FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE FOR INFORMATION:
June 2, 2016 Muriel Mosher, 207-623-0680

Lynx device benefits trappers, animals, business

AUGUSTA, Maine – It looks a bit like chicken wire wrapped around a plastic bucket, but JB Sheet Metal’s lynx exclusion device is proving to be worth far more than that. In 2014, Maine Department of Inland Fishers and Wildlife (MDIFW) issued new regulations to protect lynx from accidental trapping. When Ken LeTourneau, Project Manager for Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Maine MEP), saw the guidelines, he thought of Jeff Baker, owner of JB Sheet Metal in Caribou, who developed a prototype in only one month.

“That month was a whirlwind,” Baker said. Armed with the MDIFW regulations, he and LeTourneau attended several meetings of trappers, who talked about what they needed and helped fine tune the design. “They [MDIFW] put out a schematic of what they envisioned would work, but truly we needed input from the trappers,” said Baker. Some wanted a special length, and a game warden weighed in on the modifications.

“The whole trick was the price point,” added LeTourneau. “If you can purchase bulk material and produce a high volume, it lowers the cost per unit.” As a sheet-metal product manufacturer, Baker was able to purchase large quantities of wire mesh, and already had specialized tools. The device sold for $30-35, depending on size, making it more cost-effective than if trappers built their own.

With a late start and a race through design and manufacture, Baker sold about 60 devices last season. But 75-80 percent of trappers statewide didn’t trap last year due to the new regulations, he said. This year, he estimates that he could sell 1,000 of the devices, and already he’s seen spin-off business from the new product, with trappers requesting trays to carry bait along trap lines and spare tire racks. When clients come to pick up their devices, “they see I have nuts and bolts and screws and tools, and they end up purchasing those items, too,” Baker said, all from LeTourneau’s initial phone call. “It was a very good idea that Ken had.”

As a Maine MEP project manager for Aroostook and Washington counties, LeTourneau assists manufacturers in researching, evaluating and implementing opportunities for business and technology improvements. “This was essentially product development,” he said.

JB Sheet Metal has grown steadily since Baker opened it in 2014. “The heart of my business is ventilation, duct work, and HVAC,” he said. He and his employees make an oven that attaches to wood stoves, a portable toilet, and custom products, but until last year, nothing like the lynx exclusion device.

“Maine MEP is all about helping manufacturers, from product development to lean efficiency techniques,” said Muriel Mosher, Maine MEP president. “This device is useful for Maine trappers, protects an endangered species and benefits a local, small business.”
“Northern Maine Development Commission is proud to be one of the field offices for Maine MEP,” said NMDC Executive Director Robert Clark. “When one of our employees can assist local manufacturers in becoming more competitive with new manufacturing and management technologies, it is a real benefit to the region and local economy.”

About Maine MEP
The Maine MEP is a program of the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development and an affiliate of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP system is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2,000 manufacturing and business professionals whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits and enhanced global competitiveness. For information on the Maine MEP program, please visit www.mainemep.org, or phone 207-623-0680.

About NMDC
Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC) is a membership organization comprised of participating communities and counties in the Aroostook Washington Economic Development District. NMDC provides federal and state services at the regional and local levels. NMDC also provides management and support for Aroostook County Tourism (ACT), Aroostook Municipal Association (AMA), and Aroostook Partnership. NMDC is proud to be one of the field offices for Maine MEP. A field engineer is located at our Caribou office to assist local manufacturers in becoming more competitive with new manufacturing and management technologies.