



# Wild Illinois History

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## Regulating the Harvest

### Concept:

To help students understand how practices in early Illinois Territory led to wildlife such as beavers becoming almost extinct in Illinois by 1900, and to see the importance of conservation rules and regulations for today's trappers in Illinois.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- By participating in their own classroom "harvest," understand how hunters and trappers in the Illinois Territory over-harvested wildlife such as beaver
- See how wildlife conservation science and regulations keep beaver populations in healthy numbers

### Standards Addressed:

- 13.B.2f Analyze how specific personal and societal choices that people make affect local, regional and global ecosystems
- 16.E.2a Identify environmental factors that drew settlers to the state and region
- 16.E.2c Describe environmental factors that influenced the development of transportation and trade in Illinois
- 17C.2c Explain how human activity affects the environment

### Materials:

- Poker chips (assorted red, blue, white)
- Play money
- Hunting license cut outs
- Illinois Hunting and Trapping Regulations (available at <http://dnr.state.il.us/admin/systems/Digest/Digest.pdf>)

**Space:** A classroom

**Key Points:**

It would be easy to blame the over-harvest of beavers (as well as other furbearers and wildlife) on the simple greed of trappers and hunters, but several things contributed to the near-elimination of beavers from Illinois. This includes:

- Competition for wildlife resources
- Government encouragement
- Lack of regulations and a nonexistent conservation ethic

**Educator background:**

Beavers were common in Illinois during the early 1800s. Without laws to protect them, their numbers declined so much from hunting and trapping that they were no longer considered an important part of the fur trade by 1850. Only a few beaver colonies remained by 1900. When protective regulations were enacted in 1933, it was too late. It is not clear whether beavers were totally eliminated (extirpated) from the state for a period of time, but the population was not able to sustain itself.

Hunting and trapping is helpful to conserve wildlife populations when managed properly through rules and regulations that prevent wildlife from being depleted. Hunting and trapping also is beneficial in managing wildlife that live near people.

This exercise will show in a rudimentary fashion how attitudes, laws and practices affect wildlife's ability to survive.

**Procedure:**

The goal is to put students in role-playing in the classroom, where they are hunters and trappers in old Illinois. The classroom should be divided into two sections. One section is Illinois Territory in 1805. The other section is Illinois in CURRENT YEAR.

Divide the students into groups. Half the groups will be trappers in 1805. Others will be modern day trappers.

**Scenario to read to 1805 trappers:** It is the year 1805. By now, hundred of mountain men are moving from the Eastern part of the United States to the Illinois Territory to make their fortunes off of the vast numbers of beavers that live here.

When you go to Illinois Territory, you know only these things:

1. Many people are going to Illinois Territory to find beavers.
2. There seem to be a huge supply of beavers. Everyone wants to trap as many as they can.
3. No one knows much about beavers, how they reproduce and grow, or the value that they provide to the environment.
4. Thomas Jefferson, our country's president, has encouraged everyone to trap beavers and sell them. It is good for the United States to do so, because it is the primary way they can make money, by trading and selling beaver pelts for goods and money from other countries.

**Scenario to read to modern day trappers:** It is CURRENT YEAR. You are trappers in Illinois. You work a fulltime job in Illinois, but trap during the winter months during furbearer trapping season. You enjoy the activity of trapping and being in nature. You also trap to sell furs to fur buyers. This helps supplement your income to feed your family. You also like to eat some meat from furbearers, including raccoon and beaver. You also trap furbearers on the property of people who have wildlife problems. They might have too many raccoons around their home or beavers cutting down trees, flooding fields or causing damage. They want you to trap on their properties to reduce numbers of certain furbearers that cause problems.

You have been taught that it is important to conserve wildlife, and it is important to follow all the rules and regulations when trapping. Unlike the 1805 trappers, you've been taught that wildlife and natural resources are important to conserve. They provide many benefits to people, but if abused, those wildlife and natural resources could become depleted.

When you go trapping in Illinois, you know that you must follow rules:

1. You must purchase a trapping license. [Trapping license provided.]
2. You must follow all the rules and regulations for trapping furbearers. Your trapping regulation is on the trapping license.

In this exercise, the rules you must follow are: Each group can harvest no more than 5 beavers (chips). Even if you see many more than 5 beavers, you can only harvest 5. You must follow the rules on the back of the card.

**Instructions:** Teacher should hide poker chips around both sections of the classroom. An area could be provided near the chalkboard to exchange chips for money and to tally how much money each group made from trapping. This information can be listed on the board to illustrate main points.

**For the 1805 trappers:** The goal is to find the most poker chips (representing beavers) in 1 minute. It should be emphasized that the students are finding the chips so that they can make the most money and out-compete the other groups. They must hurry and collect as many chips as they can.

Groups can search the room at once or in succession to find chips. If each group takes turns, they will find that the harvest will get smaller for each group. Each succeeding group will find fewer than the group before.

The goal is to beat the other group at collecting as many beaver pelts as possible (showing competition for limited resources).

At the end of the exercise, the fur buyer will ask each group to add up their chips, and will pay them. They will mark on the board how many beaver pelts each group has and how much they are worth.

The teacher then will subtract the number of chips from the number left around the room – perhaps in her desk – places that no one would search. The number should be very small.

In this way, the students will see that based on no information about how many beavers exist, and encouragement from leaders to find as many beavers as they can, that they have exhausted the supply of beavers. With so few beavers left, the beavers can't reproduce well, and they likely are to become eliminated from the Illinois Territory. And with no beavers left, hunters and trappers will have to find other jobs or go to other parts of the country to find beavers. Without regulation, those beaver populations in new areas will be depleted as well.

**For the modern day trappers:**

Trapping groups are allowed to work the room at once or in succeeding groups. They must follow the rules and regulations on the back of the license. They have 1 minute to harvest their beavers. Once that happens, they too can sell their beaver pelts, but the main point is to see what remains – a healthy population of beavers should be left.

## Questions

### For 1805 trappers scenario:

1. Discuss what happened. Why did the students harvest as many beavers as they could? How does this compare to what trappers experienced in the real world in the Illinois Territory?
2. In the year after the students made the beaver harvest, the number of beavers is only a few. You still need to feed your family, but there are no longer enough beavers to make trapping worth while. Now what will you do? (Take another job? Go trapping somewhere else?)
3. If there are no regulations for trapping, and you move to another part of the country to trap, what do you think will happen to beavers? (In this way, teachers can show the students how beavers were systematically eliminated from all parts of the country from east to west and into Canada.
4. What is the affect on the environment of losing beavers? What good to beavers do for the environment?
5. How would your desire to harvest beaver have changed if the teacher had told you that beavers were an important part of nature; that if you took too many, their survival would have been affected, or that you could do good things to help beaver populations stay healthy while still harvesting beavers?
6. Can you compare this situation to modern wildlife regulations and laws? Why are wildlife regulations and laws good for wildlife? Why is it bad if some people disobey wildlife regulations?

### For the modern trappers scenario:

1. What are the differences in income between the 1805 trappers and the modern ones? How are 1805 trappers different than modern ones?  
**Hint:** 1805 trappers trapped fulltime for a living. Modern trappers usually have other jobs and use trapping to supplement their income. Or they might simply enjoy using trapping as a way of being outdoors, so money is much less important.
2. At the end of the season, how did the numbers of beavers compare between the 1805 and modern trappers? Compare what this means for the future of trappers and beavers in both time frames.
3. How are the beliefs and attitudes of people important to managing and conserving natural resources? Can you think of instances when your beliefs and attitudes have been shaped when a groundswell of people push or advocate a certain view?  
**Examples:** campaigns against smoking or doing drugs, efforts against drinking and driving, promotional efforts against littering.

4. What is the benefit of buying a trapping license? **Answer:** The money is a fee that trappers pay for the privilege of trapping. It will help pay for wildlife conservation for furbearers and other wildlife. It will help buy habitat to make homes for wildlife and pay biologists to do their jobs.
5. What are benefits of trapping in Illinois today? (Hint: Controlling property damage, wildlife diseases, reducing populations of one animal that might hurt other endangered species, population management in urban areas, providing important products to people.)
6. Using the Illinois Hunting and Trapping Regulations, identify examples of rules that govern hunting and trapping. Those rules include only:
  - Types of wildlife
  - Numbers of wildlife
  - Hunting or trapping at certain times of the year
  - Rules governing methods (including traps and firearms) that can be used to harvest wildlife
  - Safety rules for hunters and trappers
  - Ethics rules for fair chase and humaneness.

**Sources of information:**

- Fur Hunting and Trapping in Illinois website:  
<http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildlife/index.htm>
- Fur Hunting and Trapping Regulations:  
<http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildlife/regulations.htm>
- Fur Hunting and Trapping in Illinois/ Related Links:  
<http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildlife/links.htm>
- Fur Hunting and Trapping in Illinois/ Publications:  
[http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildlife/virtual\\_news/publications.htm](http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildlife/virtual_news/publications.htm)
- For information on how hunters and trappers contribute to wildlife and conservation, go to Fur Hunting and Trapping in Illinois / Virtual Newsroom  
[http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildlife/virtual\\_news/index.htm](http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildlife/virtual_news/index.htm)
- For another historical perspective on trappers and the fur trade, as well as a description of trappers in today's world, go to:  
[http://www.anr.state.vt.us/furbearer/way\\_of\\_life.html](http://www.anr.state.vt.us/furbearer/way_of_life.html)
- To reach "Fur Trapping and Trading: An Important Industry to a Young Country" go to: <http://www.outdooralabama.com/outdoor-alabama/furtrading.pdf>

## Illinois Trapping License

Your name

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This license allows you to harvest \_\_\_\_ beavers during the beaver trapping season.

Beavers are represented with blue, red and white poker chips.

According to regulation: You can harvest only the blue and red chips. All white chips are beavers not open for harvesting. These beavers represent the beavers to be left to reproduce for the next season.