

Fur Trapper Survey 2015-16

By Jes Rees Lohr, Brian Dhuey, and Shawn Rossler

Abstract

The number of licensed trappers actively trapping was down from the total of the previous trapping season. Forty-four percent of respondents said they trapped during the 2015-16 season. Trappers used a total of 246,868 sets on 517,373 nights during the 2015-16 trapping season.

Methods

The Fur Trapper Survey was mailed to a sample of 6,000 people who purchased a resident trapping license, or a conservation patron license. The sample was selected from the 2015-16 resident trapping ($\approx 3,000$) and the conservation patron ($\approx 3,000$) license holders who indicated they were trappers. A second mailing was sent to non-respondents. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part I questioned trappers on their trapping season including; number and species of furbearers trapped, average number of sets used, number of days spent trapping, total trapping expenses, and number of furs sold in and out of Wisconsin (Fig. 1). Part I also included questions on the hunting of furbearers by trappers. Part II pertained only to beaver trappers and will not be discussed in this summary. Please refer to the Beaver Trapper Report in this publication for this information. Data from all returned questionnaires were entered into the DNR production server and summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

Results

All duplicate responses were removed from the survey pool. Responses were received from 2,312 of 6,000 trappers surveyed. The resulting response rate was 38.5%.

Forty-four percent of the respondents actively trapped for furbearers during the 2015-16 season. Fur trapper license holders were about two times as likely to trap as conservation patron license holders (62% vs. 29%). Conservation patron license holders were less active during the 2015-16 trapping season (29%) than during the 2014-15 season (34%) and fur trapper license holders were less active as well with 62% actively trapping in 2015-16 and 70% in 2014-15 seasons.

The largest number of respondents (26.1%) trapped in the Northern Region of the state (Table 1). During the 2015-16 season, trappers trapped an average of 37.1 days, lower than the 2014-15 season (39.4). The average trapper incurred \$318.50 of expenses on such things as traps, lures, gas, and a license. This is less than the 2014-15 average of \$381.60. The mean number of days spent trapping ranged from 35 to 44 days among regions, while the mean trapping expense ranged from \$268.99 to \$379.66 among regions (Table 2). Statewide, 24% of trappers also hunted furbearers in 2015-16.

When the results of this survey are expanded to the larger population of licensed furbearer trappers, we can approximate that 8,089 licensed trappers actively trapped and 4,806 trappers also hunted furbearers during the 2015-16 season. An estimate of \$2,576,347 was spent by 8,089 active, licensed trappers on basic expenses. Less than 3% of licensed furbearer trappers pursued bobcat, while 48.5% pursued raccoons (Table 3). Furbearers harvested by trappers while hunting include: red fox, 1,159; gray fox, 141; coyote, 16,453 and raccoon, 17,980 (Table 4). A summary of 2015-16 furbearer harvests and sales can be found in Table 5. Of the furs took, most trappers sold directly to fur buyers.

Wisconsin requires hunters and trappers to register all harvests for bobcat, fisher, and otter. The official harvest for these species are from registration data, (please see Bobcat, Fisher, and Otter Harvest Reports). The survey asked trappers the number trapped for each of these species. Survey results are not corrected for response bias, prestige bias or animals caught and released. These are obvious, as the harvest estimates for these species from the trapper questionnaire are higher/lower than the registered harvest totals.

Foot hold traps (34.1%) were more frequently used than any other type of trap, body grip 30.8%, cage trap 9.6%, enclosed trigger 9.2%, colony trap 7.3%, cable restraints 7.1% and snares 2.0%. Trappers averaged 21.0 foot hold traps per trapper, followed by body grip, cable restraint, enclosed trigger, snares, colony and cage traps at 13.2, 13.2, 11.5, 8.1, 6.0 and 4.0 respectively. All total, Wisconsin licensed trappers, during the 2015-16 regulated seasons accounted for approximately 5.0 million trap nights in legal pursuit of furbearers; this was less than the 7.1 million during the 2015-16 season.

Cable restraints became legal for fox and coyote during the latter portion of the existing canine season (January 1 – February 15) in 2004. During the 2009-10 season the cable restraint season was extended with the opening date moved up to December 1, while ending as usual on February 15. More Wisconsin trappers used cable restraints in 2015-16, with 7.1% using cable restraints and averaged 13.2 sets during the open season. During the 2014-15 season, 5.2 percent used cable restraints and averaged 10.1 sets. Trappers were asked, “Overall, how did cable restraints work for you”; 64.9% said “Excellent” or “Good”, while 35.1% said “Fair” or “Poor”. Eighty-eight percent of cable restraint users reported not catching a dog. Of those that did, the mean number of dogs caught and released being 2.5.

Sixty-seven percent of trappers are aware of the term Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping. The most common way trappers have become aware of the BMPs effort is through articles/websites/videos. The ways in which trappers have used BMPs for trapping is either by currently using BMPs traps on the trap line or expanding the types of traps they use. Trappers get information on trapping in Wisconsin from trapping regulations (22.1%), trapping magazines & books (18.7%), personal experience (18.3%), and other trappers (18.2%).

Fifty-five percent of trappers trap on “2-10” different water bodies or marshes during the season and on average, travel “0-10” miles to check their trap line (53.1%). Before moving to a different water body or marsh, 78.7% of trappers using stakes, 68.0% of trappers using boots/waders, and 67.5% of trappers using other trapping equipment (shovels, buckets, baskets) inspect and remove mud and plant material.

Table 1. DNR regions where furbearer trappers did most of their trapping, 2015-16.

Region	# of Trappers	Percent of Trappers
Northern	265	26.1
Northeast	174	17.1
West Central	243	23.9
Southeast	91	9.0
South Central	168	16.6
Unrecorded	74	7.3
Totals	1,015	100%

Table 2. Percent of furbearer trappers that hunted, average number of days spent trapping, and average trapping expenses by DNR region during the 2015-16 trapping season.

Region	% of Trappers who hunted	Average number of days trapped	Average trapping expense
Northern	21.5%	36.0	\$300.78
Northeast	19.0%	39.8	\$361.96
West Central	23.9%	35.6	\$268.99
Southeast	27.5%	38.4	\$321.32
South Central	31.6%	35.3	\$346.34
Unrecorded	24.3%	44.0	\$379.66
Statewide	24.0%	37.1	\$318.50

Table 3. *Estimated number of active furbearer trappers pursuing each furbearer species, and percent of active trappers trapping for each species, 2015-16.*

Species	# of Trappers	% of Trappers
Bobcat	226	2.8%
Coyote	2,580	31.9%
Fisher	1,003	12.4%
Gray Fox	510	6.3%
Mink	1,650	20.4%
Muskrat	3,567	44.1%
Otter	1,577	19.5%
Opossum	510	6.3%
Raccoon	3,923	48.5%
Red Fox	1,302	16.1%
Skunk	833	10.3%
Weasel	380	4.7%

Table 4. *Harvest of furbearers by trappers who hunted, and total harvest (trapping harvest + hunting harvest) for each of the commonly hunted species during the 2015-16 fur harvest season.*

Species	Number Trapped	Number Hunted	Total Harvest (Trapping + Hunting)
Coyote	13,559	16,453	30,012
Gray Fox	836	141	977
Red Fox	3,806	1,159	4,965
Raccoon	53,526	17,980	71,506
Total	71,727	35,733	107,460

Table 5. *The 2015-16 fur harvest summary based on responses from licensed furbearer trappers.*

Furbearer	# Caught in Traps	# Sets Used	Total Days Trapped	# Sold in Wisconsin	# Sold out of State
Bobcat	605	2,118	5,629	0	0
Coyote	13,559	32,985	91,965	6,815	3,177
Fisher	802	5,548	17,789	232	88
Gray Fox	836	7,404	19,753	295	183
Mink	6,568	18,487	45,612	4,705	2,014
Muskrat	244,127	91,352	80,866	139,511	65,707
Otter	1,376	5,537	32,252	264	208
Opossum	6,712	5,732	20,366	860	350
Raccoon	53,526	50,126	110,491	23,662	12,261
Red Fox	3,806	15,605	48,423	1,401	1,011
Skunk	7,603	9,124	33,272	1,282	541
Weasel	2,237	2,850	10,955	390	565
Total	341,757	246,868	517,373	179,417	86,105

<p>7. Are you aware of the term Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (Go to #8) If yes, in what ways have you become aware of the BMPs effort (check all that apply):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Through articles/websites/videos <input type="checkbox"/> At trapper education class/other meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Through personal communications <input type="checkbox"/> Some other way: _____</p>	<p>7A. In what ways have you used Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping? (check all that apply)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I currently use BMPs traps on the trap line <input type="checkbox"/> I expanded the types of traps I used <input type="checkbox"/> I told others about BMPs <input type="checkbox"/> I used brochures/website materials <input type="checkbox"/> Some other way: _____</p>
<p>8. During the past trapping season, how many traps did you use?</p> <p>_____ foothold _____ cable restraints _____ cage _____ colony trap _____ snare _____ body-gripper _____ enclosed trigger trap</p>	<p>9. If you used cable restraints, overall how did they work for you? <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor Did you restrain and successfully release any dogs? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes If yes, how many? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>10. In what ways do you get information on trapping in Wisconsin? (check all that apply)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other trappers <input type="checkbox"/> DNR personnel <input type="checkbox"/> Personal experience <input type="checkbox"/> Trapping regulations <input type="checkbox"/> Trapping magazines & books <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Online websites <input type="checkbox"/> Trapper education class & materials _____</p>	
<p>11. During the past trapping season, how many different water bodies or marshes did you trap?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 <input type="checkbox"/> >50 <input type="checkbox"/> 2-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 21-50</p>	<p>12. On average, how many miles do you travel to check your trap line?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 0-10 miles <input type="checkbox"/> 51-100 miles <input type="checkbox"/> 11-50 miles <input type="checkbox"/> >100 miles</p>
<p>13. Before moving traps or stakes to a different water body or marsh, do you inspect and remove mud and plant material?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Never</p>	<p>14. Before moving to a different water body or marsh, do you inspect and remove mud and plant material from boots/waders?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Never</p>
<p>15. Before moving to a different water body or marsh, do you inspect and remove mud and plant material from other equipment (shovels, other tools, buckets, baskets)?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Always <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Never</p>	<p>16. Did you HUNT furbearers with a gun and/or dogs during the past season? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If yes, please give the number of each kind taken: _____ Red Fox _____ Coyote _____ Gray Fox _____ Raccoon</p>
<p>17. Of the coyotes and foxes that you hunted or trapped, how many had mange? _____ Red Fox _____ Gray Fox _____ Coyote</p>	

Figure 1. The 2015-16 furtrapper questionnaire.