

2015 Furbearer Advisory Committee Summary Minutes

May 27–28, 2015
The Waters, Minocqua, WI

DNR Committee Members in Attendance: John Olson, Chair, Wildlife Management (WM), Nathan Roberts, Science Services (SS), Linda Olver, Customer Services & Licensing (CS&L), Chris Cole, WM, SOD, Jake Fries, WM, NED, Todd Naas, WM, NOD, Pat Beringer, WM, NOD, Brandon Stefanski, WM, WCD, Nate Kroepflin, Law Enforcement (LE)

Invited Ojibwe Biological Advisor Committee Member in Attendance: Jonathan Gilbert, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC)

Invited Committee Members in Attendance: David Ruid, USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services (WS), Dan Ecklund, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Al Lobner, Hunters Rights Coalition, Jim Hanson, Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association, Patrick Quaintance, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Scott Zimmerman, Wisconsin Trappers Association (WTA), Ed Harvey, Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC)

Advisory Committee Assistant: Geriann Albers, WM

Invited Department Experts: Robert Rolley, SS, Lindsey Long, WM, Jim Woodford, NHC

Invited University Researchers: Bryn Evans, UW-Madison, Dr. Jonathan Pauli, UW-Madison

Other Guests: Dan Carroll, Laurie Groskopf, Kelly Peterson, Justin Loehrke

May 27, Day 1 – Reports and Updates

Call to order at 9 am with Introductions, Agenda Repair, and review of Committee Protocol.

Trapper Education: Geriann Albers provided updates. The WCTEP graduated 2100 students in 2014, with 74 in-person classes occurring in 50 counties. There were 5 Wolf Trapper Education classes held with 190 graduates. Wolf Trapper Education is on hold for 2015 pending results of appeal to federal re-listing, but will be working on materials for future workshops. The program sent out an instructor survey to clean up the database and improve communications. There are approximately 200 active instructors currently in the program. Initiated an apprentice check-off form and shifted to regional New Instructor trainings led by District TE Coordinators, which seem to be going well, helping apprentices transition to full instructors more quickly while engaging instructors with their District Trapper Ed Coordinators. Updated many of our publications and debuted a new brochure entitled “Regulated Trapping and Social Media”. This brochure has been well received and recently made into a national publication by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). Summer of 2014 was the second year of Ag teacher trainings. Teachers involved are enthusiastic and working closely with local trappers to put on classes as part of outdoor skills or wildlife management courses. We are still working on developing an online course, which was included in Act 168. A recommendation was made at the spring DNR/WTA Trapper Education Committee meeting to have test-out days for an online

course and the correspondence course. Details will be worked out over the coming months with hopes to move forward in 2016.

Furbearer Training Programs: John Olson provided updates. Last December a Track Training workshop was held with Dr. Jim Halfpenny for DNR staff as well as Furbearer Registration training session for DNR staff. There were five Wisconsin Fur School workshops held in 2015, including UW-Madison, UW-Stevens Point, Northland College, as well as Wildlife Fur School and Law Enforcement Fur School. As part of a larger focus to develop a national Fur School program, AFWA and the WTA assisted New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) conduct a Northeast Fur School through support from a National Conservation Need grant. A Pacific Northwest Fur School workshop was cooperatively presented by AFWA, WDNR and North Dakota Predator and Trappers Association in Idaho under the same program in early May. Plans are in development for future Fur School workshops in 2016 through this grant. Another aspect of the grant are plans for Trapping Matters workshops, a one day short course on furbearer management, regulated trapping, working with the media, key messages for trappers, etc. This program is directed toward agency staff and a few states have already requested this program. There will be a Trapping Matters workshop in Winnipeg, Canada at the annual conference of The Wildlife Society.

Wisconsin Trappers Association (WTA): Scott Zimmermann provided updates. WTA has been testifying and letter writing to Joint Finance about the Bureau of Science Service cuts. The WTA is also staffing many outreach events, including the Youth Expo in May. WTA has been posting a lot of content on its website, including information on track surveys, the beaver plan, and information about wolves. WTA Board of Directors meets quarterly, but have conference calls as things come up, including one planned to discuss the Beaver Management Plan soon. Membership is around 2500 right now, and the WTA is hopeful that improved communication will draw additional members. Trapper Ed grads now get discounted memberships instead of free memberships and WTA is actually seeing better retention from this program. Future Trappers of Wisconsin (FTW) currently does not have a coordinator, but WTA is actively looking for someone. Vice President Junior Prudlick is assisting for now, but camps are cancelled until this position is filled.

Wildlife Services Beaver Control Results 2014: Dave Ruid presented updates. In 2014, 1455 beavers were removed, which is slightly above the long-term average. This included 681 that were removed on damage sites (roads, wild rice, timber, etc.), which is higher than the long-term average for non-trout stream work. Trout work is on par with long-term trends. Wildlife Services has been getting increased requests for removals. Number of townships/county roads worked is similar to last 4–5 years. Fisheries requested additional work on trout streams last year (extra 59 miles) in Sawyer, Price, and Southern Ashland counties. In 2014, Wildlife Services staff took 82 incidental otter which is 18 beaver per otter. This ratio has been as low as 12 beaver per otter, so it is encouraging seeing this ratio increase.

Furbearer Surveys: Robert Rolley provided updates as Brian Dhuey was unable to attend. Usual mail surveys are being conducted (e.g. trapper, beaver trapper, bobcat harvester, etc.). Those are not completed, but will get reported in the August survey reports along with harvest summaries. The fall beaver helicopter survey was conducted in 2014 in the northern 1/3 of Wisconsin. Staff flew 84 blocks and saw a total of 186 active colonies. Extrapolating to the non-surveyed areas provides an estimate of about 10,000 active colonies in northern Wisconsin, assuming an 80% detection rate. These numbers are similar to the 2011 estimate for the same area. If we use an assumption of an average of 5.5 beaver/colony (as has been used in the past), there are approximately 54,000 beavers in fall of 2014 in northern Wisconsin. Colony estimates by zone showed slightly fewer beaver in Zone A and slightly more in Zone B, though confidence intervals overlap quite a bit. These data are included in the current draft of the Beaver Management Plan. Brief discussion was held on the future of the helicopter surveys due to costs and staffing.

Winter track surveys saw 32 track routes conducted in the North and 10 in the Central/Southern regions. Poor snow conditions in 2013/14 resulted in only eight routes conducted. Thirty-two is the most routes run since 2004/2005 and the 10 routes in the south was the most ever conducted. New routes were added in two counties this year. Snowshoe hares were detected, but at fairly low levels compared to the past. Surveys detected a median level of five coyote tracks/transect. Fox tracks were on the low side. Otter sign was fairly low, but surveys not designed for detecting otter. Martens were slightly detected, but the survey is not designed well to pick up marten. Aerial otter surveys were also conducted in winter 2014/15, including 2 routes in central, 1 in south, and 23 in north. Low route completion was the result of poor snow conditions. Committee had brief discussion on poor snow conditions and when official survey reports will be available.

Carcass Collection: Nathan Roberts updated the committee. In 2014/15, bobcat carcasses were collected to obtain age information and repro status. Research staff has also been working with other groups to look at other research questions since carcasses are available. For instance, UW-Stevens Point is looking at bobcat parasites. Fisher skulls were also collected statewide to gather teeth for age information. All teeth go to Matson's lab in Montana, the lab most state agencies use. They do thousands of teeth, which results in a time lag. SS sends teeth in late May and get them back in late fall or winter, depending on the lab's workload. Research staff has been sending back raw, frozen skulls to harvesters when requested. Next year scheduled to collect otter statewide, fisher skulls, and bobcats statewide. This is dependent on staffing, as many staff are currently at-risk for further employment. Brief committee discussion was had on the increasing number of samples being collected from tribal bobcats and about tribal staff being trained to assist in collections.

Tribal Research/Management: GLIFWC update provided by Dr. Jonathan Gilbert. GLIFWC collaborated with Dr. Jon Pauli of UW-Madison on two projects looking at fisher and marten diets. The marten work found a high preponderance of shrews, which was a surprise, as shrews are not normally considered desirable prey. In some areas in Canada where marten are eating

shrews, marten have declined. This raises questions of correlation between food and population status. Other major food item are deer carcasses, which provide a rich food resource but leaves marten susceptible to other predators like bobcat, coyotes and fisher. Fisher results will be presented later, but some concerns about fat levels in fisher being lower than documented elsewhere were raised. Currently three marten research projects are active, including a recently concluded population assessment and habitat modelling in Chequamegon NF. Genetic work in Chequamegon estimated population size in the mid-20s and recruitment of about 3% a year. Another student is conducting a similar study on the Nicolet National Forest but will also try to determine how that population is connected to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan marten population. A Purdue student is also looking at marten dispersal using modeling to try to better understand how marten are moving and dispersing statewide. There was recent evidence of marten on the Red Cliff Reservation and on Stockton and Manitou islands of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Marten were introduced to Stockton Island in 1953, with no confirmed sightings since 1972, until camera traps identified multiple marten this spring. Attempts will be made to gather genetics to determine lineage.

Furbearer Survey Sub-committee: Nathan Roberts, SS, provided an update. A few years back a process began to review the surveys conducted by DNR and look at strengths/weaknesses and possible improvements. Staff turnover has delayed the process, but the sub-committee decided to tackle one survey first and look at merits and limitations. They began with the winter track survey as it is used to provide information on several species simultaneously. The track survey, conducted since 1977, is a trend survey—not a population estimate—that occurs primarily in the northern regions of Wisconsin. In 2014 surveys went well, but staff often has a hard time completing surveys because of the stringent survey protocols. Staff have conducted 1,108 surveys from 1977–2013. These are ten mile routes partitioned into ½ mile intervals during which the abundance of species and covariate data (e.g., weather conditions, snow depth) is recorded. Researchers analyzed whether detection probability of a species could be estimated. A 10 season analysis of the northern zone which included 243 surveys was used, though there were limiting environmental conditions and extensive missing data. Analyses suggest a fairly low detection probability for animals for any one interval. Distance between points to not have spatial autocorrelation varies a lot amongst species. Because of these preliminary analyses, six observers were asked to do a repeat survey (i.e., same block twice) in 2014 to see if a better estimate of detection probability and model influence of covariates could be obtained. Variation was detected between visits (e.g., one county saw 4 fisher during the first visit and 0 fisher during the second visit). In 2015-16 hope to get as many repeat visits to routes as possible to analyze further. Power analysis suggests the track survey has the most utility for common species like coyotes and detailed analysis suggests that increasing the number of transects doesn't gain much power in detecting trends, so increasing survey effort won't be beneficial. Alternatives that might work statewide are being discussed, such as scent station surveys.

BMP Trap Research Status: John Olson, WM provided updates. A major milestone was reached in August when AFWA published the wolf Best Management Practices (BMPs) for

trapping. There are now trap research documents for all furbearer species in the lower 48 states. In North America, two species remain—the arctic fox and wolverine—which the Technical Working Group (TWG) of AFWA is developing strategies to complete. There is a 2016 deadline with the European Union (EU) to have initial humane trap research completed. However, trap testing continues for many trap types, including footholds, cable restraints, and enclosed trigger traps, for several species. Wisconsin will host a necropsy event related to some of these projects, with plans to skin animals to salvage the pelts for educational use, when possible. The TWG has developed a 10 year plan for future work which will include trap research and outreach needs. A number of publications are in the works or already released, including a monograph on the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, an International Journal of Environmental Studies article on Trapping and Wildlife Management in North America, and a book chapter drafted for The Wildlife Society publication. Other publications in development include a technical bulletin on killing systems (body-grips) and an edit of *Trapping and Furbearer Management in North America* booklet. Additionally, The Wildlife Society position statement on trapping is under review and the recommendation was made for it to be a permanent, standing position. The annual meeting with Russia, Canada and the European Union was cancelled this past year, but the U.S. is working to gather reports from each nation. As part of a significant National Conservation Need grant, the TWG will be conducting a national trap use survey this year, documenting the types of traps trappers are now using and identify if the voluntary BMP program is working. Plan is to survey 5000 trappers, 100 from each state. In addition to the trapper survey, a survey will be developed for state agencies to document the various forms of BMPs being used in management activities.

Furbearer surveys of the St. Louis River AOC: Bryn Evans, graduate student, UW-Madison, provided a research update. A project was funded by the EPA to evaluate semi-aquatic mammals on the St. Louis Estuary to determine if native mammals are limited by historic pollution issues. Otters and mink are highly sensitive to chemical pollutants and biomagnify pollutants through consumption of fish, muskrats are important as a prey species, and beaver can have important ecosystem impacts. The study is comparing semi-aquatic populations on the St. Louis to two reference sites, Boulder Lake and the St. Croix National Scenic River way, as well as evaluating several survey methods, including aerial surveys (fixed-wing vs. helicopters) and remote cameras. This past winter started to collect preliminary data including double observer fixed-wing surveys and camera surveys at stratified random target site locations which were randomized to reduce spatial correlation, minimize bias in site selection, and ensure equal coverage. For cameras, habitat data was also collected. Fixed-wing survey seemed successful as low altitude was achieved, though the plane is still moving pretty quickly. Otter and beaver sign were detected. Plans are to fly the routes again in fall, but to repeat the routes multiple times. Camera data was collected in two sessions with some target species documented. The study does not yet have enough data yet to do occupancy modeling, but it appears that detection probabilities are low and otters relatively abundant. There are plans to have cameras out in summer to try to improve detections, as well as have a session in fall to overlap with fixed-wing

and helicopter surveys. There are also plans to try to collect mink and otter carcasses from trappers to test for contaminants.

Body-grip Trigger Study: Dave Ruid of Wildlife Services provided updates. Wildlife Services and DNR are looking at selectivity of trigger configurations on beaver traps to see if various trigger configurations can further reduce incidental otter capture. Research in New York found that a certain two-way trigger, offset and ferruled together, reduced otter captures in a lab setting. This configuration was field tested on select Wildlife Service's beaver sets this past spring. Otter capture, strike location, and other variables were recorded. The goal is to determine if a set is effective at avoiding otter while still being humane, based on strike location, of beaver. Wildlife Services were provided triggers and six technicians used them on traps during the month of April in northern and western Wisconsin. Technicians used a system of alternating modified traps with standard beaver trap sets with center triggers, so every other trap was a configuration designed to avoid otter. During the month of testing, 100 beaver were caught by these six individuals with an almost 50/50 ratio between offset triggers and center triggers. Humane catches were most common for both triggers, with "suitcase" type catches being slightly higher with offset triggers. Hip catches were the same between triggers. Seven otter were captured, five in offset triggers and two with center triggers, which is inverse of what might be expected. The beaver:otter ratio was 9.5/1 for offset, and 25.5/1 for center. This is a small sample size and only for one month, for one year. Additional data will be collected in future years to get a better sample size. Not sure why less otters caught in middle trigger, but one theory is the possibility the otter see triggers and avoid. However, sets are not channel sets, but are baited and set in a notch on bank, so the otter passing through are not streamlined otter that could pass with an offset trigger, which may also be a factor. The offset triggers also caught two muskrats which is also the inverse of what is expected. However, the study is still preliminary and increased sample sizes will provide more accurate results. The committee expressed gratitude to Wildlife Services for the effort they are expending to conduct this research project.

Marten status: Jim Woodford, NHC, provided updates. There are several inventory projects ongoing, including snow tracking surveys, observations, hair sampling, and den box monitoring in Nicolet National Forest. There are specialized marten routes for snow tracks and 78.9 miles in Chequamegon and 109 miles in Nicolet were surveyed in 2014. The routes detected 12 martens in Chequamegon and 7 in Nicolet, which resulted in 15.2 martens/100 miles in Chequamegon and 6.4 martens/100 miles in Nicolet. There are a lot of variables with track surveys that are problematic, however. DNR staff also gets a few rare observations, especially with increase in trail cameras on the landscape. The hair-snare sampling is part of on-going research projects. Reports have come in from Red Cliff Reservation the last three winters. Red Cliff is trying to increase bait stations to look a little more broadly in that area for marten sign. Also have pictures from Manitou Island and Stockton Island in the Apostles that were confirmed marten, which were the first confirmations since the 70s. Hair snare work is completed in the Chequamegon with ~79 samples in 35 locations. Preliminary work indicates low juvenile survival of 0.39. There were individuals translocated from Minnesota, and their initial survivorship was 0.66 and

then increased to 0.81 once individuals become resident. This suggests reintroduced individuals might be reproducing, but survivorship is low. The study also used genetics to look at parentage, which suggests reintroduced individuals do not have high contribution to reproduction. Good news is adult survivorship is high, but not seeing a lot of recruitment. A graduate student set up 175 stations in Nicolet this past winter and has 50 possible samples in 23 locations with plans for another sample collection season this winter. Additionally, a PhD student from Purdue is doing some work in Iron/Ashland counties on dispersal modeling. Based on surveys, minimum marten population in Wisconsin is 75. Very few incidentals have been turned in, though there was one road-killed last year.

Horicon Fur Farm: Chris Cole, WM, provided updates. As in the past, the Horicon Wildlife Area held an auction last October in conjunction with the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge. There were 14 units auctioned on the federal side and six on the state side. The WDNR has concerns with apparent low numbers of muskrats and poor harvest in 2013/14, so offered less units and selected impoundments to protect dike integrity and keep costs down. Harvest was better than expected as there were good water levels, as opposed to hard winters and low water the two years prior. The Fish and Wildlife Service kept all 14 units open and harvest increased from 700 to 7400. Unit prices were lower this year, but had about 75 people at auction. There were concerns of falling pelt prices, so bids seemed lower than previous year. State season was November 1 through March 31 to allow for spring harvest to get muskrats that might impact dikes. The National Wildlife Refuge season was December 1 to March 15. Water levels look good this spring and staff was able to burn about 4500 acres of cattail which hopefully will benefit muskrat dispersal. A graduate student is starting a muskrat project on Horicon to look at various topics including diseases and parasites as well as compiling and organizing harvest data. Staff will assist by collecting any dead muskrats. FWS staff is also collecting low-level aerial imagery in an attempt to use GIS software to count muskrat houses, with the hope of better understanding populations and to see if there are preferred areas of the marsh. A second Learn-to-Trap event was held in March and went well.

Beaver Management Plan. John Olson provided updates. The Beaver Plan, started in 2011, recently went out for 30 days of public comment. The Beaver Task Force, which drafted the plan, included representatives of 24 groups. Prior to plan development, there were four public meetings, a survey, and a webinar to get public input. WDNR Administration, Fisheries Management, and the Task Force have all approved the draft that was released to the public. There are plans still to meet with Forestry, Law Enforcement, and Natural Heritage Conservation to give updates and provide opportunity for feedback and Voigt Task Force will be updated as well. Public input is open until June 22 and four public input sessions will be held in early June. Six goals emerged from the plan, including management goals by zone, habitat management, and damage management as key components as well as education/outreach, research, and beaver health. There were several primary concerns, including maintaining relatively stable beaver populations; developing team decisions and collaborative management; protect trout on designated cold water streams; continue damage management control efforts; increase

understanding of beaver-trout watershed; improve monitoring efforts; utilize riparian zone management; and improve flexibility in harvest regulations. Plans are to reconvene the task force every 5 years to re-evaluate aspects of the plan, such as population management. After public input, will summarize input and have Task Force and Wildlife Policy Team review changes. Hopefully Natural Resource Board review and approval will occur by early fall. After approval, any rule proposals recommended would move forward under a separate hearing schedule.

Midwest Furbearer Workshop: Geriann Albers, WM, provided updates. Most Midwest states attended. There was a preliminary update on gray fox genetics work that was initiated because a subspecies of gray fox, the prairie gray fox, was proposed for federal listing, and will be reviewed in 2017. Previous subspecies delineations are dated, so genetics are being collected to re-analyze. More samples are needed, but it looks like while there are some genetic groups in the east, the only genetically distinct subpopulation is in the northeast (Maine/Vermont/NH). Discussion on muskrat populations led to expressed interest from MN in possibly trying to monitor a few large marshes in different states to start gathering long-term trends. Horicon is a likely candidate. There was also a presentation on Statistical Population Reconstruction. They're releasing version 2.0 of PopRecon, in June with an easy-to-use interface. This statistical program allows input of age structure data, harvester effort, and additional supplemental data (survival rates, probability of harvest, abundance estimates, etc.) to build population estimates based on harvest data.

CITES: John Olson provided updates. Currently, no states have CITES approval for exporting black bear, but some expressed a desire to have such authority. Currently, there are 32 states that harvest ~42,000 black bear (Wisconsin is number 1 in harvest). The FWS has agreed to move forward with developing a CITES process for black bear, but it requires a change to the federal register which could take time. The Service is planning to conduct a webinar to explain the program and allow state input. Currently, the idea is not to replace any forms of registration, but to provide CITES tags as a service to harvesters after they register and also allow states to transport DNA/tissue samples across international borders in a more timely fashion. States will be able to choose whether or not to participate.

Furbearer Health: Lindsey Long, WM, provided updates. Canine distemper virus (CDV) is a disease of concern that can occur in all wild canids (dog family members) and mustelids (weasel family members) because it can have local population impacts, and though not transmittable to humans, can be found in domestic animals. Regular epidemics occur in raccoons while gray fox seem particularly susceptible. Had a few cases this year of epidemics throughout the state, and while none were large they occurred at the same time. Documented cases included raccoons in Douglas County, a gray fox and raccoon from Ashland County, and four gray foxes from Manitowoc County, all during a six week period. There were two raccoons in Racine with CDV, but they also had canine parvovirus. Those results are preliminary, but could be a sign raccoons may be a carrier of parvovirus. There were also investigations of toxoplasmosis (toxoplasma), which humans can get through contaminated food or water or from undercooked meat. One household

reported 5 squirrels dead in 3 weeks, and one submitted, had died from toxo, though the other four were not tested. In our improving wildlife health database, staff can enter sick animals into a database. There is hope that these records may make it possible to map observations by species or clinical signs and see if we can identify hotspots and look for usable carcasses for necropsy.

Customer Service: Linda Olver, CS&L, provided updates. Information on 2014 B/F/O drawings and applicants from last five years were summarized in handouts. The bobcat application has been updated to reflect the addition of the Southern zone. Previously the Northern zone was labeled B1 and B2. This year seasons and zones will change to: N1, N2, and S1, S2.

Public Input: Public input included questions about the Beaver Management Plan. These were noted to be included in the document for review by the Beaver Task Force as part of Beaver Plan public input period.

Bobcat research. Nathan Roberts provided updates. Current bobcat monitoring techniques are primarily winter track surveys and population models using reproductive data. With funding provided by the increase in the bobcat application fee several years ago, funds are available to better understand bobcats. A study was initiated with the goal of refining population estimates for Northern Zone cats, providing greater confidence in quota setting and harvest management. Over time will gather empirical estimates of mortality/survivorship, suitable habitat estimates; hopefully to validate survey methods, and detection probabilities. This past winter, a pilot study occurred in Oneida and Vilas Counties to collar bobcats with GPS collars, which, has reduced staff time in monitoring and provides more locations. Trappers occasionally catch incidental bobcats they release, so to be more efficient, research staff hopes to work directly with trappers to collar bobcats. If successful, it makes the project more cost-efficient, thus allowing regional expansion. To date, seven bobcats have been collared. All seven are still alive and transmitting locations (as of the end of May, 2015). Collars are designed to collect locations twice a day, 12 hours apart. Plans are to collar 20–40 bobcats, expanding the project to other areas of the state.

Fisher diets. Jonathan Pauli provided a research summary. Initially began work looking at marten diets using a technique known as stable isotopes, which compares carbon/nitrogen ratios in tissue or hair samples. Marten research was looking at food limitations, habitat, and competition interactions that could limit marten recovery. Other studies found what marten eat when prey is abundant (voles, hare, deer mice) and when prey scarce is scarce (shrews). Stable isotope research suggests Wisconsin marten are eating a ton a shrews. This led to the question of how does this relate to what fisher are eating in these same areas of the state, so a fisher project was initiated as well. Using the same method of stable isotopes, data suggest that while fishers normally eat hares, they seem to be overlapping with marten and eating small mammals/shrews. This suggests marten and fisher are competing for the same, less than optimum prey base. This could suggest a prey limitation problem, which may partially explain why marten haven't recovered well. Another part of this study compared body fat of current fisher in Wisconsin to body fat determined in Wisconsin the 90s, as well as body fat in Ontario and Quebec. In most studies, fisher average 8–12% body fat. Current fisher in Wisconsin appear to have far less body

fat, and fall outside of both Wisconsin's historic body fat range and that found in Canada. Fisher and marten are eating the same things, which could be having demographic consequences for marten and a nutritional consequence for fisher. Prey shift regionally seems to be consequential. Niche overlap seems to be about 99%.

May 28, Day 2 – Quota Setting and Rule Proposals

Call to order at 7:42 am with Introductions, Agenda Repair, and review of Committee Protocol.

Committee agreed to move fisher zone rule proposals to allow discussion by members who have to leave early.

Committee was reminded that all data presented are preliminary as additional registration stubs are submitted after committee meeting but prior to final reports in the August surveys. For bobcat and fisher, changes are usually minor, but otter closed the end of April, so we should expect a change to those numbers.

Fisher Management

Fisher harvest summary. Robert Rolley reviewed 2014 fisher harvest and survey data. The 2014 fisher harvest goal was 840 for all six zones. Harvest was 810 by trappers, 61 incidentals, and 110 off-reservation harvest for a total mortality of 980. Majority of harvest came from Zones E and F. Off-reservation tribal harvest occurred in Zones A and B. About 50% of incidental harvest was in Zone F, with the remainder distributed among all other zones. Majority of incidentals were caught in body-grip traps. About 20% of harvest was from public land; a large percent of harvest comes late in the season; and the majority of harvest comes from center of state. Success rates were slightly higher than average across the board, with the highest rates in Zones A and E.

Committee discussed fisher declines in the north and possible need to change zone boundaries. Members also discussed local sightings of fisher in the various regions and how sightings seemed to reflect harvest maps.

Fisher Survey Data: Thirty-two winter track counts were completed in northern Wisconsin. Fisher index in Zone A was intermediate. Detections continue to be low in Zones B/C/D, but long-term trends can be useful. A few routes were conducted in central Wisconsin, but conditions have been challenging. Carcasses have been collected for fisher for many years. Last year was a skull collection year to provide age distribution. Generally there is a fairly high percent of juveniles in harvest, about 50% in both north and central portions of the state. Some fisher researchers suggest juvenile to adult female fisher ratio may be indicative of harvest pressure, with light harvest seeing a higher juvenile to adult female ratio. With exception of the 1998 harvest when quotas were very conservative, our ratio in the north has been in the 3–4 range, but this year, closer to 5. This could suggest that harvest intensity was decreasing slightly. In southern zones, continue to see a ratio in the 3.5–4 range. Not sure if other states find this

index useful, but it is curious we saw the upward blip in the last several years when we reduced harvest.

Fisher Zone A: Population models suggest Zone A reached peak in early 2000s, declined mid-2000s, and now seems to be stabilizing. The Zone A goal is 1700. Model suggests we're slightly above that. To stabilize population, the model suggested harvest in the 125–150 range. Last year's goal was 150, which was exceeded slightly. Committee discussed disparity in Zone A with high populations in southern portion and low populations in northern portion. Recommendations ranged between 150 and 200.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone A Harvest Quota of 175.

Fisher Zone B. Population model shows decline may have stabilized. Population goal is 3200 and the model suggests population is about 1000 under goal. The 2014 quota was 75 and final harvest was 63. Want to keep at current levels, harvest of 125 recommended by model and if trying to increase population, somewhere less than 125. Committee discussed wanting to allow population to increase with estimates being under goal. Recommendations were between 75 and 100 with most recommendations to hold harvest quota at last year's level of 75.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone B Harvest Quota of 75.

Fisher Zone C. Model shows sharp decline from early 2000s leveling off last few years. The zone goal is 1,600 and the model suggests population is around 1,200. Harvest quota was 60 last year with a harvest of 53. Model suggests harvest in the 75 range would keep population stable, under that would allow some increase. Committee discussed low success rates in this zone. Recommendations were all 60.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone C Harvest Quota of 60.

Fisher Zone D. Model shows similar population trends as other northern zones. The zone goal is 2700 and the model suggests population is about 1000 under goal. Last year's quota was 75 and harvest was 71. Model suggests harvest of 100 would stabilize, less would allow population to grow. Committee discussed similarities between Zones C and D. Recommendations were 75.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone D Harvest Quota of 75.

Fisher Zones E and F. These zones have no models or goals. The history of setting harvest quotas in these zones is based upon changes in success rates.

Fisher Zone E. Zone E has generally seen success rates bounce around between 30–35%. Last year's harvest quota was 220 and 228 were harvested for one of the highest success rates so far. Committee discussed likelihood populations in this area could continue to grow and members related sightings in the zone. Recommendations were between 230 and 250, with most at 250.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone E Harvest Quota of 250.

Fisher Zone F. Last year's quota was 260 and harvest was 339. Success rate increased quite a bit to just over 22%. There's been a steady increase in success rate the last 4–5 years, with last

year the first time over 20%. Committee discussed the high harvest in the zone and the lack of data for this zone. The committee also discussed success rates being low, but increasing. Committee recommended a harvest that would maintain permit levels, which would be around 340. Suggestions ranged from 335 to 350.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone F Harvest Quota of 350.

Fisher Zone and rule proposal discussion.

Zones have grown over time as fisher populations have expanded. Current zones are may not be adequate to address management issues. A subcommittee met to discuss new zone proposals, and presented a 3-zone option to the committee (north, central, south). Committee discussed whether reducing zones would simplify regulations and allow better management. Questions were raised about using existing furbearer zones (e.g., bobcat zones), but members had concerns about some counties with high harvest being included in zones with declining fisher populations, which could affect ability of harvesters to get permits. Suggestion was made and discussed to reduce to two zones. The benefits of having zones compared to statewide harvest were also discussed, but most members wanted flexibility to make harvest recommendations to allow population management by zones. **Committee overall supported re-configuring fisher zones, with final borders to be determined later, though members recommended against using dmus as boundaries.** Input from the Wildlife Policy Team will provide direction to move forward with new zones. Fisher population objectives were also discussed as changing zones would require changes to population goals. Three basic population goal types were discussed, including a numeric goal, a numeric range, and non-numeric goals similar to deer. Range has worked with bobcats and other species are using non-numeric goals. Numeric goals have been problematic for many species. **Committee recommended exploring alternatives to current numeric goals that best fit current DNR policy.**

River Otter Management

Otter harvest summary. The 2014 quota was 1300 and state harvest was 772, though these numbers will likely change as the last registration stubs are submitted. Reported incidentals were 182, off-reservation harvest was 76, and on-reservation harvest was 3. Quotas in 2014 were distributed in a 40/30/30 split, and zone harvest was 290/239/241. Harvest peaks occurred in early November, Christmas time, and late March/early April. Incidental harvest included a portion of Wildlife Service incidentals. Majority of incidentals were caught in body-grip traps and 25 were road kills. Incidentals peak in fall and spring. Incidental numbers were down from previous years at 182, compared to 290, 270, and 274 the last three years. Harvest is consistently averaging about 60% males. Success rate was up over 30% in 2012. In 2013 and 2014, success rates dropped under 20%, and drops were similar in all zones. Central Zone had the highest success rate, which is consistent with trends of the last several years. Committee discussed local otter sightings, apparent abundance of otter on landscape, harvest being down, and the need for better otter data. Members postulated that low pelt prices and long winters in north may have

contributed to low harvest levels, which for two years have been well below quotas despite permits being available.

River otter survey information: Otter aerial surveys are conducted when snow/ice conditions permit and in 2014 staff flew all 23 routes in the north, two routes in the central zone, and one route in the south. North routes observed tracks at about 17% of crossings. Percentage of crossings in early years was 20–25%, dropped below 15% for a while, and now around 15%. Observed track crossings decreased till late 2000s then leveled off. Central zone has little data this year with few aerial routes completed, but overall appears to be a downward trend in the Central Zone. In the South Zone there's no consistent trend and routes have a low level of detections. Opinions of beaver trappers have a consistent pattern in north as percentage of beaver trappers saying otter are increasing has been increasing. Over 50% saying otter population is increasing, as opposed to 30% that thought otter were increasing 10 years ago. In central zone, a less clear pattern. The majority has been saying increasing, but there hasn't been a shift in that percentage. In south zone, relative distribution of opinions doesn't seem to be changing consistently, either. Majority think in most years otter seem to be increasing. Otter are documented on winter track surveys, but it is not great for monitoring otter. Otter sightings are also documented on the deer hunter wildlife survey, but the data is too noisy to interpret much pattern in change over time. There is no pattern consistency between aerial surveys, trapper opinions, and success rates as all suggest different trends. Hard to know what's going on as the independent data doesn't track in the same direction, which makes it hard to calibrate the population model. Population models suggest we are below the goal of 13,000, but creeping upward. In 2013/14, the quota was 1300 and harvest was 850. Model suggests harvest of 1400 would keep population stable but under goal. Less harvest will allow population to continue to increase. For river otter, it would be helpful to have better information.

Discussion was had on trying to reduce incidentals to allow them to be legally harvested. Also concerns about perception of increasing goals too quickly when the science, despite being poor, suggests we are under the population goal set in Administrative Code. Possible reasons for harvest being significantly below the quota for two years was discussed, including winter severity, low prices, and timing of ice-out in the north. Comments about incidentals not being evenly distributed (i.e., a few trappers get multiple otters) were shared by members. Discussion was also had about the observers and process for the otter aerial surveys. Recommendations varied between 1500 and 2000.

Committee Recommendation: Otter Harvest Quota of 1,700 with a 40/30/30 split (north/central/south respectively).

Proposed otter research: Nathan Roberts requested support from the Furbearer Advisory Committee to request Pittman-Robertson Funds to look at otter survey methodology, otter population models, and comparing aerial surveys to bridge crossing surveys. **Committee recommendation to support the proposal and stressed the great need for better otter information on all fronts.**

Trap incident reports. Nate Kroeplin, LE, presented updates. Initial trap incident report came from Law Enforcement concerns about 220 body-grips. The report was developed with the cooperation with the WTA. Report format is a consistent and systematic way to collect information surrounding trap incidents, especially when involving domestic species. Data are collected, reviewed by Administrative wardens and then forwarded to the furbearer program where they are databased. From 1998–2014 the majority of incidents involved domestic dogs. The number of incidents has increased since wolf harvest became legal. In 2014, there were three dog fatalities reported: one foothold (first ever foothold incident - older dog that was not restrained long), one in a 160 body-grip, and one in a cubbed 220 body-grip. This data allows DNR and WTA to review long-term data on trap incidents including mortalities, animals involved, private land access permission, and other data gathered.

Bobcat Management

Bobcat harvest summary: State harvest of bobcats was 209, with 9 called-in but not registered, so state harvest is likely closer to 218. There were 62 incidentals reported and tribal off-reservation harvest was 54, for a total of 335 bobcats. Of the permitted harvest, 66% were taken with the use of dogs and 30% were trapped; 67% of harvest was from public land and 30% from private land. The harvest in the Northern Zone was evenly split between time periods. In the Southern Zone, greater harvest in the 2nd time period. Incidentals were scattered across the state and about half were road kills. The majority of harvest in the Southern Zone was just south of the Highway 64 zone line. There was an upward increase in harvest which reflected the opening of the southern zone; and there's been a steady increase in percent of harvest with the aid of dogs.

Bobcat survey information: Sex and age composition show 60% of harvest is males and high percentage of harvest is adults. Less than 10% of harvest was juveniles and less than 20% were yearlings. All age and reproductive data presented is a year old (2013) because of lab constraints. The 2013 pregnancy rates showed no yearling females were pregnant, though sample size was relatively small. Pregnancy rates in adults were up a little from year before, but still relatively low at 60–65% range compared to late 90s rates closer to 85–90%. Winter track counts had good completion this past year and showed upticks in detections with almost 50% of transects having detections. Number/transect was up to almost 0.8 tracks/transect. In 2014, 10 routes were completed in central/southern WI this year and no bobcats were reported from those 10 routes. Usually there are at least 1 or 2 detections out of 5 or 6 routes run. While there are cats in the southern counties, they are not being detected regularly. Bobcats are also documented on the deer hunter wildlife observation survey. There was good response in 2013, but response rates dropped some in 2014. In the northern forest observations have bounced around from 2/1000 hrs to less than .5/1000 hours with an average of <1.5/1000 hours. This data is noisy and doesn't show much trend, but do see more bobcats in the north than in the south, though there is some consistency in the central farmland. Hunter/trapper opinions on status last year indicated the majority of respondents felt bobcat numbers were about the same. Just over 30% thought bobcat

numbers were increasing. Trends in respondents who think population has increased peaked in 2005/06 and have been fairly steady at 30% since. Numbers of bobcats run by dogs has been fairly stable around .6 cats per day, with a slight dip in 2013 and a slight increase in 2014. Harvest per trapper bounced up slightly in north, and per hunter day with dogs went down slightly in the north. Trapper success rates were lower in the Southern Zone than in Northern Zone, with comparable rates of harvest with the aid of dogs in both zones.

Bobcat Northern Zone: Population models utilize track surveys as basis for calibration of the model, and this year it was suggested to adjust the model slightly to try to better fit the track pattern. With that adjustment, there is a slight uptick in the population which may suggest the population is leveling off when compared to data from other indices and is closer to the middle of goal range at ~2400. Model suggests that to maintain the current population harvest would need to be in the 150 range and if harvest remains similar to last year it may slowly decrease population. Committee discussed previous season, local bobcat sightings, the process for tribal declarations and allocations, the possibility previous hard winters moved cats into town so more people are seeing them, some bobcats being seen to die of starvation, and trappers releasing incidentals. There was also mention of harvest in surrounding states

Recommendations between 250 and 350 were made, with a few groups recommending a quota of 500. Some expressed concerns if harvest was too high, could result in a dramatic cut in permits in subsequent years if population shows declines. After discussion, 300 was settled on as a compromise, however some user groups still desired a much higher quota.

Committee Recommendation: Bobcat Northern Zone Quota of 300. But with a note that some user groups recommended 500 without any data for support.

Bobcat Southern Zone: The 2014 quota was 50, with a tribal allocation of 5 and used committee recommended success rates of 60%. Observed success rate was 39% in first time period and 55% in second time period with a total of 36 cats being harvested. No information on population and no population objective available for this zone.

Committee discussed local observations of cats, seemingly strong populations in central Wisconsin, especially just south of the Highway 64 zone division line and anecdotal increases in sightings over the last 5 years. Any permit issuance will use the success rates from the previous year, so 39% in the first time period and the 55% in the second time period. Recommendations were at 100 from most members.

Committee Recommendation: Bobcat Southern Zone Quota of 100.

DMAP mentoring: Geriann Albers provided information on a new program. DMAP is planning to pilot a program to allow DMAP properties to give voluntary access to new, especially youth, harvesters to use the property with a mentor. The DNR is partnering with Kids and Mentors Outdoors (KAMO) and possibly the WTA to find local paired mentors/mentees so they may access the property for activities landowners are willing to allow. Not sure how much interest there will be, but may allow opportunity for new hunters/trappers to have access to property near

them and have a mentor help them learn to harvest responsibly. Landowners will be able to request an optional work day in exchange for the opportunity to use the land, from either the mentor/mentee and/or the group. If interest from landowners, may try to expand the program.

Overview of Spring Hearing results

All DNR questions received support and will be moving forward as rule proposals. A few folks expressed concern about opening at midnight on opening day. Still working out details on foot activated cable restraints.

WCC advisory questions: The Wisconsin Conservation Congress had several advisory questions on the Spring Hearing. Only 1 failed, a question about requiring patron license purchasers pay stand-alone fees for fisher and otter applications. All the rest passed and were delivered to the NRB. Then they will go to the WCC Fur Harvest Committee. The Furbearer Advisory Committee can make recommendations to the Fur Harvest Committee on these topics.

Question 1. Setting values for wild animal protection surcharges: Committee supported

Question 3. Ethical hunter/trapper verification system for landowners: Discussion began with concept seems like a good one, but what does “ethical” really mean. Members also brought up the concern this would take a lot of money/time for not much reward. Members were also not convinced it would be useful or used by landowners. Committee recommended a cost/benefit analysis and seeing if this program was actually useful to other states that have implemented before moving forward.

Question 11. Fisher season extension: Question recommended a season end date of March 31. Committee discussed that fisher were having young at that time, the increase from December 31 to March 31 seemed extreme, we currently have the most liberal fisher season in the U.S., and that a longer season would decrease tags by increasing success rates. Committee recommended rejecting.

Question 12. Traps set in weasel boxes: A rule change occurred last season to allow weasel boxes to be checked once every four days if the box is secured to an immovable object and the opening is 1 3/8 inches or less. This question wants a 4-day check with any hole size. Committee discussed the hole size was specified to keep out marten while allowing weasels to enter, and if there was no hole restrictions, could catch incidentals like mink and marten in weasel traps or people trying to trap fisher and claiming they are trapping weasels, and thereby getting around daily trap check requirement. The rule is less than a year old, so some recommended waiting a few years before rushing to make changes. Committee recommended rejection. Committee also recommended defining a weasel trap in administrative code.

Question 13. Eliminate the otter drawing: This rule does not specify a bag limit, so would not change the quota process, though the committee members discussed the authors probably intended to eliminate the quotas as well. The question does not specify quota elimination, however. This rule would let everyone who buys a trapping license get 2 otter tags. With this

proposal, the season would get closed when quota was met. Original question said 5 tags/person, the Executive Committee of WCC reduced to 2/person. Committee discussed that tags would increase from ~3900 to 20,000 or more and incidentals would still be an issue with beaver season remaining open but the otter season potentially being closed after quota is reached. While most of the committee was supportive of changing the process for otter, they did not feel this question was worded to appropriately achieve desired outcome, so recommended rejection.

Question 14. Include turtles under the trapping license: Committee was supportive.

Question 15. Patron license requirement for fisher/otter application fees: This question failed and will not move forward.

Question 21. Open DOT lands to outdoor activities including trapping: The committee discussed the DNR not having authority over DOT decisions and that some DOT mitigation sites are currently open. No action taken.

Citizen resolutions on the county level were also presented. While the committee does not take an official stance, members were able to provide input to WCC rep to take back to appropriate committee when being reviewed.

Resolution 200415, 200115, 240115: Cattail control on Rush Lake. Rush Lake Committee wants to close the lake to muskrat trapping to try to decrease cattails and then eventually have a shorter trap season. John Olson related that the furbearer program staff attended a meeting at Rush Lake, explained the fur farm system and that the lake has mostly hybrid cattail. Staff explained that muskrats don't seem to make open patches in hybrid cattail as they can in native cattails. The Rush Lake group seemed receptive and staff recommended consulting with Horicon Marsh personnel about managing cattails with fire, water, and herbicide as a closure on trapping may not benefit anyone. Furbearer Committee members expressed concerns with loss of opportunity, especially when there is no guarantee closure will help cattail management. Members also offered that muskrats are short-lived, and that not trapping will not necessarily increase muskrats and wetland-specific regulations complicate matters.

Resolution 132015. Protect beavers as state treasure. Committee members pointed out beavers are already an ecological treasure, but ending harvest is not viable.

Resolution 500315. Single dryland trapping opener for all furbearers. Committee discussed this is likely targeted at having a later wolf opener because of conflicts with other user groups, but that is a legislative decision that can't be changed by the DNR. This seems focused at gaining support to ask Legislature for later wolf season opening date, and to make it consistent with other furbearers.

Resolution 132115. Stop killing predators. Members were not supportive.

Resolution 160215. Residents and landowners priority on bear/bobcat permits. The DNR Customer Services representative offered that only 3% of permits for Class A bear licenses go to

non-residents and that number is pretty consistent. Another comment suggested if they get landowner preference, they should only be allowed to harvest on their own property.

Public input: A member of the public had questions about changes in otter harvest and when the drawing started. Members thought it was mid-90s, were unsure of exact year. Also asked if patron's licenses were affecting wait times for otter permits, but the committee chair explained permit issuance accounts for those who don't harvest by using success rates. Another member offered that a study was done on bear permits to ensure anti-hunters weren't keeping permits from harvesters, and it was found they are not, so this is likely also not an issue for otter.

Potential Rule Proposals

Potential rules proposals were discussed by the committee. The rules the committee decides merit having action taken and are then supported by the Wildlife Policy Team will be drafted into questions for the 2016 Spring Hearing advisory questions.

Right-of-way Trapping. Issues with right-of-ways come up quite a bit and WDNR tries to address where possible in regulations, especially stressing to get landowner permission. Law Enforcement has noticed a majority of trapping complaints have some right-of-way component to it, but every county is so different with easements and regulations. It was suggested implementing a rule that traps must be 50 feet from the center of the road may reduce conflicts and will allow Conservation Wardens to better enforce illegal traps set along roadways. Currently, if illegally set in roadway, it is trespass, which wardens can't enforce and local police usually have no trapping background, so don't know what to do. The committee members discussed issues with landowners' rights, complications with similar hunting regulations about firearm discharge, and whether forest roads and gravel roads would be included. There were also concerns with restricting mink, raccoon, and weasel box trapping in culverts as well as concerns that continuing issues could eventually lead to legislation or county ordinances being more restrictive. **Committee decided to not request a proposal be drafted.**

River otter zones. River otter zones may have issues. We have one county, for instance, that is split into all three zones. A suggestion has been raised that since we manage otter and beaver for same seasons, maybe we should manage using the same zones. The exception would be the beaver Zone D. This suggestion would split the north and make the south one zone. Committee discussed this move would be in the spirit of rule simplification. Suggestion was made to simplify further and use the bobcat zones instead of beaver zones and thereby leave the north as one zone. **Committee recommended moving forward with drafting a proposal to have two otter zones, a north and south, which follow the current bobcat zone lines.**

Toothed trap elimination. Currently, toothed traps are allowed, but only underwater or on land if you have a scientific collectors permit. Appears we don't need toothed traps for beaver with the current, strong traps available. Committee discussed the potential negative image that comes with toothed traps and whether trappers still use them. Because of concerns related to perception

of toothed traps, the **Committee recommended moving forward with drafting a proposal to eliminate the use of toothed traps.**

Regulated badger trapping season. There is solid research out of UW-Milwaukee that suggests a healthy, viable badger population in all 72 counties and good genetic diversity, even better than in the Lower Peninsula of Michigan. The study had samples from Ohio to the west coast, so very strong study. With this knowledge supporting a strong population, could institute a limited harvest on a permit system. Committee discussed the data that showed the population could sustain harvest. **Committee recommended moving forward with drafting a proposal to allow limited, permitted badger trapping during a set season.**

Non-resident raccoon season. For the last few years, the numbers of non-resident furbearer hunters, which includes raccoon hunters, has not exceeded 135. Most seem to be family members of residents; yet non-resident raccoon season starts two weeks after residents. A member explained many years ago, lots of people coming up from south to hunt raccoons, hence the initial rule. The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation representative said he would discuss with the various dog hunting groups to gauge their opinions and report back to the committee on their support of changing the non-resident season. A suggestion was also made to allow raccoon hunting during the 9-day gun deer season.

Mandatory wolf trapper education. This question was discussed at the spring Trapper Education Committee meeting and that committee decided to hold off on this for now because of the current federal status of wolves. No action taken.

Nuisance/damage control agent certification. Some nuisance wildlife control operators have asked for a way to certify those removing nuisance animals out of concerns of irresponsible behavior. The Wisconsin Wildlife Control Operators Association is supportive of this action. Committee discussed concerns with a certification preventing trappers from removing a few animals for a neighbor or local town. Suggestion was made that there could be an income minimum set and if nuisance control operator makes more than that, they must be certified. Committee also discussed possibility of offering a voluntary course on nuisance removal to better educate people. **Committee was supportive with an income requirement, but thought rule would likely require statutory change.**

LTE Trapper Education Position. Currently, the DNR position that oversees the Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education program is a limited term employee (LTE), which is a part-time, temporary staff person. This position is important to providing consistency to the Trapper Education program. **The committee recommended the Trapper Education Position be made into an FTE (Full time employee) position to provide better support and allow for consistency in the Trapper Education program.**