

**2007-2008
FALL FURBEARER FORECAST**

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Natural Resources (DNR)**



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Wisconsin is blessed with a wonderful diversity of common and unique members of this interesting group of wildlife. Beaver, coyote, raccoon, and muskrat are good examples of the more abundant and common species across our large state. In contrast, the more secretive bobcat, fisher and otter are doing well in the North, and slowly expanding southward. And then there's the marten, still an endangered species and barely holding its' own in two small regions of the North. Well, this time of the year many folks begin to ask in anticipation "how are things going out there," or, "what can I expect to see this fall"?. From bear hunters, to berry pickers, trekkers to trappers, folks are interested in what they can expect this fall and winter.

In a nutshell, furbearer populations are doing well, and in some areas a real challenge due to high numbers.

Raccoon



Raccoons are found in a wide variety of both rural and urban habitats. Those areas close to a wetland or farmland mosaic have the highest populations, with even the northern forests now being home to raccoons.

“We have large populations of raccoons with the highest densities in the southern one-half of the state,” reports John Olson, furbearer specialist for the Department of Natural Resources, “Raccoons are still very abundant in all counties in a wide variety of habitats - often to nuisance levels, with populations extending northward into portions of southern Canada where the ancient language of native Americans doesn’t even include the word ‘raccoon’!”.

On the western front, Kris Johansen, wildlife biologist for Buffalo and Trempealeau counties reports, “The raccoon population is doing well, making this species a great opportunity to gain access to private lands, as farmers and landowners experience nuisance and damage problems. Through regulated harvest, trappers and hunters can work with landowners in efforts to control these large populations.

Julie Langenberg, department wildlife veterinarian notes however, that high populations of raccoons can produce localized effects or pockets of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) infection. In the past, there have been widespread problems with Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) causing raccoon deaths.”

“Canine distemper acts as a population regulating factor that controls high raccoon numbers and once it’s in the environment, can spread to other mammals,” according to Langenberg. “Infections were found in less commonly affected furbearers including badger, opossum, and mink in recent years. Everyone should take special care with abnormal acting raccoons, as the distemper clinical signs mimic those of the rabies virus. Rabies is a fatal viral disease for humans and other warm blooded mammals, and cannot be differentiated from canine distemper without laboratory testing.

Wildlife managers from around the state suggest that 2007 will be a good year to train that young dog or ask permission to trap on new lands. Raccoon is a species where landowner permission to hunt or trap is normally not a problem, but ask for permission now, don’t wait until the week prior to the season opener.

Mike Zeckmeister, northern region wildlife supervisor from Antigo urges trappers and hunters to, “get permission from the landowner well in advance. It’s never too early to start asking permission.”

The raccoon season opens statewide for residents on October 20, 2007 with the exception of the Mississippi River Zone where the season opens with the muskrat and mink season. Pending legislative approval, a trapping season will be established this fall for non-resident raccoon trapping, from November 3 – January 31, 2008. to check status of approval, contact your local conservation warden.

Raccoon Season: Oct 20 – Jan 31, 2008.

Except: Mississippi River zone, which opens day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November which ever occurs first through Jan 31, 2008.

Bag Limit: None

Beaver



With excellent mid-winter fur prices at the international auctions, where the average Wisconsin beaver pelt sold for just over \$28.00 on the January auctions, interest in this furbearer remains stable. Longer seasons, initiated in the 1980s, have helped to reduce beaver populations as planned, especially in northeastern Wisconsin.

Statewide the beaver population estimate is around 87,000 animals, varies dramatically depending on the area of the state and has not shown any signs of ill health from density-dependent wetland diseases such as botulism or tularemia, but can be affected directly by drought.

Regionally, beaver numbers in southeastern Wisconsin appear to be stable, decreasing in west-central and southwestern portions of the state, and remaining at good levels in the northern one-third of the state. Michele Woodford of our wildlife research section from Rhinelander coordinates intensive aerial surveys, conducted every three to four years in northern beaver management zones. Following our fall surveys of 2005 Michele suggests: “we have a population of approximately 40,800 beaver in northwestern Wisconsin, known as Zone A and around 29,000 beavers in northeastern Wisconsin, known as Zone B. At one time these zones were at similar levels, but the need to manage cold water streams for additional values such as trout habitat, has resulted in a gradual reduction in beavers in Zone B.”

Mike Foy, wildlife biologist for Dane and Iowa counties reports, “Beavers are everywhere you’d expect them, with regular calls from farmers and highway officials about problems.” However, Tom Meier from Marathon County and wildlife biologist of the Mead Wildlife Area also suggests: “beaver are down considerably over the past few years.” According to Pat Beringer, wildlife biologist for Price County, “Beaver populations remain stable, with high numbers still found in remote areas where accessibility is limited.” He also suggests that, “...gas prices may be a key factor impacting the 2007-08 harvest.”

In Zone B, where more intensive management programs exist, the population has declined and is now at a level where damage to trout streams and town roads are manageable. Because beaver populations are now at acceptable levels, the trapping season in Wisconsin opens in early November, rather than mid-October, and Zone C closes the end of March rather than the end of April.

Season: Zone A (Northwest) Nov 3 – Apr 30, 2008
Zone B (Northeast) Nov 3 – Apr 30, 2008
Zone C (South) Nov 3 – Mar 31, 2008
Zone D (Mississippi River) Day after duck season closes to Mar 15, 2008

Bag limit: None

Otter



“Factors that impact beaver populations have similar effects on otter,” according to Caleb Bilda, Assistant Furbearer Specialist. “Beaver are herbivores that prefer the inner bark of aspen, willow and cottonwood for food, and their branches for construction of dams and lodges, but otter prefer other animals for food, mainly small fish, crayfish, and amphibians.”

Current statewide otter populations are at or slightly below management goals of approximately 13,000 animals. Although a majority of the population is found in the north, otter numbers in central and southern Wisconsin appear to be increasing. They are now present in many of our major river systems of the southwest, namely the Kickapoo, Black, Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers and tributaries.

Otter, like many of our furbearers, are associated with and depend on clean rivers, lakes and streams. As Dave Matheys, wildlife biologist for Vernon and Crawford counties suggests, “People interested in otters should thank all those who have worked so hard to improve the water resources of southwestern Wisconsin – farmers, landowners, DNR, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Land & Water Conservation Districts, and Trout Unlimited to name a few.” Mr. Matheys has observed high-quality riparian habitats are supporting abundant otter numbers.

“The otter harvest is highly regulated to control harvest pressures at a time when recent fur prices have strongly fluctuated, with an average of over \$100.00 per pelt in 2006 to a recent low of \$30.00 per pelt this past spring,” says Todd Naas, wildlife biologist for Ashland County. Permits are issued based on estimated fall populations and expected success rates. Success rates have climbed almost three times what they were ten years earlier.

The statewide opening date is the same as beaver, November 3, and continues until March 31, 2008 in the Central and South Zones, and April 30th in the North Zone. Anyone interested in trapping otter must apply for a permit by August 1.

“The harvest quota will actually increase slightly, but permit levels may decrease slightly due to increased success rates,” says Olson. “However, many applicants will receive at least one permit, depending upon the number of applicants in your zone of choice.”

Season: North zone Nov 3 – Apr 30, 2008
Central zone Nov 3 – March 31, 2008
South zone Nov 3 – March 31, 2008

Bag Limit: One per permit.

Application Deadline: August 1.

Fisher



Strong interest in fisher by tribal and state trappers has resulted in more applicants than permits, especially in Fisher Management Zone A, in northwestern Wisconsin, and in Fisher Management Zone E, in west-central Wisconsin. Permit numbers are up slightly this year, but the number of permit applications received for each zone will determine whether a trapper receives a permit in their zone of choice or is awarded a preference point.

There are six fisher management zones in Wisconsin. Zones A through D have the highest fisher populations and are located in the northern portion of the state. Zone E is in west-central Wisconsin and has a growing population. In Zone E, the best opportunities will be in the northern portions, namely Chippewa, Clark, Eau Claire and Marathon counties, according to John Dunn, wildlife biologist at Eau Claire. Zone F includes the remainder of the state and will be open for harvest in 2007 for the fourth year. In this zone good opportunities exist on the eastern portion, in southern Shawano and Oconto counties and southeastern Marathon. Be sure you have landowner permission prior to applying for any permits.

However, even in areas where fishers have flourished for over four decades, we're experiencing localized declines, while adjacent areas have strong numbers. As Beringer suggests, "Fisher numbers remain spotty in Price and southern Ashland and Iron counties. Although localized areas may still have lots of fisher, many trappers reported low numbers of fisher during last years trapping season." Yet in other areas local wildlife managers are reporting an increase in fisher presence. Jess Carstens, wildlife biologist of Dunn and Pepin counties suggests, "I'm also hearing more and more about fishers, especially in Dunn County." And last year a fisher was caught and released in Columbia County!

Season: October 20 – Dec 31, 2007 for all zones

Bag Limit: One per permit

Application Deadline: August 1

Bobcat



Bobcat populations have increased across the north. "Even though we're on the northern edge of bobcat range, we do have relatively good habitat and mild winters compared to regions north of Lake Superior," states Olson. Conservative management efforts have allowed for this steady increase to an estimated population of just under 3,000 bobcats with an average annual harvest of around 250. Final permit numbers are determined in late summer when success rates and quotas are calculated. A preference system allows the continuous applicant a bobcat tag about every four to five years. Wildlife biologists and wardens in northern and even central portions of the state report an increase in bobcat sightings.

As with fisher and otter, bobcat must be tagged at the point of harvest and registered with the department. Hunters and trappers keep the pelt, but bobcat carcasses, and in some years otter and fisher carcasses, are collected from the trapper or hunter. "Registration and carcass collections allow biologists to gather important management information such as harvest pressure, overall age structure of the population, reproductive age, and previous litter sizes," according to Bruce Bacon, wildlife biologist from Mercer and an active member of the department's furbearer committee. In 2007, carcasses will be required from all bobcat and

fishers from Zones E and F, in addition to fisher skulls or complete lower jaws from Fisher Zones A thru D. There are no otter collections planned for the upcoming season.

Season: Oct 20 – Dec 31, 2007. North of highway 64 only.

Bag Limit: One per permit.

Application Deadline: August 1.

Coyotes, Foxes and Gray Wolves



Coyotes, the second largest of Wisconsin's native canids, have expanded their range throughout southern and western Wisconsin. In the remainder of the state they continue to do well with the greatest challenge in established eastern gray wolf territories, where coyotes have learned to be less vocal and avoid their larger cousin. An adaptable animal, coyotes seem to fair well almost anywhere, especially in rural, urban and suburban settings. Wildlife managers across much of Wisconsin are reporting a marked increase in coyotes. The same is being observed for both gray and red fox, with "reds" closer to human dwellings and grays in the brush land and woods. Jim Tomasko, wildlife technician from Waushara County reports a high population of cottontail rabbits and of course, coyotes! At the same time Nate Kroeplin, conservation officer in Dane County reports: "coyote and red fox trapping and hunting is very good with little to no mangle present."

A new tool, called the cable restraint, is now available for use during the latter portion of the existing coyote and fox season, namely from January 1, 2008 to February 15, 2008. According to Steve Hoffman, wildlife biologist from Waupaca, "...this tool was thoroughly tested during three years of science-based research, and was remarkable in its ability to restrain without injury, any wild or domestic canine." After four years of use by licensed trappers, things are going well, with further studies on the horizon. For additional information, request DNR Publication WM-443-2004, **Cable Restraints in Wisconsin, A Guide to Responsible Use.**

"Foxes, the smallest of our three native canids, prefers a more rural setting," says Southeast Regional Wildlife Supervisor, Tami Ryan from Waukesha, who also reports that, "coyote

numbers are stable and steadily increasing in the southeast portion of the state, where they've been known to cause quite a stir around Germantown, Mequon and Port Washington."

Red fox numbers have increased across many areas of the north, with mange and coyote competition impacting populations in western and southern portions of the state. A density dependent disease, sarcoptic mange, was observed across Wisconsin in susceptible canid species including red fox, coyote, and gray wolf in 2003. Gray fox have fewer cases of mange and appear to be doing well in southern and central Wisconsin.

In 2003, the US Fish and Wildlife Service down listed the eastern gray wolf in Wisconsin from endangered to threatened status, yet a court challenge in early 2005 re-listed them as a federally endangered species. According to Adrian Wydeven, mammalian ecologist for the Endangered Resources Bureau, "the Fish and Wildlife Service has now completed their review and have announced official federal delisting of gray wolves in the Western Great Lakes region in March, 2007." Adrian suggests, "this action is a major step in state management of this species in the western Great Lakes region, but this decision is also being challenged in federal court." At the present time, only designated government trappers, state biologists, or conservation law enforcement officers have authority to trap and dispatch wolves when deemed necessary.

The gradual increase in numbers and expansion of the gray wolf across northern and west-central portions of the state offer a unique opportunity for hunters and trappers to observe these wild and wonderful canines. "We encourage the public to report their observations," says Wydeven, "especially hunters and trappers who are intimately familiar with their area of the state. This kind of information is valuable in our efforts in monitoring populations." Every observation counts and we welcome the help.

Trapping Season: Coyote and all fox species:

Northern Zone: Oct 20 – Feb 15, 2008 (North of US Highway 64)

Southern Zone: Oct 27 – Feb 15, 2008 (South of US Highway 64)

Hunting Season of Coyote:

Year round with seasonal closure during gun deer season in some areas

Hunting Season of Fox:

Oct 20 - Feb 15, 2008 (North of Highway 64)

Oct 27 – Feb 15, 2008 (South of Highway 64)

Bag Limit: None

Muskrat and Mink



Mink and muskrat populations appear to be doing relatively well in most of the state, with pockets of good numbers, and other spots with low numbers. As observed by Conservation Warden Nate Kroeplin, “Fresh-water inland marshes and river systems in southern Wisconsin received better rainfall, making for improved conditions for mink and muskrat.”

On a statewide basis, opportunities to trap these species are quite good, as they exist in most areas where permanent water can be found. Mark Anderson, wildlife biologist for the Mississippi River suggests muskrat populations on the Big River “appear to be fair.” He further reminds trappers that, “...on the Mississippi you need to have a USFWS trapping permit and tags, as well as the Wisconsin license in order to trap.”

However, the recent drought in large portions of northern Wisconsin can affect all aquatic and semi-aquatic life. “Due to severe drought conditions this summer, water levels in many ponds and waterways are below normal”, explains Nancy Christel, wildlife biologist for Washburn County. She further states “trappers targeting these animals should focus on larger waterways with more permanent and stable water sources.” Season opener for muskrat is October 20 in the North Zone, October 27 in the South and Winnebago Zones, and the day after the duck season closes or the second Monday in November, whichever occurs first in the Mississippi River Zone. For mink the season is now identical to muskrat, opening and closing on the same dates, depending on the zone.

Season: Muskrat & Mink:

North zone, Oct 20 – Feb 29, 2008

South zones Oct 27 – Feb 29, 2008

Winnebago zone Oct 27 – March 15, 2008

Mississippi River – begins the day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November, whichever occurs first – Feb 29, 2008

Bag Limit: None.

Pine Marten



American marten, known by most as “pine marten”, appear on the state protected list as the only endangered mammal in Wisconsin. Reintroduced into two distinct forests of north central and northeastern Wisconsin decades earlier, they’re barely hanging on. Jim Woodford, wildlife research biologist for our Endangered Resources bureau is also chair of the marten management committee and suggests, “martens are a unique, rare mammal of our northern forests of which we have focused continued interest, research and management in their direction.”

Although they’ve not ventured far from the original release sites we’ve discovered one additional, small population in northern Iron County. Bruce Bacon, wildlife biologist for Iron County tells us, “local trappers have helped us determine where these rare martens have been living for the last ten years, and through their help we may learn of their connection with healthy marten populations in our neighboring state of Michigan.” Mr. Bacon also has an adult marten radio-collared which he states: “is being tracked as part of the Woods and Waters program in the Hurley and Mercer High Schools.”

Anyone with marten observations please forward this information to Mr. Woodford at 715-365-8856, or Adrian Wydeven at 715-762-1363.

Additional Responsibilities

Local ordinances

Some villages, cities, and towns throughout the state, primarily in urban areas, require special permits and/or have ordinances that restrict trapping, or the discharge of firearms or bows. Check with local town or village offices before you hunt or trap to see if special rules apply! A quality hunting or trapping experience can be found on public or private lands, but pre-season scouting and permission from landowners is critical.

Best Management Practices (BMP’s) for Trapping

In a progressive effort to improve the science of furbearer management, the State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Trappers Association, Wisconsin Conservation Congress and individual trappers have been actively involved in an international effort to develop BMP's for Trapping. This is one of the largest collective trap research efforts ever undertaken, with the final product being information and suggestions that each state and their trappers can use to improve on animal welfare, trapping in general, but specifically, trapper education.

“Advances in trapping through scientific study are the future of resource management in Wisconsin and in the United States, where our natural resources belong to all citizens,” says Tom Hauge, Director of the Bureau of Wildlife Management. “Regulated harvests, combined with science-based knowledge, a caring public, and highly trained conservation officers will provide us with reasonable tools with which we can continue to manage wildlife populations while enjoying the immense pleasure and knowledge of having intact, natural systems”, concludes Hauge.

According to Scott McAuley, president of the Wisconsin Trappers Association, "If you would like to learn about furbearers, trapping history, responsibilities and ethics of the modern-day trapper, consider taking the trapper education course offered by the department and taught by dedicated volunteer instructors of the Wisconsin Trappers Association." If you are interested in becoming a trapper, completion of the 12-hour, \$8.00 course is mandatory. To locate a current class near you, contact your local DNR office or check the DNR Internet home page at: www.dnr.state.wi.

For further information please contact John Olson, Furbearer Specialist, (715)685-2934, or Caleb Bilda, Assistant Furbearer Specialist, (608)261-6452.

