



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

STATE FURBEARER PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

Spring 2006

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.

2005-06 SWIFT FOX CENSUS

FWP's furbearer program has been very active in monitoring the state's swift fox population during the past decade. Swift fox are one of the ten designated furbearers in Montana, and are a small cat-sized tawny colored fox with large ears, black muzzle patches, and a black-tipped tail. They are a prairie grassland species with a range from southern Alberta to central Texas and are a cousin to the southwest U.S. desert dwelling kit fox. Swift fox management activities are aligned with conservation strategies established through the national Swift Fox Conservation Team (SFCT) that is comprised of representatives from state wildlife agencies in the ten states that make up swift fox range and various federal land management agencies. There is a well-established swift fox population in northcentral Montana south of the Canadian border in Hill, Blaine, Phillips, and Valley counties. During this past winter of 2005-06 FWP cooperated with Canadian wildlife agencies and obtained funding from the BLM and World Wildlife Fund to conduct the second international swift fox census to determine population trend and document

distribution since the previous census in 2000-01. This past winter's census results indicated a growing population of over 500 foxes in TD 6 and a combined international border population of around 1,400 animals with an expanded species range of about 4,500 square miles in Montana.

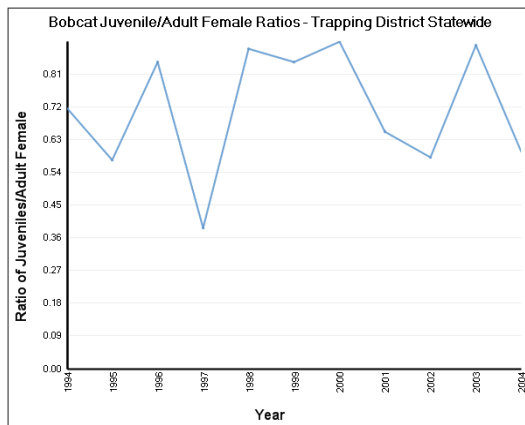
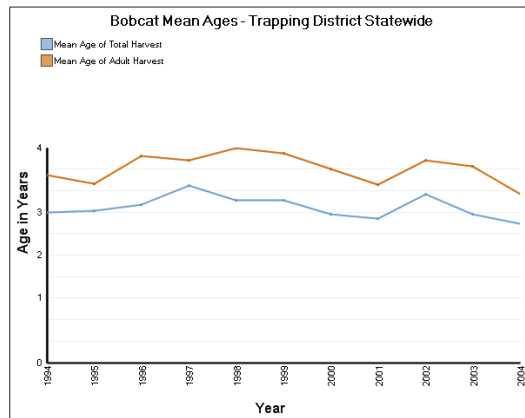
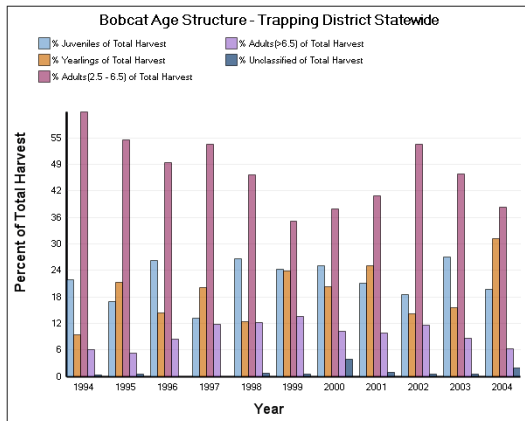
In addition to the swift fox in northcentral Montana, another population has been established within the Blackfeet Reservation from a reintroduction program that was initiated by Defenders of Wildlife in 1999. This population now appears to be expanding south along the foothills of the east front of the Rockies in Pondera, Teton, and northern Lewis and Clark counties. FWP may conduct a sign-search distribution survey this fall to determine the extent of swift fox range expansion into TD 4.

WESTERN MONTANA FISHER STUDY

A recent scientific article published in the Journal of Mammalogy describes the results of a 2-year graduate study to evaluate a reintroduced fisher population in northwest Montana and investigate the overall status and genetic origin of fisher in Montana. This study was supported and funded in most part by FWP. The article describes the discovery of a genetically native population segment in the Bitterroot Mountains, concluding fisher were never extirpated from the state as once thought. This study also traced today's fisher populations back to successful transplants conducted by FWP in the 1950s and 1980s.

FURBEARER HARVEST DATA

FWP annually collects harvest data from several furbearer species through mandatory trapper pelt registration and carcass or skull turn-ins. This information is analyzed and used to follow population trends for these species to manage quota levels. Below are examples of this data for bobcat in the state.



FURBEARER SNOW TRACK SURVEYS

To supplement trapper harvest data, FWP monitors selected furbearer and prey species populations by conducting snow track surveys each winter in forested mountain habitats throughout TD 1-4. During the past winter of 2005-06 there were 26 routes completed with each run in 1-3 replicates for a total of 718 miles. On a statewide basis, marten track detection rates were below the long-term average of 51 track trails per 100 miles down to 34 in 2005-06, although this rate was higher than in 2004-05. The bobcat track detection rate in 2005-06 was above the long-term average of 8.5 tracks per 100 miles at 12.4 tracks. Although not a furbearer, mountain lion tracks are recorded and detection rates of 4.7 tracks per 100 miles in 2005-06 were above the long-term, or 10-year average, of 2.6 tracks.

TRAPPER EDUCATION LEGISLATION

FWP has submitted a 2007 legislative proposal to amend the current education and safety course statute to include trapper education. Both the MTA and FWP worked hard together in support of this legislation that would require first time trapper license buyers to complete an education course.

AVERAGE PELT PRICE VALUES (MT)

Species	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Beaver	14.50	15.25	20.50
Otter	90.00	94.00	100.00
Muskrat	2.15	2.25	3.50
Mink	11.00	11.50	15.00
Marten	20.50	19.50	45.50
Fisher	28.10	28.25	35.00
Wolverine	275.00	275.00	300.00
Bobcat	280.25	325.00	345.00
Coyote	28.50	30.70	38.50
Red Fox	20.00	21.50	25.00
Raccoon	11.50	11.00	11.50
Ermine	3.00	3.00	3.00
Skunk	5.50	7.00	6.50
Badger	23.00	23.50	27.50