Navigating the permit maze to understand what wildlife parts may be possessed.

Am I Permitted?

Story by Kathy Andrews
and Jason Sherman
Photos By Joe McFarland

Grandpa Miller's best friend was with him the day he shot that atypical buck that earned a Boone and Crockett record. He's interested in purchasing the taxidermy mount from Grandpa's estate, but is it legal to sell it?

Walking down aisle after aisle of hay racks loaded with auction merchandise, you spot a dusty, old drake mallard mount. It's just corny enough to look good in the family fishing cabin on the river. Do you dare bid on it?

The garage sale ad said "everything must go" and implied that all evidence of someone was being removed from the house. They must have paid a fortune to have a taxidermy made of that largemouth bass, a souvenir of a trip to Kentucky, according to the plaque. Are you tempting fate if you snag it for the bargain price they're asking?

Passing by an angler at the lake, you remark on the nice stringer of catfish they have. "More than I can eat, would you like to buy a couple off me," the angler asks. Fresh fish does sound good, but is this a legal transaction?

Here's the short answer: The laws regarding the sale, purchase or barter of fish and game—live or mounted—are complicated and you're better off erring on the side of caution until you learn a little more.

Warning: What may seem like a deal too good to pass up could land you in hot water.

A fish taken under a sport fishing license cannot be bought, sold or bartered.

Aquatic life (amphibians, reptiles and fish) taken under a sport fishing license cannot be bought, sold or bartered. Aquatic life legally taken by a licensed commercial fisherman can be sold to a person with a "wholesale aquatic life dealer's permit" (also referred to as a wholesale fish dealer's permit) without the need for additional licenses. On the other hand, if a person wants to sell aquatic life to the public, they must have a "retail aquatic life dealer's permit."

Those selling minnows must have a "minnow dealer's license."

Game fish can only be bought, sold or bartered (alive, processed for consumption, or preserved by a taxidermist) if they were raised under an aquaculture permit and the person is able to provide proof of legality.

Non-game species of wildlife can only be possessed by an individual and mounted by a taxidermist if the individual first obtained a "mounting permit" from the Department of Natural Resources' Office of Law Enforcement. The mounting permit will only be issued when the finished mount is going to be donated to a public facility where it will be put on permanent display. Non-game species of wildlife can never be bought, sold or bartered

Game birds, including migratory waterfowl, cannot be bought, sold or bartered (including their feathers or mounts preserved by a taxidermist) unless it can be proved that they were pen-raised under the appropriate state and federal permits.

The inedible parts of game mammals may be held, possessed, sold or otherwise dealt with when legally taken in Illinois, or legally taken and possessed in and transported from other states or countries. This includes shed antlers collected on private property with permission of the landowner and sheds collected on state fish and wildlife areas.

It is not legal to collect shed antlers on state park property.

The inedible parts of road-kill or "found" deer may not be bought, sold or bartered.

The legal possession of shed antlers hinges largely on where they were collected.

Any person desiring to possess, propagate, hold in captivity, sell alive for propagation or hunting purposes or sell dressed for food purposes any game mammals or game birds protected under the Illinois Wildlife Code may do so by acquiring a Class B Commercial bird breeder's permit or a Class B Commercial game breeder's permit. Game held under this permit must have come from pen-raised stock and not from the wild.

Fur-bearing mammals, or any parts thereof, may be held, possessed, sold or otherwise dealt with when legally taken and possessed in Illinois or legally taken in another state or country and transported into Illinois. The green hides of fur-bearing animals cannot be possessed by hunters and trappers beyond 10 days past the end of the season. Licensed tanners, taxidermists and fur buyers are exempt from this 10-day restriction.

Any person who wishes to hold, possess, raise or breed in captivity any live fur-bearing mammal protected under the Illinois Wildlife Code shall first obtain a "fur-bearing animal breeder permit" from DNR. Holders of furbearing animal breeder permits may hold, possess, sell or otherwise dispose of captive-reared live fur-bearing mammals or their green hides, possessed thereunder, at any time of the year. When at least 20 percent of a person's gross farm income as reported on their federal tax forms for the previous year is generated from the sale of captive-bred mink, red fox or artic fox as live animal, animal pelts or carcasses, that person will be exempt from the fur-bearing animal breeder requirements.

To be safe, be prepared to present to law enforcement officers documentation on where, when and how an animal was harvested.

Before any person, except holders of Class B wild game and game bird breeder permits sells or processes wild game, including carcasses of fur-bearing mammals, for public consumption, they must first obtain a "processed wild game dealer's permit."

The bottom line is: Document where, when, how mounts were created and the animal was harvested. Contact a Conservation Police Officer if you have any questions about the transaction.

And finally, if any doubt remains, pass on the bargain.

Commercial licenses

Commercial licenses are available online via DNR Direct (www.dnr.state.il.us/lic_holders.html) or by phone at 1-888-6-PERMIT (1-888-673-7648). If a permit is issued to a business name, a customer number must first be established by calling (217) 785-3423 or (217) 782-2965. The individual will then be able to purchase the business license from DNR Direct.

Resident Wholesale Fish Dealer: issued to anyone conducting a wholesale fish market or selling aquatic life wholesale that are protected species and indigenous to Illinois. Annual permit is $50.50 and expires January 31.

Resident Retail Fish Dealer: issued to anyone conducting a retail fish market or selling from a truck aquatic life that are protected species and indigenous to Illinois. Annual permit is $10.50 and expires January 31.

Resident Minnow Dealer: retail permit allows the retail sale of minnows and frogs for bait; wholesale permit allows the wholesale sale of minnows and frogs. Annual permits are $10.50 and $25.50, repectively, and expire January 31.

Mounting Permit:

Class B Commercial Bird Breeder and Commercial Game Breeder: to possess various game mammals, game birds and migratory waterfowl and sell alive or dressed for food purposes. Annual permit is $20.50 and expires March 31.

Taxidermy: allows individuals to engage in the business of taxidermy for other individuals. Annual permits are $25.50 and expire March 31.

Fur Tanner or Dyer: allows individuals to engage in the dressing, dyeing or tanning of green hides for other individuals. Annual permits are $25.50 and expire March 31.

Fur-Bearing Animal Breeder: to possess, breed and/or sell opossum, raccoon, mink, red and gray fox, beaver, muskrat, badger, river otter and weasels. Annual permit is $25.50 and expires March 31.

Processed Wild Game Dealer: allows processors to buy, sell and/or process wild game for public consumption. Annual permits are $25.50 and expire March 31.