



THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE
PROTECTION
of Fur-Bearing Animals

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Special Report: Cruelty is NOT Green

In 2007, proponents of the fur industry, the Fur Council of Canada, launched a campaign to convince the public that fur and fur-trimmed products are “green”, “ecological”, and “environmental”. This report examines these claims and provides information to the contrary.

Unregulated and Vague Claims

Many of terms used by the Fur Council of Canada in their “fur is green” campaign are not well defined or regulated, and under the law, they don’t have to be regulated. Canada’s Competition Act does not specifically restrict the use of terms such as “Eco” or “Environmentally Friendly”. (August 13, 2007) (Also worth considering is Wikipedia Encyclopedia’s description of the term “Environmentally Friendly” which states: “Due to the fact that there is no existing international standard for this term, the International Standards Organization [ISO] deemed it too vague to be meaningful.”)

Peddling so-called environmental claims seems to be a common occurrence. A recent study of environmental claims involving more than 1,000 products, released by an Ottawa environmental marketing firm TerraChoice, found virtually all claims to be false or misleading. Mr. Scott Case, with TerraChoice, states that the biggest sin was the hidden tradeoff - products that promote a single issue, such as recycled content. “That’s important, but there are a wide variety of additional environmental considerations: Was there any pollution during the manufacturing phase? What are the aspects of the product that aren’t made of recycled content?”¹

Marketers of fur products are quick to compare the biodegradation of fur only to fake fur. But the alternative to fur is any and every fabric and textile that is available. Why focus on only fake fur? The truth is fur is no better than the many fabrics out there that decompose easily.

“Biodegradable” is also a term that remains unregulated in Canada.² It may be surprising to note that certain types of plastic bags are also being marketed as biodegradable. According to Don Jardine, Director of Pollution Prevention with PEI’s Department of Environment, “Companies are using their own standards. It may say biodegradable, even if it takes 15 years.”³ It is also interesting to note that marketers of fur products contradict themselves because they claim fur biodegrades, but then add fur lasts for generations, and can even be a family heirloom.

The term “recyclable” indicates an item or product is usable again in the original form or with minimal alteration. Virtually all textile products can be remodeled, passed on to younger brothers and sisters, or donated to charities, therefore are “recyclable” or “reusable”. It is meaningless to claim that fur is recyclable or reusable, because under this definition, all textile products can be recycled.

Other buzz words, such as “organic” or “natural” have also been misleadingly used by the fur trade. To describe a product as “organic” or “natural” is to imply that the production of such product involves neither artificial chemical treatment nor disruption to our eco-system.

Fur Trapping Disrupts Nature’s Balance

Wikipedia Encyclopedia defines an “eco-system” quite appropriately as: “The interconnectedness of organisms with each other and their environment and living creatures are a key component of any eco-system”.

The fur trade traps and kills a *million* of Canada’s wildlife *every* year from our ecosystem for needless fur products. These animals are *not* chosen because they are “surplus”, weak, or diseased. They are killed because they happen to be the 10 or 12 species that have nice, thick fur out of an estimated 140,000 species of animals in Canada.⁴

It is becoming widely understood just how vital a role fur-bearing and other animals can play in our eco-system, and how we cannot reasonably expect to be able to continue to deliberately interfere with the intricacies of their population dynamics in such significant ways as commercial fur trapping, without expecting far-reaching and potentially serious consequences. For example, when wolves were being exterminated in Yellowstone Park in the United States in the early 20th century, it resulted in a soaring elk population. The larger elk population led to the decline of aspen, cottonwood and willow trees that were crucial components of natural habitat for birds, beavers, and other animals. In addition to those problems, the coyote population skyrocketed, dramatically reducing the population of deer and ground squirrels, which then negatively impacted the mid-level predators like foxes, hawks, owls and pine martens. The downward spiral of the ecological balance within

Yellowstone Park persisted until the successful re-introduction of Canadian grey wolves in 1995.⁵

Proponents of the fur industry often suggest trappers are “wildlife managers” who know how to kill just the “right” animals in order to maintain an optimal eco-system for the area. This would be an ambitious task even for a well trained biologist and naturalist, let alone for a fur trapper.

Trappers and hunters know they are not wildlife management experts. Hunter, John Harrigan, said in his column for *Outdoorsmen*, “Hunters and trappers have forgotten why wildlife management began in the first place. It began to control hunters and trappers. Hunters and trappers ‘solved’ the problem because they were the problem. Limits were put on how many animals they could kill because otherwise they would have killed every living thing into extinction.”⁶

Environmental Hazards of Trapping

A) Traps are Indiscriminate

Former U.S. fur trapper, Bill Randall’s words convey the irrefutable and chronic problem with the fur trade’s steel traps when he says “regardless of trapper skills, any trap can and does catch all birds and beasts, wild and domestic.”⁷

Traps cannot distinguish endangered species from non-endangered ones. There is of course no sign for the endangered animals, like eagles or swift foxes, to warn them: “Endangered species do not step here.” Make no mistake, species at risk *do* get caught in, and die from, indiscriminate traps.

As one recent example, the State of Maine, USA, in the settlement of a lawsuit, had to claim liability for the injuries and deaths of endangered Canadian lynx, caused by their authorization of traps set for other animals. The U.S. District Judge, John Woodcock, commented on this, “if trappers are going out ... and they accidentally or inadvertently take lynx, then that is a violation of the Endangered Species Act”.⁸

B) Legal Trapping of At-Risk Species

While most animals legally trapped in Canada are not species at risk, the question arises when numbers are scarce for certain populations. How few animals should be left of a species before trapping and killing for profit is halted?

The wolverine, for example, is a species whose population levels are of great concern. In Canada, their eastern population is already officially listed as “endangered” and their western population is officially listed as a species of “Special Concern” due to their low numbers.⁹ (A species is listed as “Special Concern” when it “may become a threatened or an endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.”)¹⁰

Despite being listed as a species of special concern, wolverines are still legally trapped for their fur in snare traps and Conibear traps.¹¹

C. Ineffective Enforcement

Trapping laws are extremely difficult to enforce, particularly because the number of enforcement officers assigned to this responsibility is disturbingly inadequate.

In the province of British Columbia of Canada, for example, there are only 92 regional staff in the Conservation Officer Service to enforce the Wildlife Act.¹² That averages about 1 Conservation Officer per 10,269 km². As stated in a 2007 survey of environmental law enforcement and compliance in the province of British Columbia by West Coast Environmental Law, “The new policy on deregulation, together with lack of staffing capacity meant that enforcement actions plummeted [in 2007] by more than half.”

Federally too, spending on wildlife protection and monitoring of ecosystems has been slashed because of budget problems at the federal environment ministry. This includes (but not limited to) 80% loss in budget for the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Network and a slash from \$1.9 million to \$0 for the National Wildlife Areas, a program that protects nationally significant habitats for wildlife and birds.¹³

D. Obeying Laws Is Not A Selling Feature

The Canadian fur trade claims in their promotional materials that no endangered species are used in their fur products, as if this was a commendable feature. Separate from the question of whether this claim is true, is the issue of relevance. Refraining from intentionally harming or killing endangered species is the law, and following the law is a bare minimum requirement of all industries. TerraChoice Environmental Marketing refers to this kind of statement of an obvious and basic legal requirement as a special selling feature, as the “Sin of Irrelevance”, one of their six noted green-washing phenomena.¹⁴

E. Patrolling Traplins

The huge majority of trapping in Canada is done on registered traplines (on federally owned land). The traplines are measured in square miles, with some of the larger traplines up to 500 square miles in size. For trappers to travel to and patrol their traplines in the woods, as well as transport dead animals and steel trapping equipment, many use resource-guzzling automobiles or snowmobiles. Such vehicles consume a large amount of fossil fuel and discharge polluting exhausts into the atmosphere.

Pollution from Fur Farms

Fur farms account for 85% of the world's production of animal fur.¹⁵ There are many ecological problems and risks inherent in raising and killing animals on a large scale for consumer purposes.

A recently released report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, warns that the worldwide livestock industry has become a significant contributor of land degradation as well as air and water pollution, and the largest source of animal wastes, antibiotics, hormones, chemicals from tanneries, and fertilizers and pesticides used for feed crops.¹⁶ The Industrial Pollution Projection Systems, published by the World Bank (1995), ranks "Tanneries and Leather Finishing" *third* on the Linear Acute Human Toxic Intensity Index, after "Fertilizers & Pesticides" and "Industrial Chemicals Except Fertilizer". The USA's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 1991) fined *six* fur processing firms \$2.2 million for the pollution they caused. The EPA stated that the waste from fur processing plants "may cause respiratory problems, and are listed as possible carcinogens." Some fur farmers have actually been going out of business recently in the USA due to their inability to clean up the "nitrates, phosphates and other substances running off with rainwater or seeping into aquifers and polluting local water supplies."¹⁷

The Fuhrmann Mink Farm in Wisconsin closed after testing of the well water near their fur operation revealed a high concentration of nitrates. The cost to clean it up, according to one source, would run well into 7 figures. And the fur trade's own recent publications (2007) admitted that China, the largest manufacturer of fur products and textiles made with fur¹⁸, was considering imposing an extremely punitive Value Added Tax on fur dressers and tanneries because they are considered "industries causing excessive pollution".¹⁹

In addition to the excessive waste from fur farms, how many resources are needed to produce the feed necessary for the 1.5 million caged fur-bearing animals, kept captive every year in Canada alone? One source indicates that it takes about 3 tonnes of feed to produce a single mink coat, and a tonne of feed (2,200 pounds) to produce one fox fur coat.²⁰

Chemicals in Fur Processing

After animals are killed by cruel traps or gassed or anal electrocuted on fur farms, their skins are peeled off of their bodies to create a "pelt" (which is the animals' skin with the hair still attached). The fur industry then needs to process each pelt (dye, bleach and chemically treated it so the fur will not collect insects etc.)

The Encyclopedia of International Labour Organization states that the chemicals commonly used to process fur include acids, hydrogen peroxide, chromates, formaldehyde, bleaching agents, and various types of dyes. Many of these are potential skin irritants to humans. Formaldehyde is classified as a human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, and a probable human carcinogen by the US Environmental Protection Agency. Chromates, depending on the type of compounds, can cause breathing problems and other health issues.²¹

In addition to chemical processing, according to the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO), fur dressing involves sorting, soaking/washing, fleshing/turning, tanning, extraction/wringing, drying, cleaning, plucking/shearing/trimming, shaving/buffing, drying, and finishing.

The energy consumption does not end there.

Fur coats require ongoing maintenance. As furriers often say, "Nothing shortens the lifespan of a fur like keeping it cooped up in the closet during hot summer months."

Home storage, even using air conditioning or a cedar closet, will not protect your fur from drying out or from dust, dirt and insect damage. Fur vaults are specially designed environments, with carefully controlled temperature and humidity. When furs are not professionally stored, though the fur may appear undamaged, the natural oils in the leather may have dried out, prematurely aging your garment and leaving it more vulnerable to rips and tears.²² Imagine the energy required to run "fur vaults" to properly store furs, and on top of that, the energy required to professionally dry clean them.

No Future for Fur

People worldwide are becoming increasingly aware of the cruelty involved in fur. The number of animals trapped for their fur in Canada has already plummeted by 80% from its' peak popularity.

"People have just gotten out of it," said Mr. Duncanson, a member of the Nova Scotia Trappers Association. "Even those who are still active are not going very far because the payback isn't worth it." (Chronicle-Herald, Jan. 9, 2001)

When interviewed by CBC Radio, 84-year-old one time Fur Auction Owner, Ted Pappas, admitted himself, "The fur business is dying. The old trappers are dead. The young generations are well educated. A lot of natives are professionals now. They are lawyers. They are doctors. They are in the computers... Are they going to ... trap a handful of fur that doesn't even pay the gas on your snowmobile? It's only logical. I wouldn't do it... I wouldn't put my sons in this business." (CBC Radio, Jan. 10, 2005)

Conclusion

Fur and fur trim is not green. In addition to putting our environment and human health at risk, this industry is also responsible for the death and cruel suffering of millions of animals worldwide.

The Association for the Protection of Fur Bearing Animals encourages consumers to critically think about environmental or animal welfare claims made by the fur industry, and to explore other clothing options that truly have a lighter footprint.

If you find any of the "green" or "eco-friendly" advertisements misleading, please file a complaint to the **Canadian Competition Bureau**. email: compbureau@cb-bc.gc.ca or phone: 1-800-348-5358.

¹ National Public Radio, December 7, 2007

² Standards Council of Canada, 2007 http://www.scc.ca/en/news_events/features/featuresindex_99.shtml

³ Press Release, Standards Council of Canada, http://www.scc.ca/en/news_events/features/featuresindex_99.shtml

⁴ <http://canadianbiodiversity.mcgill.ca/english/species/index.htm>

⁵ "Hunting Habits of Wolves Change Ecological Balance in Yellowstone", The New York Times, October 18, 2005

⁶ Union Leader, June 24, 2007

⁷ Animal Issues, Animal Protection Institute, Winter 2007

⁸ Portland Press Herald, October 5, 2007.

⁹ Environment Canada http://www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca/search/speciesResults_e.cfm?qLang=e&quicksearch=wolverine

¹⁰ COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada)

http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct0/assessment_process_e.cfm#tbl5

¹¹ B.C. Wild Fur Harvest Summary Report, B.C. Ministry of Environment, Fish and Wildlife Branch

¹² Correspondence from B.C. Fish and Wildlife Branch, August 3, 2007

¹³ Canadian Broadcasting Corp, September 18, 2007

¹⁴ TerraChoice Environmental Marketing <http://www.terrachoice.com>

¹⁵ International Fur Trade Federation. "Fast Facts" <http://www.iftf.com> Oct 2008.

¹⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations <http://www.fao.org/ag/magazine/0612sp1.htm>

¹⁷ The Sandy Parker Reports, January 21, 2008

¹⁸ International Fur Trade Federation, February 2005 http://www.iftf.com/iftf_3_1_1.php?id=122

¹⁹ Sandy Parker Reports, August 2007 and Trapper & Predator Caller, December 2007

²⁰ Animal Issues, Animal Protection Institute, Winter 2007

²¹ Health Canada http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/chromium-chrome/index_e.html#5

²² Fur Council of Canada, Easy Care Tips, 2010

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