

# Evaluating Performance of the Soft-Catch® Coyote Trap

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Increasing public awareness of both traps and trapping, along with concern among wildlife professionals and trap manufacturers about the continuing need for highly effective and selective traps, have motivated considerable research efforts to modify and improve animal traps. Researchers at the USDA's Denver Wildlife Research Center (DWRC) have been involved in research on traps and snares for many years.

Coyote trapping research has concentrated on two major areas:

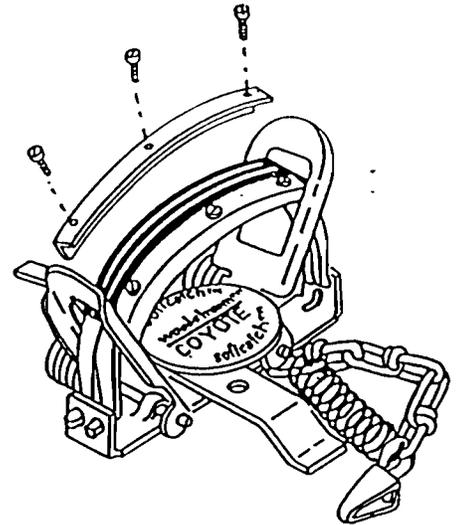
- *efficiency and selectivity of different trap types and modifications used for capturing coyotes, and*
- *reducing animal injuries associated with trapping.*

Much of the DWRC's recent research in this area has focused on testing the performance of Woodstream Corporation's no. 3 Soft-Catch® trap in comparison with other traps used in predation management programs. Results of the first field study conducted in 1984 and 1985 showed that the Victor No. 3 Soft-Catch® padded trap and the Victor 3NM trap fitted with similar rubber-jaw pads substantially reduced foot injuries to coyotes but were much less efficient in capturing and holding coyotes than the unpadded 3NM traps. Follow-up studies conducted in 1986 and 1987 again showed the Soft-Catch® trap to be less effective in capturing coyotes than unpadded traps.

A fourth-generation model of the Soft-Catch® trap that was re-engineered to increase closure speed became available in 1988. Consultation with co-workers and trapping specialist W.E. "Pete" Askins from the Woodstream Corporation suggested that changes in setting procedures for the Soft-Catch® trap and specific training in the trap's mechanics and use might help to improve performance. Accordingly, in cooperation with the Texas Animal Damage Control (ADC) program, we conducted field trials in southern Texas during the winters of 1989 and 1991 utilizing the new traps and setting procedures. These tests showed no difference in the capture rates of the Soft-Catch® trap, the No. 3NM Victor, the No. 4 Newhouse, or the unpadded No. 3

Victor coil-spring trap. Results of these trials will be reported in greater detail at the 1992 Vertebrate Pest Conference in Newport Beach, California.

Despite the good performance of the Soft-Catch® trap in southern Texas, data were lacking on how the trap might perform in different soil types and under adverse weather conditions. To further evaluate the performance of the Soft-Catch® trap in different geographic areas of the west, wildlife biologists from the DWRC and ADC's Western Region, in cooperation with the Woodstream Corporation, initiated an operational field test in the fall of 1991.



Fifteen ADC specialists (ADCS) from 7 states are participating in the test. Each ADCS was issued 2-3 dozen Soft-Catch® traps for use in conjunction with ongoing coyote predation management work. Some standardized procedures were developed to facilitate comparisons. This fall (October-December) traplines were established in each ADCS's district. Study personnel accompanied each ADCS when traplines were established and provided instruction on trap setting and data collection procedures. Each Soft-Catch trap was paired by location, but at least 20 feet distant, with a standard trap that the ADCS would normally use. The same lure or scent was used with both traps at each location. In most districts, the ENM long-spring trap was used; however, some ADC personnel gathered comparable performance data on the Sterling MJ600 and the No. 4 Newhouse traps.

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The Ark



## *Soft-Catch® Traps...*

All traps were checked daily for 10 consecutive days. Following the completion of these initial standardized traplines, each ACDS will continue to use Soft-Catch® traps in combination with traps normally used in operational control work for the next year. During this time, data will be recorded on trap performance in different weather and soil conditions, along with any miscellaneous information on malfunctioning traps, capture of non-target species, or comments on procedures. The information from this field test should provide a more complete assessment of the operational performance of the new Soft-Catch® traps. This will allow wildlife managers to make informed decisions on their use for capturing coyotes.