



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

STATE FURBEARER PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

Spring 2007

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 legally classified by Montana state law as beaver, otter, muskrat, mink, marten, fisher, wolverine, bobcat, lynx, and swift fox. Furbearers are a category or group of game species that are considered to have pelts with relatively high economic 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 Montana residents. 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 is closed on lynx and swift fox). 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 species data. The state furbearer program coordinates all these management activities and many other FWP issues involving these furbearer species.

WINTER SNOW TRACK SURVEYS

Each winter FWP biologists monitor selected furbearer and prey species populations by conducting snow track surveys in forested mountain habitats throughout Trapping Districts 1-4. The past winter of 2006-07 was a poor snow year so only 22 of 32 routes were completed with most routes run only one time out of the standard three replicates for a total of 637 miles. On a statewide basis, marten track detection rates were below the long-term, or 10-year average, of 51 track trails per 100 miles at 41.1 in 2006-07. This rate was the third year in a row marten showed an increase since a low in 2004-05. The bobcat track detection rate in 2006-07 remained above the long-term average of 8.5 tracks per 100 miles traveled at 12.1 tracks. Although not a furbearer, mountain lion tracks are also recorded and detection rates of 2.2 tracks per 100 miles in 2006-07 were slightly below the long-term average of 2.6 tracks.

TRAPPER EDUCATION LEGISLATION

During the 2007 legislative session FWP submitted a bill to amend the education and

safety course statute to include trapper education. Both the Montana Trappers Association (MTA) and FWP worked together in support of this legislation that would have required first time license buyers to complete a trapper education and safety course. The bill passed the House Fish and Game Committee and the full House, but with a fiscal note attached, it was referred back to the Revenue Committee where unfortunately the bill died. FWP will likely request that this legislation be introduced again in 2009.

TRAPPER LICENSE SALES

The general upward trend in trapper license sales continued through the 2006-07 season. The 4,187 trapper licenses sold this past year represents a 33% increase over last year's 2005-06 license sales of 3,583 and almost a 60% increase since license sales were at there lowest point in 1990-91 at 1,731. Although pelt prices have not generally risen this dramatically over the same period, certain species, such as otter and particularly bobcat, have increased in value over the past several years. On the other hand, healthy furbearer and predator populations, an increasing number of houndsmen pursuing bobcats, and the public's increasing desire for additional winter recreational opportunities, may better explain the increase in trapper license sales.

2007-08 FURBEARER QUOTAS

Tentative furbearer quotas for the upcoming 2007-08 season were adopted by the FWP Commission at their June 14 meeting in Columbus. Tentative quota changes were:

- Increase the TD 3 bobcat quota from 300 to 325
 - Increase the TD 5 bobcat quota from 400 to 500
 - Increase the TD 7 otter quota from 2 to 4
- The FWP Commission will take final action on these items at its August 2 meeting in Helena. Comments should be sent to FWP Commission, Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 200701, Helena MT 59620-0701 or through FWP's website www.fwp.mt.gov.

FURBEARER HABITATS

Habitat conservation and maintenance are critical to the survival of furbearer species. Loss of wetlands, stream channelization, and the removal of bank cover by rural subdivision development or the loss of mature forest stands by excessive timber harvest, all contribute to a reduction in furbearer numbers and species diversity. As a trapper, become involved in land use decisions that affect these furbearer habitats.

WOLF DELISTING IN MONTANA

If the federal process stays on track, wolves in Montana are expected to be delisted in early 2008. The US Fish & Wildlife Service has approved Montana's wolf management plan, which includes hunting and trapping as methods to manage wolf numbers and distribution, as long as there are at least 15 breeding pairs in the state. Using public harvest to help manage wolf numbers within biological and social acceptance is consistent with how other Montana wildlife are managed. The 2007 Legislature created a wolf license and FWP is currently working with the FWP Commission and the public to design a harvest season.

AVERAGE PELT PRICE VALUES

<u>Species</u>	<u>2004-05</u>	<u>2005-06</u>	<u>2006-07</u>
Beaver	15.25	20.50	23.49
Otter	94.00	100.00	80.00
Muskrat	2.25	3.50	3.20
Mink	11.50	15.00	12.88
Marten	19.50	45.50	61.57
Fisher	28.25	35.00	74.31
Wolverine	275.00	300.00	217.85
Bobcat	325.00	345.00	257.33
Coyote	30.70	38.50	43.36
Red Fox	21.50	25.00	20.84
Raccoon	11.00	11.50	22.05
Ermine	3.00	3.00	4.96
Skunk	7.00	6.50	4.04
Badger	23.50	27.50	27.57