## STATE FURBEARER PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

**Spring 2002** 

Wildlife Division P.O. Box 200701 Helena MT 59620-0701

This newsletter is provided through Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) state furbearer program to inform trappers, hunters, government agencies, the public, and department personnel about current furbearer management activities and issues in the state of Montana – Brian Giddings, State Furbearer Coordinator.

#### AUTOMATED LICENSING SYSTEM

Beginning with the 2002 license year, the state's hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses will have a new look and be dispensed in a new way through Fish, Wildlife & Park's new automated licensing system (ALS). This new electronic technology will streamline Montana's 100-year old licensing distribution system to improve the services FWP and the state's license providers offer hunters, trappers, anglers, and state park visitors.

Once you acquire a license item such as a conservation license through ALS, the system will assign you a lifetime ALS number, which is a sequential digit for that birth date, on a first come first serve basis. You now have a unique identifying number that is your date of birth and ALS #. This is a lifetime number so it eliminates the need for an annual conservation license number. Providers will request a person's date of birth and ALS # for subsequent purchases, such as when you buy a trapper's license this fall.

#### TRAP TAG LEGISLATION

During the 2001 Legislative Session a bill was passed that allows trappers to use an identification number on trap tags. The FWP sponsored bill modified statute 87-3-504, which requires metal tags on all traps, to expand owner identification requirements on trap tags to include name and address or wildlife conservation license number. This change was intended for metal tags used on both traps and snares.

With FWP's new automated licensing system in place, a conservation license number is no longer issued, although now a person's unique identifying number (Birth Date <u>and</u> ALS #) replaces the old conservation license number. Trappers wishing to change over trap tags must be sure to include their birth date followed by their ALS #. An example of a tag number would be: 03/21/58 ALS #1.

#### FWP COMMISSION MEETS IN JUNE

The FWP Commission will meet in Helena June 18 & 19 with a schedule that includes setting tentative furbearer seasons, limits, quotas, and discussion of any regulation changes.

This is the beginning of the biennial season setting process, in which furbearer seasons and trapping regulations will be set for the

2002-03 and 2003-04 trapping seasons. An agenda for this meeting, which will set the day and time to discuss tentative furbearer regulations, should be available by June 10. Contact FWP at 444-2612 for information on the meeting schedule or check out the FWP website on line at <a href="mailto:fwp.state.mt.us">fwp.state.mt.us</a>

# FWP COMMISSION SETS ANNUAL RULE FOR PRAIRIE DOG SHOOTING

This past February the FWP Commission and FWP jointly adopted regulations for shooting prairie dogs on public lands. To reduce the chance of a federal ESA listing for prairie dogs in the west, the state of Montana has taken several steps toward management of this "keystone" prairie grassland species.

The prairie dog had been previously petitioned for an ESA listing and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service recently made a decision that the species should be listed, although an actual listing was precluded because of higher priority species that need attention first. Prairie dog distribution in the west-central U.S. has reportedly been reduced to about 1% of its historic range.

Based on recommendations by FWP biologists and a citizen prairie dog working group, the FWP Commission adopted the annual rule for a seasonal shooting closure for black-tailed prairie dogs occupying public lands, other than state school trust lands, in the state of Montana. The closure period includes the months of March, April and May. The closure does not apply to private lands. This annual rule also includes a year-round closure to the shooting of black-tailed prairie dogs on BLM lands in south Phillips County designated as the two black-footed ferret reintroduction areas. Shooting of white-tailed prairie dogs occupying public lands, other than state school trust lands, within a portion of Carbon County is also closed year-round.

#### AVERAGE PELT PRICE VALUES

Pelt price values have increased for some furbearer species over the past several years, although prices for several species continue to be weak. The table below indicates trend in pelt prices based on estimates from various sources during the 2001 sales period. Check local fur dealers or auction houses for current price information.

<u>Species</u>	2001-02	2000-01	<u>1999-00</u>
Beaver	12.40	15.98	13.65
Otter	47.93	59.17	49.22
Muskrat	2.07	1.71	1.49
Mink	10.05	8.37	10.27
Marten	18.70	19.95	19.33
Fisher	25.12	28.62	22.88
Wolverine	225.00	212.94	186.61
Bobcat	135.25	106.05	98.67
Coyote	23.70	18.93	22.06
Red Fox	22.65	16.24	14.34
Raccoon	10.30	10.02	7.78
Ermine	2.00	no buy	2.92
Skunk	5.00	3.73	5.51
Badger	18.50	15.98	13.65

#### MONTANA YOUTH TRAPPER CAMP

The third annual youth trapper camp is scheduled for June 13, 14, & 15 by Beaver Creek Park south of Havre. Contact Fran or Jim Buell from the MTA by phone at 376-3178 or at <a href="mailto:rmbuell@ttc-cmc.net">7mbuell@ttc-cmc.net</a> by email. Registration is \$40.00 although there are some \$20.00 FWP scholarships. The camp is sponsored by MTA, FWP and 4-H.

#### 10-YEAR HARVEST SUMMARY

On the following pages is a 10-year harvest summary for furbearer, predator and nongame species monitored by FWP. Each column represents the total state harvest per year. Shaded segments in each column represent harvest from each trapping district.

# FURBEARER HARVEST GRAPHS

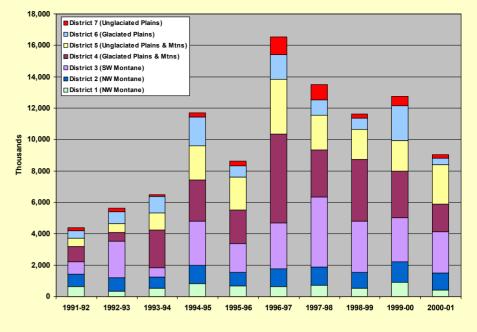
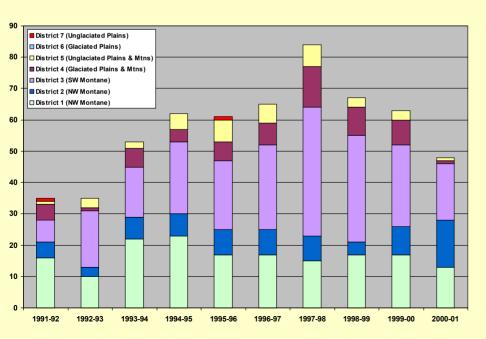


Figure 2. Statewide beaver harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion), 1991-92 to 2000-01



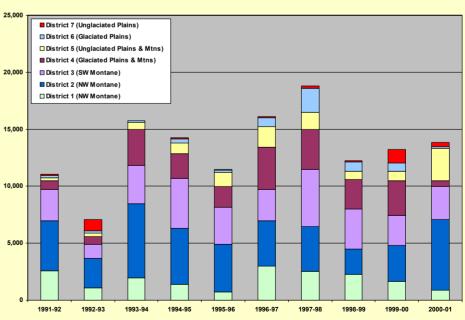


Figure 3. Statewide otter harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

Figure 4. Statewide muskrat harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

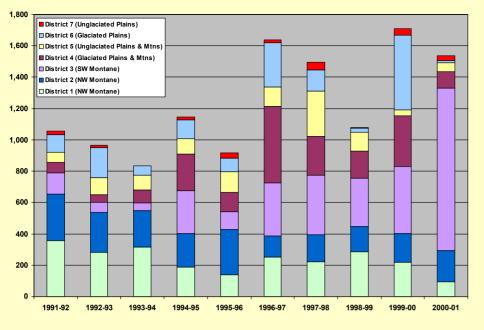
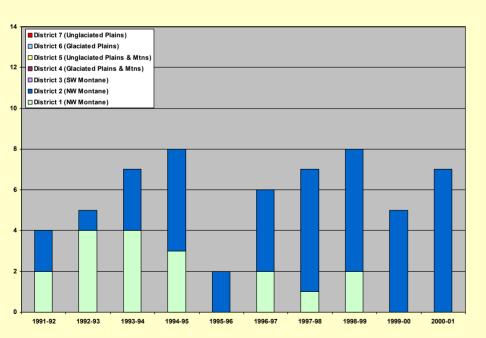


Figure 5. Statewide mink harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01



2.000 ■ District 7 (Unglaciated Plains) ☐ District 6 (Glaciated Plains) 1,800 ☐ District 5 (Unglaciated Plains & Mtns) ■ District 4 (Glaciated Plains & Mtns) District 3 (SW Montane) 1.600 District 2 (NW Montane) ☐ District 1 (NW Montane) 1.400 1,200 1,000 800 600 400 200 1991-92 1992-93 1993-94 1995-96 1996-97 1997-98 1998-99 1999-00 2000-01

Figure 6. Statewide marten harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

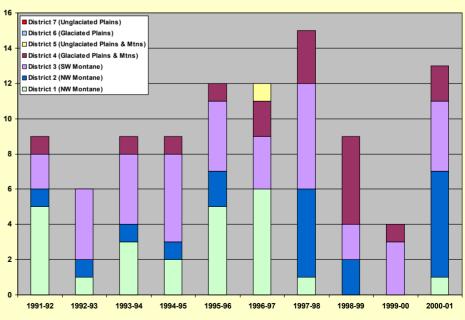


Figure 7. Statewide fisher harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

Figure 8. Statewide wolverine harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

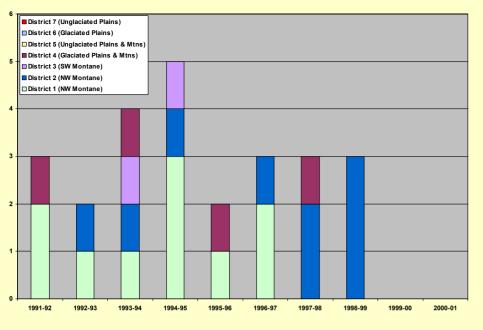


Figure 9. Statewide lynx harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

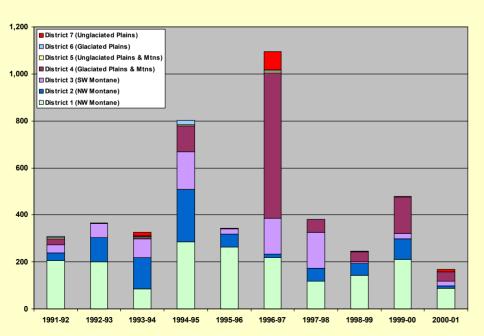


Figure 11. Statewide weasel harvest by trapping district (ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

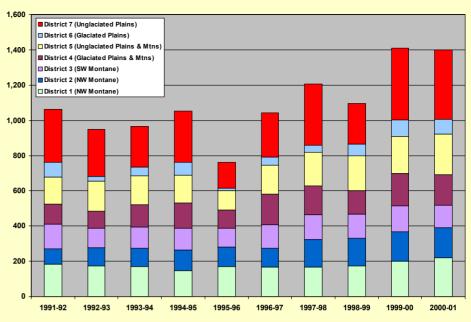


Figure 10. Statewide bobcat harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

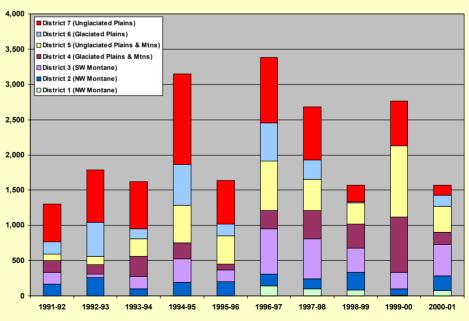


Figure 12. Statewide skunk harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

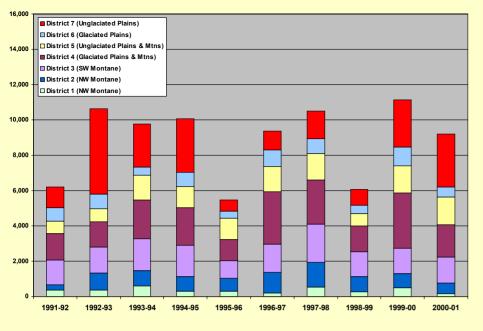
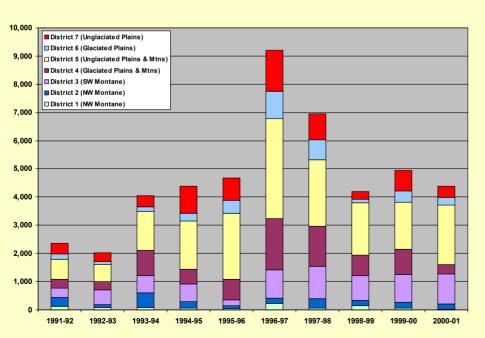
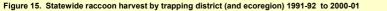


Figure 13. Statewide coyote harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01



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1993-94

Figure 16. Statewide badger harvest by trapping district (and ecoregion) 1991-92 to 2000-01

1994-95

1995-96

1996-97

1997-98

1998-99

1999-00

2000-01

### Recommendations To Improve Trapping Efficiency, Selectivity, and Animal Welfare

- Use pan tension devices to avoid non-target catches.
- Use extra swivels and center-mounted chains to hold more animals and reduce the chance of an injury occurring.
- Use modern positioning techniques at dirt hole sets to increase selectivity.
- Use short trap chains for most land sets and especially those targeted for fox and coyote.
- Use guarded or "stop-loss" traps for muskrats in shallow water or dry land sets.
- Use dispatching methods that are quick and humane.
- Use trap sizes that are appropriate for the target species – foot pad catches are desirable for fox, coyote, raccoon, and most other animals because they reduce injuries.
- Use baits and lures that attract target species but not other animals.
- Use cage, box, or species-specific traps near barns, outbuildings, and other locations where domestic animals may be present.
- Use common sense in choosing set locations that maximize opportunities to catch target species and minimize opportunities to catch other animals.
- Use secure methods of attaching traps tailor methods to hold the largest species you may catch.
- Use traps with laminated or offset jaws.
- Use discretion and select trap site placement carefully when setting body-gripping traps.
- Use time to your advantage do not set more traps than you can handle.
- Use early morning trap checks to reduce the time an animal is held, reduce its chances of pulling out, and avoid theft of traps and animals.

#### REGULATION CHANGE REMINDERS

Several regulation changes were made in 2000 including mandatory breakaway snares; 24-hour reporting of bobcat and fisher; and 5-day pelt registration/tagging of bobcat, fisher, wolverine, and otter.

Changes were made for placing and setting conibears and ground sets on public land.

Breakaway locks have been required on snares placed on land for the past two trapping seasons, but beginning 11/01/02 breakaway locks will be required on all snares, including underwater sets. With regard to bobcat and fisher quota's, trappers and hunters must personally report their harvest within 24-hours by calling a FWP regional office (8 am-5 pm weekdays) in the trapping district where the animal was taken. Reporting can be made after office hours and on weekends by calling 1-406-449-1065. According to regulation, these are the only two ways to report a bobcat or fisher. Trappers and hunters must not call wardens or biologists to report. This does not comply with regulation requirements and can result in problems with tracking harvest quotas. However, pelt tagging can be done by any authorized FWP personnel within 5 days of take – such as local wardens, biologists, or regional office staff.

When using a ground set on public lands, conibears with a 7x7 or larger jaw spread: 1) must have the trigger recessed at least seven (7) inches and be in an enclosure that provides an opening of fifty-two (52) square inches or less; 2) are prohibited in the right of way or thirty (30) feet from the centerline of any public road; and 3) be setback thirty (30) feet from any designated cross-country ski trails or designated hiking trails.

Regulations also state any ground set, including snares, are prohibited within 1000 feet of a designated public campground or fishing access site and also within 1000 feet of an occupied dwelling without written notification of the occupant. Become familiar with the Furbearer Trapping & Hunting Regulations booklet to avoid violations. Specific regulations are intended to help prevent the accidental trapping of pets, primarily dogs. During the 2001-02 season, several dogs were caught in conibear and

foothold traps and in all instances the sets were determined to be illegal.

#### WOLVES RECOVERING IN MONTANA

It is estimated that 570 wolves make up the 35 or more breeding packs that occupy the Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming wolf recovery areas, with 18 of these packs, or about 100 wolves, present in Montana. Since federal wolf managers have decided that a total of 30 breeding pair, equitably distributed in the tri-state area for three years, will trigger a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposal to delist the wolf, this process could begin as early as 2003. Once a delisting occurs, management of wolves would be transferred to the states. However, there are federal requirements tied to this delisting process. Montana, Idaho and Wyoming must first have adequate regulations in place to maintain populations in the northern Rockies.

In anticipation of the wolf's recovery and the potential for delisting in Montana, two years ago, a 12-member Wolf Management Advisory Council – a mix of livestock producers, hunters, educators, outfitters, conservationists, and other citizens – was appointed by former Gov. Marc Racicot. Their charge was to consider a wolf management approach for the state. The Council's goal was to maintain a viable wolf population that is biologically possible. socially acceptable, and economically feasible. While the Council identified over 30 issues, the six main issues were: wolf conservation and management, ungulate populations, livestock depredation, compensation, defense of life/human safety. and funding. In 2001, after seven months of public deliberations over a wide range of issues, the Council submitted its findings to Gov. Judy Martz, who then directed FWP to draft a wolf conservation and management planning document. This was released in January 2002, and is available from FWP's

website at <a href="www.fwp.state.mt.us">www.fwp.state.mt.us</a>. This planning document reflects what a state wolf management plan would look like, if it was based on the Council's recommendations.

Ultimately, FWP will be the state agency managing wolves, so we must first take a few extra steps. We are in the midst of a yearlong process preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) whose proposed action is to develop and adopt a state wolf management plan. During this process, we are considering a range of alternatives to manage wolves. The Council's planning document will be presented as one alternative in the draft EIS. Other alternatives would be to create a new plan. modify the Council's planning document, or not develop a state wolf management plan. FWP has conducted community work sessions in 12 Montana cities during March and April, taken comments on-line, via Fax, and by mail correspondence. More than 800 people participated in the work sessions. Comments were received from nearly every county in Montana, 49 states, and eight foreign countries. We received about 4,000 comments before the April 30 deadline.

This input is being used to craft the alternatives to be considered and analyzed by FWP. We anticipate release of a draft EIS during August 2002. At this time, the public will be invited to comment on FWP's preferred management plan, at a series of public hearings in September 2002. ----- Carolyn Sime, FWP Research Biologist

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service requests that trappers and hunters report sightings or wolf sign. Please make these reports to your local FWP or Forest Service office or by calling the USFWS at 449-5225. Information provided by trappers and hunters will aid in the management and eventual removal of wolves from the endangered species list.