of bait and could be set near a trap without being covered from above. Early Raccoon Trapping Season: Raccoons are widespread and abundant and comprise a large share of the annual reported human/wildlife conflicts. In 2019, the Department conducted a public opinion survey and raccoons were the top wildlife species reported to cause problems for the general public (other top species included deer, skunk, and fox). Based on more recent data, these trends continue with raccoons dominating annual rabies cases and other reported human/wildlife conflicts. Regulated hunting and trapping are important management tools to maintain healthy wildlife populations and reduce conflicts. Currently, raccoons can be hunted from October 1 through December 31 and trapped during the general trapping season from late October/early November through December 31. A trapping regulation review indicates Maine has the shortest raccoon trapping season of any jurisdiction in the northeast. The proposed changes would allow an additional two weeks to trap for raccoons when they are likely to be more active during an existing early canid trapping season from mid to late October. Beaver Closures: Wildlife Biologists consider annual requests from landowners to close their properties to beaver trapping, in conjunction with the amount of habitat, past harvests, and complaints of beaver damage to public property. This information informs staff recommendations on closures for the upcoming trapping season. Weasel Traps: Weasel traps were originally made with a wooden base and some are now being made with a plastic base. The new language broadens the materials that can be used for traps that are permitted in Maine to trap for weasels and red squirrels.

**Estimated Fiscal Impact of the Rule** [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(C)]: None anticipated.

**FOR EXISTING RULES WITH FISCAL IMPACT OF \$1 MILLION OR MORE, ALSO INCLUDE:**

**Economic Impact, Whether or Not Quantifiable in Monetary Terms** [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(A)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Individuals, Major Interest Groups and Types of Businesses Affected and How They Will Be Affected** [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(B)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Benefits of the Rule** [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(C)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

*Note: If necessary, additional pages may be used.*

AMEND SECTIONS 17.03, 17.06, 17.08 AND 17.09 AS FOLLOWS:

09-137 DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

Chapter 17: FURBEARERS AND TRAPPING

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17.03 Definitions

1. **Bait:** means animal matter including meat, skin, bones, feathers, hair or any other solid substance that used to be part of an animal **or any object that mimics or replicates animal matter**. This includes live or dead fish. For the purposes of this chapter bait does not include animal droppings (scat), urine or animals, dead or alive, held in a trap as the result of lawful trapping activity.

17.06 Seasons and Specific Information for Trapping of Furbearing Animals

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2. Beaver Trapping
3. Muskrat Trapping
4. Early **Raccoon**, Fox and Coyote Trapping Season
5. Fisher Trapping
6. Marten Trapping

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1. **Bear Trapping\***

C. **Restrictions for Bear Trapping**

Except as otherwise provided by state law, no person may set, place or tend any bear trap that is not in conformity with 12 M.R.S. §12260 and the following provisions:

- (5) Whenever a cable trap (foothold cable restraint) is used in conjunction with a device that is designed to capture a bear when it reaches into the device to obtain bait (e.g. bucket, tube, or pipe-style traps):
  - i. the opening and inside diameter of the device must be no more than 6 inches;
  - ii. animal-based bait and/or lure may not be placed within the device. Animal-based bait is defined as animal matter including meat, skin, bones, feathers, hair or any other solid substance that used to be part of an animal **or any object that mimics or replicates animal matter**. This includes live or dead fish;
  - iii. the trigger must be recessed at least 12 inches below the opening of the device;
  - iv. any bait and/or lure within the device may not be placed above the trigger, or between the trigger and the opening; and

- v. the opening to the device must be covered by a weight of at least 30 pounds when set, placed, and tended to prevent access by non-target species.

## 2. Beaver Trapping

### B. Closed Areas for Beaver Trapping:

(See season dates chart for WMDs above in 2.A.)

#### 1. Closed Areas within WMDs:

- WMD 5** The following town shall be closed but with the excepted part of the town open:  
**Trout Brook Twp.**, except north of Trout Brook.  
The following towns shall be open but with the excepted part of the town closed:  
**Ashland**, except unnamed brook on land owned by Artemus and Rosemary Coffin located north of Goding Road and west of Route 11.
- WMD 6** The following towns shall be open but with the excepted part of the town closed:  
**Ashland**, except section of Nowland Brook on land owned by Ronald Rushinal adjacent to the Nowland Road.  
**Castle Hill**, except unnamed tributary to North Branch Presque Isle Stream on land owned by Melvin Johnson. Land located on east side of Haystack Mountain and south of Route 163.  
**Fort Fairfield**, except the property of Jane and Mark Stanford at 122 West Limestone Road containing a portion of Hacker brook.
- WMD 17** The following towns shall be open but with the excepted part of the town closed:  
**Atkinson**, except the flowage located on the east side of the Dorr Road and within the Bud Leavitt Wildlife Management Area.  
**Charleston**, except the land of Christopher Almy, which includes a portion of South Gate Brook and a tributary to Hudson Brook.  
**Hartland**, except tributaries to Thompson Brook west and north of Route 23 that are on the property owned by John Studt.  
**Hermon**, except the land of Herbert Bates bordered on the north by the Fuller Road, on the east by the New Boston Road, on the south by Route 2/100, and to the west by the Billings Road.
- WMD 18** The following towns shall be open but with the excepted part of the town closed:  
**Burlington**, except the land of Gerry Warren, which includes the western end of the Clark Road and running north and including that portion of Clark Brook.

#### 4. Early **Raccoon**, Fox and Coyote Statewide Trapping Season Dates

##### A. Season Dates

There shall be an early **raccoon**, fox and coyote trapping season statewide from the Sunday two weeks before the opening of the general fall trapping season through the day before the opening of the general fall trapping season.

##### B. Exemption to Incidental Catch Requirements for Early **Raccoon**, Fox and Coyote Trapping

Any **raccoon**, skunk or opossum taken incidental to **raccoon**, fox and coyote trapping may be lawfully possessed. During this early trapping season, except as provided in this section, it is unlawful to take or possess any furbearing animal other than fox, coyote, raccoon, skunk and opossum.

C. **Additional Restrictions for Early Raccoon, Fox and Coyote Trapping Season**

In addition to department rules and state laws which affect trapping in general, the following restrictions also apply when trapping during the early raccoon, fox and coyote trapping season:

- (1) The use of exposed bait or visible attractor at any trap site location is prohibited;
- (2) Killer-type traps are prohibited except as authorized within section [17.06-3-C](#). when trapping for muskrat; and
- (3) Foothold traps may not be set in the water except as authorized within section [17.06-3-C](#) when trapping for muskrat.

**17.08 Types and Sizes of Traps**

5. Wooden, plastic, or similar solid material-base rat traps may be set on land for weasel and red squirrel trapping if recessed in a wooden box with a hole no larger than 2 inches in diameter.

**17.09 Location and Preparation of Traps**

**3. Placement of Steel Foothold or Killer-type Traps**

- A. Steel foothold or killer-type traps must not be set within 50 yards of bait that is visible from above except if the bait is completely covered to prevent it from being seen from above, and it must be covered in such a way as to withstand wind action and other normal environmental conditions. Bait is defined as animal matter including meat, skin, bones, feathers, hair or any other solid substance that used to be part of an animal or any object that mimics or replicates animal matter. This includes live or dead fish. For the purposes of this paragraph, bait does not include animal droppings (scat), urine or animals, dead or alive, held in a trap as the result of lawful trapping activity.
- B. Steel foothold traps must be set at or below ground, ice, or snow level.
- C. Steel foothold traps must have a chain that is mounted within the central portion of the base of the trap, and must have three swiveling points, with one swiveling point at the base of the trap, one midway in the chain, and one at the trap's anchoring point. These restrictions do not apply to foothold traps that when set, placed, or tended are fully or partially covered by water, those that are set on a muskrat "float", or dog-proof traps also known as enclosed foothold traps (as defined within section [17.03](#)).