

RIVER OTTER AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUES



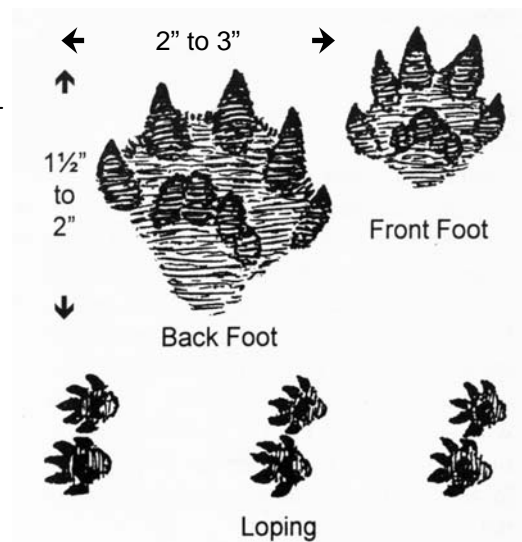
INTRODUCTION

To view a river otter in South Dakota is a unique opportunity for many residents and visitors. This species, although once historically found throughout the state, is now state protected as threatened. Historically, unregulated trapping pressure and more recently, habitat loss and degradation have led to sharp declines in river otter populations.

Otters typically inhabit freshwater streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, and other wetlands with abundant prey (primarily fish such as carp and sucker) and adequate cover (shoreline vegetation), limited disturbance, and good water quality.

OTTER SIGN

River otters weigh from 10 to 25 lbs and are 35-50 inches long from head to tail. Look for sign often left by this brown, slender, torpedo-shaped species that indicates their presence. Sign includes tracks, slides, and scat piles. Tracks are similar to mink, only larger (2-3" wide) with track pairs often side-by-side. Watch for slides on bank sides; they are best observed in snow. Scat is dark and often concentrated in piles (latrine sites) near regular landings where otter leave the water. Otter scat may be further identified by the presence of fish scales and bones and crayfish parts.

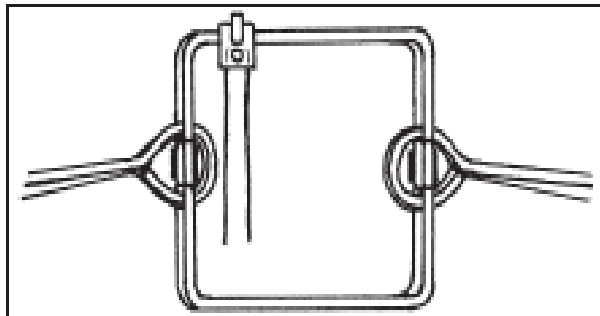
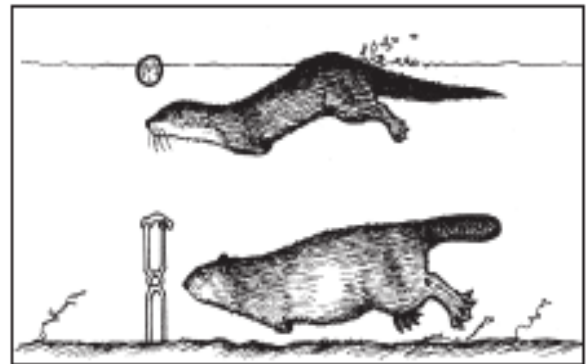


TECHNIQUES

Beaver-modified wetlands provide excellent otter habitat. Special techniques should be used to trap for beaver (or other furbearers) when otter are present. To avoid incidentally trapping otter, locate sets away from trails established by beaver, particularly the trail over a beaver dam. Otter often use abandoned beaver lodges and bank dens, so avoid these areas when trapping for beaver.

BODY-GRIPPING TRAPS

Otter are most frequently incidentally caught in 10 inch (#330) body-gripping traps. The set of this trap can be modified to reduce incidental otter catches by securing the trap deep underwater (at least 2½-3' deep). Float an item over the top of your set (e.g. dive pole, stick or log; shown below in cross-section). Typically, when the beaver encounters the floating item, it will dive down to the bottom to avoid it and consequently spring the trap. An otter will merely duck under the obstacle and pass over the trap.



Straightening, shortening (to 4-5'), and shifting the trigger wires of the #330 body grip to either side of the trap jaws will allow an otter to pass through while still setting an effective trap for beaver. This allows for the agile otter to slip through while the larger, more cumbersome beaver trips the trigger.

SNARES, FOOTHOLD TRAPS & LURES

Snare properly set for beaver are the least likely to capture otter. Set your snare loop diameter to 9-11". This is part of a properly set beaver snare and will allow otter to pass through. Add a stop to the snare that prevents the loop diameter from closing less than six inches to reduce chances of catching otter. Foothold traps set in deep water are less likely to catch otter.

Beaver are drawn to lure and visual attractors (e.g. castor mounds, peeled sticks and/or other beaver food lures). Otter are rarely attracted to beaver sign or odors. Use beaver lures to draw beaver away from trails used by otter.

REPORTS

IF YOU CATCH AN OTTER

While all South Dakota trappers should avoid catching otter, it may occur. If this species is caught in a trap or snare, release it alive without causing injury to yourself or the otter. Reports of incidentally caught live otter should be submitted via phone, e-mail, or mail. Knowing the location of incidentally caught otter helps to monitor the distribution of otters in the state. If the animal is dead, leave it undisturbed and contact a Department of Game, Fish & Parks representative within 12 hours. Important management information (reproductive status, age, and health) is collected from carcasses.

OBSERVING OTTER

If you simply observe a live otter, record basic information: date, location (Township, Range, Section or GIS coordinates), general habitat, behavior and why you think it is an otter. The location at which an otter is observed is used to help monitor the distribution of otters in the state. Reports can be submitted via phone, e-mail, or mail. Please include your contact information.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Please provide reports of otter in South Dakota to a Department of Game, Fish & Parks regional wildlife program manager or Natural Heritage Program (NHP) staff. The NHP is a member of a network of biological inventories known as NatureServe; the NHP is sponsored by the Department of Game, Fish & Parks.

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Sioux Falls

605-362-2700; 4500 S. Oxbow Ave

Watertown

605-882-5200; 400 West Kemp



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