

2017 FTA Trappers College

Special Report

Most of the photos in this story were taken by Justin Jett. Justin was tapped as the "Media Specialist" for this year's college, and he clearly rose to the occasion, including both Facebook and film. Thanks! (Check out FTA on Facebook!)

Also thanks to Ronnie Kocher and Dean Bartz, who shared Photos as well.

-Editor

First question? "Why go?"

"I learned more in the first day and half than I expected to learn all week."

"I was here for about a half an hour when I said, 'These are my kind of people.'"

Ignorance is really the assumption that there is nothing left to learn. When you think you know it all, you clearly have hit

rock bottom. Trappers who have done the same thing for decades can naturally assume that they are not likely to discover any new information that is of value. Clearly the Trappers College is a great



Brian McGowan works out logistics and prepares to introduce Savanna Vaughn. Brian is with Purdue University and has been a key asset for the college for many years.



Above, Doug McKenzie begins the instruction with his group.



Left, Savanna Vaughn, Property Manager, delivers a "Welcome to Pigeon River Fish and Wildlife Area" presentation.

example of how foolish that can be.

The 2017 Trappers College session was pretty much all that the students and instructors had hoped for. Folks who were just starting, trappers who were likely very comfortable with one or two species but need help with the rest, and veteran trappers who know that even the things that don't seem significant can greatly improve the harvest, the damage control efficiency, and the solution to a particularly challenging critter or circumstance—nearly all levels learned, shared, and met folks they are not likely to forget.

Often one of the most important answers to the "why go?" question is in the networking. Meeting trappers from all over the country and the world, meeting instructors from similarly diverse geographies, and being able to contact those two resources in the future can be one of the most significant "take home" prizes from the college.

It is also important to note that lasting friendships always develop. Start with folks of similar interests and experiences, enhance their education and share some great moments together, and it is very unlikely that a student would not have connections for most any future question, and a diverse set of contacts for job references, information resources, and just friendly discussions.

So much for the "why." Let's examine the "what" and then the "who" of the Class of 2017.

"What's it like?"

Beginning in 1980, students from across the country and from around the world have attended the college. Students from Norway, Spain, Canada, South Africa... and parts unknown, have gotten their feet wet, knees dirty, and met a lot of fine folks.

Today, fifty to sixty students converge on a piece of property called the Pigeon River Fish and Wildlife area. It is a diverse habitat that offers dense cover, open fields, and a variety of wetlands, farmed areas, and generally grassland prairie. It is hard to imagine a piece of property that is more suitable to the needs of an international student body to work with habitat that is comparable to what they need to know about.

Eighteen to twenty veteran trapper instructors represent the teaching staff, working with a student-teacher ratio of



Charlie Maschek is gettin' wet for muskrat trapping.

Gary Jepson (L) and Cory Van Driel (R) conduct the initial interviews. A great effort is made to assign students to the class level that fits best with their personal experiences in trapping.



Kimm Hunt and class prepare for a release. Everyone (except the 'coon) seem pleased at the capture--there is no teacher like a successful real-life experience.



Dean Bartz gives an in-depth presentation on modern bear snaring, as used in bear damage control.



Dave Eckels is in the water for micro location identification.



EJ Kelley points out the particulars of snare construction as students prepare to build a few of their own.

three or four to one. (Unlike public school, where we often see thirty to one ratios.) The educational goals are to maximize the one-on-one opportunities, the hands-on activities, and to guarantee that the diversity of the faculty will address the diverse needs of the students.

In addition, several presentations are delivered by invited expert speakers such as Chris Anchor and Rob Ericson; folks who are at the center of wildlife issues.

The Pigeon River FWA is managed well, and a good portion of what the trappers will harvest is in accordance with management needs on the area. Most trapped critters are released; some are harvested in order to balance whatever management goal the FWA establishes as its priority.

This year, Savanna Vaughn, PRFWA Property Manager, operated both as the area supervisor (delivering the "Welcome to the Pigeon River" introductory presentation) and as a student in the course. Her involvement helps the DNR have a clear grasp of the details of the course, and hopefully her education about trapping will be of use as she plans future management of the area.

Charlie Park, long time "Dean" of the college, has worked on the Pigeon River for over thirty five years, not only as a Conservation Officer, but also as the College Director. He said, "I've known some good managers, and maybe some 'not-so-good' ones. Savanna is just excellent."

Students are initially interviewed in order to assess their experience levels. It is more effective to have veteran trappers in a class with other veterans, and beginners with beginners. The comfort level, the curriculum, and the expectations all fit and flow much better.

Once the student body is assigned to a course level, the five classes meet, and each morning they travel from the YMCA camp to the assigned section of the wildlife area for in-field instruction, and hands-on trap setting and critiquing. Trappers will have folks "over their shoulder" as they put into practice the lessons taught.

As the week proceeds, most of the time, the animals become the best instructors of all. Learning to carefully observe what has occurred with a catch, or a miss, means we achieve the highest level of understanding. This kind of immediate and particular feedback is extremely important for high

level learning.

Early in the afternoon, all the classes return to camp, and there participate in a series of "round robin" instruction. By the end of the week, every student has had direct instruction from every teacher.

Evenings are spent in classroom instruction of a wide variety, including Power-Point presentations on research, trapping and fur harvesting techniques, disease awareness, lure use, trap site macro and micro location selection, animal behaviors, animal damage control tools and techniques, fur grading, and several more.

Literally, the talk is trapping, from before sunrise, to far after sunset.

Trapping takes place in the water, in grasslands, in farmed environments, in timber and brush. Students are assured to get a little wet, a little dirty, and a little brush-beaten by the time the week is over.

Most classes poll the individual students for priorities in order to see to it that if a student went to the college for a particular type of trapping education (Coyotes? Beaver? Weasel?) it can be addressed.

This year, Todd Lang and Kevin Echterling were the college administrators. It was their first year in these positions, and of course there are always details and adjustments to make, and processes to improve, but overall, it was universally agreed that a fine job was accomplished. It is almost certain that students, had they not been told, would never have known that the administration was new and making the first "shake-down run."

That, in a nutshell, is the "what."

"Who will be there?"

Again this year, the student body "who" at the college was diverse. Alaska, California, South Africa, Canada, Texas, and generally everywhere in between was represented.

Niel, from South Africa, said, "It took me three years to get here. It has been wonderful for me, particularly on the subject of lures and baits, but just everything else also. I hope I can come back."

Niel works in S.A and a good part of his job description is working with folks in agriculture, and helping folks integrate farm and wildlife management. "Predation is part of farming here." He deals with animals, but also with education of land managers so that they can improve their ag interests as well as work in harmony with



Robert Colona and Gary Jepson present Application and use of lures. Many students discover that this "duo" presentation alone can be worth the cost of the college.



Hard to wipe away the smiles when a student captures the "apex predator" of the midwest. For the mountain men, being "up to beaver" was a sign of proficiency. Today, it is "Up to Coyote."



Passing a quiz in the best classroom in the world!



"You done real good" celebration!



Small student/teacher ratio, and up close presentation. Here, Kimm Hunt points out a detail for dry land trapping.



Working lunch in the field. Unlike many modern day seminar opportunities, not much time is wasted! "Dark to dark, plus."

the natural environment.

As the week wears on, clearly folks get better acquainted, and more fun to be around. It isn't long before the personalities relax and the memorable moments begin to accumulate. (Robert Colona, for example, had an "ah-ha!" moment when he found that the local convenience store sold microwavable pork rinds.)

Without a doubt, in a few short days, collectively the group captured an impressive number of animals; again, most released, but some harvested to achieve management goals, and to have opportunities for students to practice skinning and fur handling skills, gland harvest, skunk essence collection, etc.

As it has been in recent years, over half of the students are "agency" folks—biologists, land managers, conservation officers, USDA Wildlife Services personnel, etc. We still maintain a good number of folks who would classify themselves as fur trappers, from hobby trappers, to semi-professionals, to fur and ADC trappers.

The goal of the Trappers College is to provide a bit of a "buffet" presentation. Information and techniques for diverse species, for fur harvest, for ADC work, for



"Brer coon" on a foggy morning. It is likely that on the wildlife area, over the years, there are some Ph.D critters. (And Justin gets another great "artsy" shot!)

predator control, for property management, and for other wildlife related management techniques, such as hog control, and predator damage mitigation.

As is always the case, the world outside of the college has an effect. We had students from Florida who could not attend due to the hurricanes, and an instructor from Montana (Bob Shepard) who had to stay home to deal with raging mountain forest fires. There is always next year!

The networking also helps when it comes to addressing the ongoing battle between consumptive use management folks and those who would end all wildlife management as we know it. Networking helps when the "wolf is at the door" in terms of legal or legislative efforts to curtail, or eliminate, furbearer management. Over and over we have seen where a small group of savvy trapper volunteers can undo the well-financed, well organized and staffed efforts.

It is a mistake to assume it will not affect you. It will.

The 2017 Trappers College went off without a hitch, and the efforts of the new directors are to be appreciated!

Good old Ben Franklin said, "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."



Rob Erickson's presentation on urban wildlife control is a high point of the week. Rob here discusses some high-tech night vision equipment.



Getting down to business in the fur preparation and finishing segments. Fur preparation is an art and a science that is mastered with real experience.



The apex predator validates a trapping lesson taught.



And that is how it is done...



A group celebration of success! (FTA folks might note Elijah Lowe, second from the right. Elijah is

a pretty quiet guy; sometimes hard to catch him on camera. Elijah has been a big help to the FTA at our presence with the FFA national conventions! [He's holding a "silver sub-fox"!])



Up close skunk essence removal training—a "value added" use of the resource.



Lee Steinmeyer explains the detailed evidence of a deer pullout, commonly mistaken for a "smart coyote" escape.



Gland removal techniques from a veteran lure maker: Like getting "singing lessons from Elvis."



EJ Kelley give some particulars on water trapping micro location. Now the students will proceed to put the lessons into practice.



Trap physics and detail awareness addressed in depth.



*Muskrat
in the
bag!*

We would like to offer a special thank you for Woopie Pies from Maple Lane Furs owned by Allen Miller, and the LA Express gas station for their support.



Brian McGowan helps with equipment check-in. Students who fly (and others) may check out whatever equipment they will need.

College Keepsake!

Next June, at the FTA 50th Anniversary Convention in Marshfield, WI, a beautiful oak stretcher board that has the autographs of all the college instructors, and a trap tag from each one will be sold at auction, as a fundraiser. Funds generated this way go directly toward promoting trapper education, defending trapping, and proactively working to ensure that our heritage of wildlife management is preserved.

Please consider sending in a bid by proxy, bidding on it in person, or having your chapter or affiliate file a bid.

It is a nicely done keepsake for the 2017 college; but more important, it is a fun way to generate dollars to fight the fight. ("Absentee auction" bids may be sent to Dave Hastings by letter or e-mail: ftaeditor@yahoo.com)

Kurt Hayden, of Hayden Honda, loaned this new Side by Side to be used by staff at the college; its a great trapline machine! Ron Peters looks fine at the wheel.

Many Thanks to Hayden Honda!



*Media Specialist Justin Jett and Charlie Maschek--a selfie!
Many thanks to Justin for his work at the college & with Charlie at Hoosier Outdoors--these guys are moving trappers ahead into the 21st Century with a great "on line" presence! (If you are one of the many who "kept up" with the college on Facebook this year, tell *em you appreciate it! And, it is not to late to check it out.)*

