



## **Mink raft deployment**

### **How many, how far apart?**

There are no definitive answers to these linked questions. In principle, the more smart rafts on a given water body, the faster the mink population will decline, but the law of diminishing returns applies. Doubling the number of rafts/traps is unlikely to double the catch of mink. GWCT guidelines suggest a spacing of 1 raft per km of waterway bank, but this is impractical over landscape-scale trapping operations. When traps are in short supply, it is better to place them unevenly - more where mink are abundant, and fewer where mink are rare. One per km may be needed in areas of rich wetland while one per 5-10km may be sufficient in small watercourses or depleted habitats.

### **What makes a good mink spot?**

1. It's hard to predict where mink occur, but habitat quality will normally be a good guide. Winding rivers with overhanging trees and complex banks are generally more attractive than straight, steep-sided drainage ditches, but sometimes mink turn up in seemingly unfavourable places. Select waterway junctions if any are visible. Local knowledge will normally help to identify where mink are more likely to live.
2. Aim for somewhere safe and convenient to access in different conditions – flood, snow, drought etc. Avoid steep waterway banks.
3. If all else is equal, select locations without public access, but sometimes this is unavoidable.
4. If possible, avoid locations near sluices and outfalls.

### **How to deploy the raft**

1. Choose a good trapping site, bearing in mind likely water level and flow rate fluctuations (long term river gauge data are available at <https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/river-and-sea-levels> or <https://riverlevels.uk/> . Where big fluctuations are possible, longer tethers, looped to a tall post, may be needed to allow the raft to rise and fall. Alternatively, tie a long rope to a high, strong branch. In such waterways, find an area where there will be some slack water for the raft to drift into.
2. Determine what the raft will be tethered to. In all but exceptional circumstances, the raft should be tethered at each end, to two independent points on the bank. If existing reliable structures are available, such as a fence post or tree, use those. If not, stakes will be required. Bear in mind that, in a river, flow rate will increase significantly during flood episodes so make sure that any fixing is able to take the strain. Stakes should be 50mm diameter, 1.5m long and driven well into firm ground.
3. Use polypropylene rope or similar, of at least 6mm diameter, for the tethers. Thinner material, and bailer twine especially, will wear and break. Once the location has been

selected, estimate the length of rope required to reach the stakes or other bankside tethering places, remembering that extra may be required to accommodate water level fluctuations. Cut each piece of rope to the desired length and securely attach one end to the raft. A bowline or two half-hitches will suffice, but for safety thread the end of the rope back through the strands, as shown in the illustration below. A similar knot should be used if attaching the raft to a tree or an existing fence post. If you use a new stake, tie a loop on the end of the rope, place it over the stake and push the loop down to the ground. Drive a 6" nail through the post near the top to stop the loop slipping off if flooding is possible at that site

4. Once the raft is attached, launch it and check that both tethers are of the right length. Remove any reeds or overhanging twigs/branches that might interfere with the trap. Pull the raft back to the bank, then slide the prepared smart trap into the tunnel, with the trap entrance at the end with the dowel otter excluders. Gently push the raft back out, using a stick if easier.

## Raft Inspection regime

To make sure that traps are functioning correctly, each should be checked on every visit, after flooding events, and at 3-month intervals if no activations are reported. Check that the tethers are not damaged, that the stakes and knots are secure, and that no debris has entered the trap. Ensure that the cable between the Remoti magnet and the trap door is undamaged. Each inspection should be logged as a visit in the WRE database.

## Your safety

Every trap visit has the potential for you to fall in the water. Do a mental risk assessment on every approach. Move slowly and cautiously, especially on steep banks and where there's a muddy margin to the waterway. Follow all Health and Safety advice from your employer and on the WRE Website ( <https://waterliferecoveryeast.org.uk/health-and-safety/> ).



*Attaching a tether to the raft. A bowline knot (as shown here) is excellent, but two half-hitches will suffice. For extra security, thread the end of the rope through the strands. This will prevent your knot(s) from becoming loose and the raft potentially floating away.*