



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

STATE FURBEARER PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

Spring 2013

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, the public, and department personnel about current furbearer management activities and issues in the state of Montana – Brian Giddings, State Furbearer Coordinator.

WHAT ARE FURBEARERS?

Furbearers are a group of legally classified game animals under Montana statute which are beaver, otter, muskrat, mink, marten, fisher, wolverine, bobcat, lynx, and swift fox. Furbearer species are considered to have fur pelts with relatively high commercial value. Therefore, these species are afforded state protection through limited harvest seasons and regulated take, such as trapper limits or trapping district quotas. FWP is responsible for assuring that these furbearer populations remain healthy and are maintained to provide benefits for all Montanan's. These include ecological, recreational, cultural, educational, economic, and scientific uses of these state furbearers. FWP management activities also reflect a balance with the social impacts of furbearers on human health, private property, and agricultural values. The FWP Commission, through its season setting process, provides traditional recreational opportunities for resident trappers and hunters to harvest a small portion of each population of furbearer species (season closed on lynx). FWP manages furbearers in the state through various harvest strategies, recommends furbearer seasons and

trapping/hunting regulations, monitors harvest and population trends, and collects long-term biological data for some species. The state furbearer program coordinates these management activities and many other FWP issues involving furbearer species.

FEDERAL PROPOSAL ON WOLVERINE

In February 2013 the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed to list the wolverine as a threatened species in several western states under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). This decision includes wolverine in Montana, despite the species being well distributed throughout the state's mountain ranges. Even the USFWS recognizes that wolverine in Montana may be at their largest population size in 100 years, but they sight climate change as the primary listing factor. FWP does not support this decision based on a predicted threat and a listing would end the state's harvest season.

FURBEARER HARVEST QUOTAS

Harvest quotas for the 2013-14 furbearer season will be proposed to the FWP Commission at their upcoming June 5, 2013 meeting in Havre. Trapping district quotas will be set for otter, bobcat, fisher, wolverine, and swift fox. Furbearer quota levels are adopted by the FWP Commission on an annual basis while regulations are adopted every other year. Data on species population trends, species harvest data, and trapper effort in each trapping district are

used to make proposed recommendations by FWP regarding any changes. Comments on any proposed changes should be sent to FWP Commission, Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701 or through the FWP website at fwp.mt.gov For this meeting, please check the FWP website to confirm date and location. Following a public comment period on the adopted quotas, the Commission will take final action on furbearer harvest quotas at its August 8, 2013 meeting.

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 injuries 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 cause fewer 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 jaws where the risk of non-target catches is high.
- 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.

MONTANA TRAPPER EDUCATION

The ability of FWP to manage furbearer populations and to provide harvest opportunities for resident trappers, by utilizing regulated trapping seasons, is becoming more dependent upon how the general public views trappers and trapping practices. Montana’s present voluntary trapper education program is a partnership between the Montana Trapper’s Association (MTA) and FWP. Members of the MTA volunteer their time as instructors. The program is designed to promote responsible and ethical trapper behavior in an effort to maintain trapping as a traditional use of Montana’s wildlife resources, as part of our state’s heritage, and as a viable wildlife management tool. The education course covers regulations, trapper ethics, responsible trapping practices, landowner relations, trap preparation, trap site selection and placement that will minimize non-target catches, and pelt handling.

AVERAGE PELT PRICE VALUES

Average pelt prices listed below are from the February 21, 2013 wild fur sale by North American Fur Auctions in Canada. The market was strong for bobcat, fisher, marten and coyote, and otter sold relatively well.

Species	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Beaver	16.57	38.22	30.91
Otter	57.63	102.29	112.58
Muskrat	6.66	10.19	11.51
Mink	17.48	23.14	29.05
Marten	61.98	55.94	84.70
Fisher	47.58	74.99	145.30
Wolverine	253.15	319.67	235.74
Bobcat	411.84	426.31	589.08
Coyote	73.16	77.30	93.98
Red Fox	24.37	57.49	65.78
Raccoon	18.50	19.45	27.56
Weasel	3.13	3.16	3.13
Skunk	2.11	7.30	4.26
Badger	24.12	38.61	25.45