

2016 Furbearer Advisory Committee Summary Minutes

May 31 - June 1, 2016
The Waters, Minocqua, WI

DNR Committee Members in Attendance: Shawn Rossler, 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), Jim Hanson, Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association, Scott Zimmerman, Wisconsin Trappers Association, Ed Harvey, Wisconsin Conservation Congress

Advisory Committee Assistant: Jenna Kosnicki, WM

Invited Department Experts: Robert Rolley, SS, John Olson, WM

Invited Ojibwe Biological Expert: Nick McCann, GLIFWC

Other Guests: Ralph Fritsch in place of Patrick Quaintance day 1, WI Wildlife Federation (WWF), Max Allen, SS, Nick Forman, SS, Laurie Groskopf in place of Patrick Quaintance day 2, WWF

May 31, 2016: Day 1 – Reports and Updates

Call to order at 10:00 am with introductions, agenda repair, and review of committee protocol.

WCTEP Update: Jenna Kosnicki provided updates. The WCTEP graduated 1,606 students in 2015 in comparison to 2100 students in 2014. Of the 1,606 students, 314 were correspondence course graduates. Live classes were down from 2014 from 77 to 56. As of today, we have graduated 153 students in 2016. Wolf Trapper Education workshops were not held in 2015 and are on hold for 2016 as wolves are federally protected. Geriann is working on a wolf trapper ed manual and we hope to see a draft within the next couple of days. The program sent out instructor surveys to clean up the database once again and provide us with information that will be used to commemorate instructors for their time spent serving the program. Instructor appreciation gifts will be handed out at the fall TE meeting. There are currently 224 active instructors. We will be merging our TE apprenticeship form with the other DNR safety courses apprenticeship form. New apprentice applications will provide us with permissions to do immediate background checks. This will decrease the transition time from apprentice to instructor while using the same criteria to become one. Background checks have also become more efficient and will provide accountability for submissions. The Trapper Ed publication has

been updated and Jenna will be working on two new brochures entitled “Becoming a Trapper Ed Instructor” and “Trap Identification.”

There was a third year of Ag teacher training last summer with the next to follow this month. Teachers involved so far are enthusiastic and seem to be working closely with local trappers and wardens to put on good classes as part of outdoor skills or wildlife management courses. As required by Act 168, we are in the process of creating an online trapper ed course and expect to have it rolled out by Jan. 1, 2017. As recommended by the TE Committee, starting Jan.1, 2017, all correspondence and online students will have to take an additional mandatory field test after completing bookwork and exams. Students will not become graduates until successfully completing this test. Districts are to provide at least one test-out course per year. A working group has been constructed to provide a field test-out outline for instructors to ensure the course is consistent and maintains the same test structure. The outline is expected to be completed by September and handed out to instructors at the Fall Rendezvous. Online courses are only available to students 18 years and older.

WI Fur Schools and Regional Fur Schools 2015-2016: John Olson provided updates. Training workshops are doing well and growing. A LE fur school was not provided this year but will be again this fall. In the winter/spring of 2016, Northland College fur school graduated 22 participants, UWSP graduated 37 students and the Wildlife Fur School (#62) trained 18 biologists/technicians. An AFWA grant provided assistance for traveling costs associated with this workshop also known as the Midwest Fur School. The Northwest Fur School held in Lewiston, ID trained 17 conservation officers and biologists. Idaho Fish and Game anticipate mandatory trapper education course later this year. The Northeast Fur School will be held in upstate New York next week, with the Southwest Fur School in Nevada in late August and the Southeast Fur School in Kentucky in October.

WTA Update: Scott Zimmerman provided updates. WTA is strong. Scott has spent a lot of time in Madison talking to legislators and speaking on behalf of the WTA. The spring banquet was a success. Summer rendezvous are in season with the Fall Rendezvous the second weekend of September. The WTA testified against the wetland bill with concerns about the wellbeing of wetland species such as muskrats and the hunter harassment bill. The WTA also testified against the trapper mentorship bill. The bill contained language that would create unintended loop holes in the mentorship program. With encouragement from the WTA the trapper mentorship bill was pulled and new language will be constructed in the future. The WTA testified for the changing of the wolf harvest season open date bill. The WTA is concerned about grey fox in the southern portion of the state and would like to see research done on the presence of grey fox in southern Wisconsin.

Enforcement Update and Trap Incident Report 2015: Nate Kroepelin provided updates. Northeast Wisconsin has a depleted warden force that will be filled in 2016. In the past, LE performed a general hire where recruits got stationed after a year of training. A hiring change

will allow stations to be rewarded upon hire to encourage interested candidates to apply. Trap incidents were recorded with three body-grip reports in 2015. Twenty-four foothold incidents were recorded in 2015, a decrease from the forty-three reported in 2014. This could relate to the repeal of a wolf season and decreased trapping pressure due to low fur prices. In early January, a hunting incident occurred near Madison where a coyote hunter over a mile off the road shot two pet dogs that resulted in death of the animals. The owner had them off leash and was trailing 100 yards behind the dogs. The coyote hunter was legal, cooperative and remorseful and no charges were filed. The District Attorney's office filed felony and criminal misdemeanor charges. No convictions have been made at the time of the meeting. This was the first time a pet was shot during a coyote night hunt in the 15 years of Nate's career that he is aware of. Todd Naas included that it is difficult to identify all carnivores at night: dog, wolf, coyote, etc. One county resolution currently asks to restrict night hunting of coyotes on public land. Scott Zimmerman proposed a "light law" that includes scanning with a light.

2015 Beaver Control Results: David Ruid provided updates. 1,461 beaver were taken by WS in 2015. The number of beavers removed (656) for trout habitat protection was below average. There were 805 removed for damage. Ashland and Eau Claire Counties requested assistance in beaver damage and Rusk and Washburn Counties requested assistance for timber sale damage. WS began beaver removal for Fisheries in Oconto County and the Driftless Area. Most county removals are performed to retain infrastructure (access to road, across bridges, etc.), not damage to a resource. Incidental otter taken every year ranges from 18 beaver/otter to 11 beaver/otter. There were 99 incidental otter in 2015 or about 15 beaver/otter. The number of townships under WS's control ranges from 20-30 a year and remains fairly consistent. WS added 7 lakes in 2015 due to wild rice protection in Wildlife Areas in Langlade and Polk Counties. Wildlife Services provided \$750.00 to the Future Trappers of Wisconsin.

Furbearer Survey Updates: Robert Rolley provided updates in the absence of Brian Dhuey. 21 track surveys were conducted in 2015 with only 8 track surveys conducted in southern counties. The winter weather in 2015 made it difficult to perform surveys in Southern region. Generally in the north, snowshoe and fox detections were fairly low. Detection of wolf was high. Bobcats were detected in southern surveys with a fair number of coyotes detected as well. Otter did not vary from the past trends. Trapper, beaver trapper and bobcat harvester mail surveys are currently being conducted and will be summarized in the August reports.

2015/2016 Carcasses Collection Results & 2016/2017 Collection Plans: Nathan Roberts provided updates. Each year the DNR collects harvested bobcat carcasses and age and reproductive status. Reproductive status of females is collected by extracting the reproductive tract and looking at individual's placental scars. Fisher skulls were collected to determine age. Every three years, otters are collected to determine age, sex and reproductive success. Otter carcasses were collected in 2015. Teeth were sent to Madison Laboratory in Montana. Data will be returned in approx. 6 months and are fed into population models. Several hundred skulls are shipped back to harvesters per their request, annually. Returning skulls is costly and restricts the

money to be used for research expenses. If trappers/hunters sent jaws-only to the DNR rather than the whole skull, the DNR would save on shipment costs and would no longer be responsible for lost or damaged skulls. Committee had a brief discussion on species that would require jaw-only vs. skull submission and decided that harvesters will submit jaws from one or more species in 2018. Shawn and Jenna will follow up with Nathan and law enforcement on best methods for preparing harvesters for the change.

Tribal Furbearer Research & Management Update: Jonathan Gilbert and Nick McCann (GLIFWC) provided updates. Marten and fisher research was performed throughout the fall and winter of 2015/2016. Seven individual marten were captured last fall which is the highest thus far. Ten individuals were captured in the winter. New GPS collars provided GLIFWC with the opportunity to collar juvenile martens and follow them in one minute intervals. Recapture will begin in the fall of 2016 to collect summer location data from the collars. Genetic materials were collected and archived until funds are available to evaluate the samples. Collected data will be paired with LiDAR habitat data to see areas of use and corridor usage. GLIFWC is collaborating with Dr. Jonathan Pauli at UW-Madison to continue marten and fisher diet research and population assessment. A student is looking at marten connectivity of the Nicolet National Forest to the UP of Michigan. Martens have been discovered on the Apostle Islands. Dr. Pauli is using cameras and scat detection to determine occurrence and origin. Hypothesis on origin include: 1-introduction efforts; 2-dispersal from inland reintroduction; 3-they were always there.

National Forest Update: Dan Ecklund provided updates. Marten are being found on Bayfield peninsula and are being collared in NW Wisconsin. Northeast Wisconsin researchers are replicating what they have done in the past using hair snares and looking at presence/absence of marten. Habitat type/preference is being compared in the two regions and forest structure is an area of interest. Nicolet NF has fewer clear-cuts due to hardwood dominant forests than the Chequamegon NF which has a large aspen component. Beaver work continues with APHIS. Bobcats seem to be increasing in numbers. The fisher population remains healthy and otters are abundant. Timber harvest is slightly higher this year and timber values are down.

Beaver Survey Methods Update: Nathan Roberts provided updates. Beaver surveys were conducted using helicopters in 2014 and will be conducted every three year as in the past. The cost in 2014 was about \$60,000 and only covered 1/3 of the state. The DNR is looking into other forms of beaver detection using fixed-wing surveys and satellite imagery. In 2014 fixed-wing beaver observations were collected and will be compared to high resolution satellite imagery which has a one-time cost of \$2,000-\$3,000. A study funded by the EPA on the St. Louis River estuary is looking into contaminants in aquatic carnivores. Bryn Evans is researching otter using fixed wing, helicopter surveys and trail cameras to count otter slides and observations. Preliminary work suggests that fixed wing detection of beaver was fairly accurate when compared to helicopter surveys. Fixed wing is less costly and may be a better source for beaver surveys. Fixed-wing is \$135/hour compared to helicopters at \$1000+/hour. Helicopters require contracts and fixed-wings don't. Preliminary work also suggests that bankside trail cameras can

provide additional information that fixed wing or helicopter surveys do not capture. Looking at a more cost effective technique and looking at the beaver/trout relationship are high priority. The Beaver Management Plan calls for a better census technique and to create indices to look at beaver damage levels. Committee briefly discussed the Beaver Management plan, funds for trout research, and switching to another form of data collection.

Body-grip Trigger Side-Study Progress Report: David Ruid and Nathan Roberts provided updates. The goal is to find out if the trigger configurations that the DNR recommended are functioning as an incidental otter avoidance tool. In 2014, in cooperation with WS, a study was conducted during the recreational trapping season using a modified trigger configuration (off-set trigger) and a standard configuration (middle trigger) placed on the top of a 330 body-grip trap. WS trapped 47 beaver with the modified trigger configuration with 5 incidental otter and 50 beaver with the standard configuration with 2 incidental otter. 2015 results on an every-other trap basis showed that the modified configuration trapped 43 beaver with 3 incidental otter and 63 beaver with the standard configuration with 5 incidental otters. The sample size has 203 beaver with 15 incidentals; standard: 90 beavers/5 otter or 11 beaver/otter and modified: 113 beavers/7 otter or 16 beaver/otter. Currently all triggers are placed on the top of the trap. Many trappers configure it on the bottom of the trap. Committee discussed other configurations that could be added to the study and agreed to complete more work on this study before discussing further. Nathan and David will look at and analyze the data and decide if more research should/needs to be done. If data continues to suggest the off-set method is not an avoidance technique, discussion and steps will be taken to reevaluate our otter avoidance materials.

330 Trigger Study	WS Trapping Season	Beavers Trapped	Otters Trapped	Beavers Trapped / 1 Otter
Modified	2014	47	5	9
	2015	43	3	14
Modified Study Total		90	8	11
Standard	2014	50	2	25
	2015	63	5	13
Standard Study Total		113	7	16
Study Totals		203	15	14

BMP Trap Research Status and AFWA updates: John Olson provided updates. BMP efforts continue and the Technical Working Group (TWG) is encouraging states with specific interest to do side-studies. The WI otter avoidance side-study will most likely be incorporated into the otter and beaver BMPs. The TWG met in early February in Brevard, NC to discuss BMP accomplishments, future plans and national updates. Minutes of this meeting can be found on the AFWA website under the Sustainable Use of Wildlife Committee site listing for the Furbearer

Technical Working Group. The last two years the annual Joint Management Committee meeting with Russia, Canada and the European Union has been cancelled due to global issues not related to the international fur market.

2016 is the agreed upon deadline to complete initial humane trap research for all U.S. furbearers. Trap research for all U.S. furbearers. This initial trap research, presented in the form of published documents (located at: www.fishwildlife.org), has been completed for all U.S. furbearers with the exception of wolverine. The wolverine BMP study will have to be conducted in Canada with efficiency examination being added to their trap research. If able to conduct the wolverine BMP study, the costs associated may affect other trap research for the next two years.

Two multi-state grants are currently being administered for trap surveys and training. 6,668 trappers were surveyed nationwide and the final survey report is near completion. Additional surveys deployed include “State Trapping Regulations and Use and Implementation of BMPS for Trapping by State Wildlife Agencies” and “Use of BMPs in the National Wildlife Refuge System.”

Trapping Matters workshops have taken place or will take place this year in NC, VT, MD, OR, MO and IL. The Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society (WCTWS) is going to look at hosting a workshop in WI this summer with assistance from the DNR and WTA. This will be offered to WTA trapper ed instructors, members of the WCTWS and three student chapters of TWS.

A body-grip “white paper” is progressing with photos currently being added. This document should be finished by this summer and available electronically. This will replace the “Ethical and Responsible Use of the Body Grip Trap” that Wisconsin currently uses.

Two cable restraint locks for coyote and fox were tested in 2015. Efficiency and a low sample size caused the breakaway pin to fail. The other lock passed. A breakaway measurement device was developed in NDSU and is being used to test breakaway devices through assistance from WS and the nd Predator Hunter & Trapper Association.

Two footholds for coyote were tested. One passed, one failed. An enclosed trigger trap (Coon Cuff) was testing poorly due to low efficiency and sample size. Additional testing showed improved humane scores yet when combined with earlier work, resulted in a pooled failing score. More testing will occur to determine if improvements were made to the device and if so, how such changes may have improved the devices’ humane standing. Trap research for arctic fox was conducted on St. George Island of the Pribiloffs with all three traps passing with low injury and high efficiency scores: #1 padded-two coilspring, #1 ½ padded-two coilspring, and the cage trap. The MB650 4-coil was tested on wolves in 2014 and 2015 with somewhat low efficiency scores and some injury, however still short of minimum sample size. Minnesota is going to continue testing in 2016 to complete sample size. The #2 size footholds will be expanded in future trap tests. Duke #3, Bridger #3 and #9 Bridger Brawn will be added to coyote

BMP with an emphasis on safety regarding the Brawn. More data needs to be collected from cubby-sets using trail cameras.

Horicon Fur Farm 2015-2016 Summary: Chris Cole provided updates. In 2015/2016, six full units were offered to trappers and one unit to youth. When comparing harvest from 2014 to 2015, there was significant change in harvest due to the “dike-trapping-only” mandate that was in effect in 2014. Horicon staff believes muskrat numbers are increasing and will continue to rise. Open units for the 2016 trapping season will be determined late June/early July. Otter complaints have been at a high and 8 otter were taken off the property the past two years (4/yr). Although other states have been seeing a decline in muskrat harvest, harvest at Horicon is still high. Aerial photo counts of muskrat houses have been completed the past two years. Data analysis should be completed by next year. A “house-count” will be a good index of fluctuating population numbers although it is difficult to distinguish huts from feeders.

Furbearer Tagging, Go Wild & Other Updates: Linda Olver provided updates. No changes to furbearer tagging requirements. Harvesters still required to immediately validate carcass tag upon harvest. Bobcat, fisher and otter tags will still be printed on durable material by DNR Wildlife (i.e. not available in Go Wild). One change that was made in statute that pertains to furbearers is allowing harvesters to carry proof of approval rather than the original approval itself. For instance, instead of carrying a trapping license, statute now authorizes trappers to show acceptable proof of an approval. The department was given emergency rule authority to identify what is acceptable proof of an approval. The emergency administrative rule specifies a conservation card, reprint authenticated WI driver’s licenses or PDF image displayed on an electronic device are acceptable forms of proof of a hunting or trapping license. The emergency rule became effective on March 12 and Go Wild went live on the 17th. Informational documents on alternative forms of proof, protecting your carcass tag, and FAQs about Go Wild and carcass tagging, etc. were made available on the Go Wild online license site (<https://gowild.wi.gov/>). The DNR website also provides a link to sources for help by searching “Go Wild” from the main DNR web page (<http://dnr.wi.gov/GoWild/>)

The emergency rule also modified tagging requirements for deer, bear, elk, turkey, and sharp-tailed grouse to lessen the opportunity for paper carcass tags to be damaged or lost. While a hunter must still immediately validate the carcass tag upon killing the animal, they are now only required to attach the carcass tag if they leave the carcass. This allows a hunter to keep the validated carcass tag in their pocket while dragging their deer out of the woods.

The ALIS system was outdated and needed to be replaced. By moving to paper licenses, users get immediate fulfillment power and can reprint a license at any time free of charge. Customers may now use alternative forms of proof of holding a license, make changes themselves to their applications and view their preference points. Currently, the department has sold over 100,000 conservation cards, which are a good option for anyone who does not have a WI driver’s license (youth, nonresidents, etc.). Some concerns about paper carcass tags and the ability to reproduce more than one carcass tag. To decrease concerns, the DNR made it illegal to carry more than

one unique carcass tag (with same tag identification number) while afield or on the waters, implemented electronic harvest reporting which allows wardens faster access to harvest registration data, and after registering the animal, that carcass tag cannot be reprinted or reused in the system.

Beaver Management Plan: John Olson provided updates. The previous beaver plan was created in 1990 and the key message was to reduce beaver populations in zones A and B. Government, tribes, partners and facilitators formulated the Beaver Task Force in 2011. Meetings were held statewide, surveys were distributed and a live webinar was offered. There were 571 respondents to the surveys, 33 written comments and 1 phone comment with the north participating more than the south. The plan had 6 goals—habitat management, population management, damage management, education, disease monitoring and research—with 33 objectives. Beaver population objectives include: zones A & B – maintain or slight increase, Zone C – maintain, Zone D – maintain or slight decrease. Implementation will be through the DNR furbearer staff, the Beaver Task Force and outreach through the internet, meetings and updates. The threshold for review of beaver control streams is 50% of perennial stream mileage on a county basis. Biologists are tasked with identifying the streams that they plan to control prior to the season. Fisheries and wildlife will be holding informational meetings for the public and wildlife/fishery professionals this summer and fall. The MOU between the DNR and Wildlife Services will be shared with Fisheries, LE, Forestry, NHC, Wildlife and CS&L bureaus and input will be accepted.

Midwest Furbearer Workshop 2016: Shawn Rossler provided updates. A study conducted at Voyageurs State Park, MN showed that in high density populations female beavers dispersed further than males in the spring and males further than females in the fall. Spring female had a dispersal rate of 75% and fall males had a rate of 60%. Another Voyager's study showed that wolves wait near dams, lodges and travel corridors to ambush beavers. Minnesota's cable restraint study suggests entanglement is the principal concern when using cable restraints. Cable restraints caused little injury to the wolves and injury that did occur was caused by wolves chewing at the cables (minor cuts to the gums). 9,300 trap nights resulted in 25 wolves captured and 1 mortality due to mechanical failure. Stable isotope analysis work in MN showed that tissue samples in predators and their prey were more reliable than hair samples. In northern CA, bobcats were found to be the greatest source of mortality for fisher. When in search of den trees, fisher do not select trees based on their species but rather their DBH. Denning fishers have strong correlation with trees with a DBH of 19 inches or greater. Snapshot Wisconsin is a new citizen-based study that plans to deploy 3000-4000 cameras throughout Wisconsin and have citizens distinguish what animal(s) is in each picture. Predator-prey population synchronicities in Manitoba showed when prey abundance was low, marten and great horned owl showed a two-year-lag response. Weasels tended to respond sooner due to low mobility. Moose in MN have normal pregnancy rates but low survival rates. Study reveals that moose death stems from >65% disease and 17% wolf predation with most sick or injured before death.

Lynx and CITES Update: Nathan Roberts and John Olson provided updates. A lynx species status assessment is being conducted through the USFWS and will decide if a recovery plan is necessary. In 2000 lynx were listed as threatened in the U.S. In 2006 and 2009, there were attempts to classify northern MN as critical habitat for lynx, both times they were rejected. In 2014 northern MN was classified as core critical habitat for lynx creating a concern for a future requirement to a recovery plan for lynx. There are seventeen risks that pertain to lynx and incidental harvest is one of them. Currently, ME and ID have restricted trapping regulations due to this. Representation, redundancy and resiliency was looked at in 2015. 2051 samples of lynx showed 7 hybrids that were all female lynx producing with male bobcats. Lynx populations trends show a decreasing population. Climate change is another threat to lynx and will cause them to lose southern habitat and/or gain northern habitat. USFWS has a deadline for 2018 to have a recovery plan in place or justify why a recovery plan is not needed. Historical records for WI are vague. Lynx-cat was documented at a time with lynx-cat was used as another term for bobcat. However, breeding pairs of lynx were never documented in WI.

An environmental group filed an intent to sue in federal court challenging the USFWS. The group is working to cease the issuing of wolf and bobcat CITES tags until a study of its effects on wildlife populations is done nationwide and finds “no-detriment” to populations. The lawsuit states that the research wasn’t vigorous enough to find no-detriment. In the early 1990s, state courts found that there petitioners did not have sufficient information to make the case that bobcats were threatened and that they had the burden of proof. There doesn’t seem to be a similar interest/risk to otter management. Annually, Wisconsin sends in a CITES “no-detriment” paperwork for bobcat and river otter.

The TWG of AFWA has polled all states and is working with the respective regions on their interest in securing CITES tagging approval from the Service. This tool would improve the timely submission of biological samples to labs in other countries as well as allow harvesters to more easily and economically sell black bear furs on regulated, international markets.

Review of Historical Fisher Harvest and Discussion of New Zones: Nathan Roberts and Shawn Rossler provided updates. From 1990 to 2014, harvest has moved from a northernmost harvest to a statewide harvest with changing high harvest density areas. Currently, there are six fisher harvest zones with four of the six zones have management goals. The small zones make it difficult to run and analyze track surveys and divide high density populations. As fisher are expanding throughout the state, the distribution of fisher zones may need adjustment. Zones were created and added to reflect fisher presence in an area. A small subcommittee discussed the simplification of fisher zones. Two options discussed by the FAC to simplify zones would be three zones with a north, central and southern zone or two zones with a northern and southern zone. A northern zone and southern zone would simplify population goals. Analyzing density (fisher per square mile) may be a more efficient and effective way to manage fisher populations. If rezoning was prospect, new management goals would need to be established. An unfavorable option discussed by the Committee was to diminish zones and have a narrow harvest season.

Committee discussed briefly on the need for zone change, the goals for fisher management throughout the state, and the prospect of creating a fisher management plan. Committee supports the general idea of restructuring the zone of fisher, similar to current bobcat zones, to increase simplification and use a broad management goal.

Review of Historical Otter Harvest and Discussion of New Zones: Nathan Roberts and Shawn Rossler provided updates. 2014- 2015 harvest density was mostly even across the state. Setting management goals based on landscape is simple and reasonable. Committee recommends splitting the state in a northern zone and a southern zone, similar to current bobcat zones and the earlier committee recommendation for fisher. The state wide population goal is 13,000. Will the WPT agree with a change in management zones if there is no change in management goals? The committee as a whole supports the idea of restructuring the zone of otter to increase simplification. Shawn will propose a change to the WPT in June.

Public Input with 3 minute time limit: No public input.

Bobcat Research Updates: Nathan Roberts provided updates. Wisconsin's 2014 pre-harvest bobcat population was estimated to be about 2,500 individuals and the harvest quota was set at 240 in the northern zone and 100 in the southern zone. In 2014, a pilot study was conducted with 7 bobcats collared. In 2015, 29 bobcats were captured and collared in 12 counties of northern WI with help from the WTA and local trappers who incidentally caught bobcats. Over 30 trappers were involved in 2015 with 25 of them receiving bobcat updates and maps. The goal of the study was to use the data gathered to estimate mortality/survivorship, suitable habitat and gain better population estimation methods. Collars send location twice a day. As of today, two bobcats died of natural causes, two were harvested and one was killed for predation control. Female cats were found to have 25 square mile home ranges and males 40 square miles. Overlap is occurring (especially during the summer months) with little overlap among adult females. Some problems that have arose over the study period are ATS collars have had antennas chewed off and about 50% of collars failed during the study. Future plans are to deploy another 30 collars in the northern portion of the state and begin a project in the southern portion with 30 collars deployed in ten counties with assistance from local trappers. The southern study will analyze stable isotopes for bobcats and focus on CWD in whitetails and predation of bobcat and coyote on deer. A camera grid will be set up spanning the study area. Cameras will have proximity sensors to get detection rates for each camera. The project costs about \$60,000/year and is funded with application fees and match through PR funding.

River Otter Research Updates: Nathan Roberts provided updates. The reliability of current river otter survey techniques is being evaluated. Bridge surveys may be an option to supplement our trend analysis and will most likely be a citizen-based volunteer effort.

June 1, 2016: Day 2 – Quota Setting and Rule Proposals

Call to order at 7:57 am with introductions, agenda repair, and review of committee protocol.

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. Most data is based on the call-in registration data provided shortly after harvest. For bobcat and fisher, changes are usually minor. River otter season closes in April and harvest estimates will increase from those presented.

Fisher Harvest & Season Review 2015: Robert Rolley. In 2015, the harvest goal was 985. Total harvest was 738: 596 harvested by WI trappers, 49 by incidental harvest, and 93 by off reservation tribal harvest. Breakdown by zones: A: 82, B, 23, C 54, D 79, E 148, F 208, with 2 unknown. 80% of fisher harvested were taken off private land with 18% public land harvest. Most incidentals were taken via body-grip and road kills. The highest harvest rates were at the end of December. Twenty-one total track survey routes were completed in the north. In the past, tribes would harvest about 30 fisher per year but have recently quit fisher trapping as sightings and sign are low. Committee briefly discussed using wolf track data for track survey trends. This has not been done in the past due to lack of data provided, unequal effort across the board and inconsistent data. Shawn will look into obtaining the data and add discussion of the use of the survey next year.

Harvest success rates from 2014-2015 were similar in the zones A, C & D and lower in the zones B, E & F. Eight of the nine track survey routes were completed in zone A, 5/12 in B, 3/6 in C, and 5/12 zone D. The mild winter made it difficult to do track surveys this year due to poor snow and increased dust over. An attempt to identify covariates and extrapolate the data to provide more reliable data was tested unsuccessfully. Trends in track counts are estimated as 3-year running average to smooth annual variation associated with changes in tracking conditions. Eau Claire and Marathon counties have had spikes of observations in the past, but all central counties where fisher have been detected are now seeing few to no tracks. Deer hunter wildlife surveys show that in the past 4 years fisher are being observed in greater numbers in the northern and central forests and less in the central and southern farmlands. Harvest age distribution of fishers has not changed greatly from past years. Juveniles are 50% of harvest with juvenile males harvest greater than juvenile female harvest in zones E & F.

Fisher Model & 2016 Harvest Recommendations: Population models are informed by track index data.

Zone A: The population is leveling off with a little less than 2000 individuals and a population goal of 1700. For the population to remain stable or increase, the harvest goal should be at or below 175 (150-175 fisher). Harvesting more than 175 fisher is projected to decrease the population. Harvest recommendations were between 125 and 175.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone A Harvest Quota of 150.

Zone B: Population models suggest that the population is declining slowly overtime and bottomed out a few years ago. With the conservative harvest the past three years, the model suggests a slight increase in population; however, the track index continues to decrease.

Population of the 2015 pre-harvest was estimated to be below the goal of 3,200 fisher. In 2015, the harvest goal was 75 and a harvest of 28 was achieved and success rates below average. The model shows that currently are 1,000+ individuals away from our population goal. Harvest recommendations were between 50 and 75 with a majority recommending 75.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone B Harvest Quota of 75.

Zone C: Population model suggests that the population has stabilized in the past few years. Harvest goal of 60 in 2015 with 54 harvested. The population goal is 1600 in which we are a few hundred under. 50 would allow a slow growth and a harvest of 75 would put pressure on the population. Success rates were low in 2015 but consistent to years' past. Committee all agreed with sustaining the quota.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone C Harvest Quota of 60.

Zone D: Population model suggests the population is stable or slightly increasing. Track counts have been stable the past 3 years. Population goal is 2,700. Model shows population low by 1000 individuals. Harvest goal was 75 with 86 harvested. Success rates for the past three years have been fairly consistent. Recommendations were to increase opportunity by increasing the quota to 100.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone D Harvest Quota of 100.

Zone E: Zone E does not have an established population goal or model due to lack of indices to calibrate the model. Harvest quota is based on harvest success. In 2015, the highest quota ever set was 250 fisher with the lowest success rate since 2007. Harvest recommendations were between 230 and 250 with a majority recommending 250.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone E Harvest Quota of 250.

Zone F: Zone F does not have an established population goal or model due to lack of indices to calibrate the model. Harvest quota, which has been gradually increasing over they years, is based on harvest success. Last year there was a quota of 350 and achieved 208 harvested. Success rates dropped in 2015. Fisher are expanding their range and there has been in increase in sightings.

Committee Recommendation: Fisher Zone F Harvest Quota of 350.

Otter Harvest & Season Review 2015/2016: Otter harvest numbers tend to change the most from now to August. Preliminary total river otter harvest in 2015/2016 was 1,181. The harvest goal was 1,700: 680 in the north and 510 in the south and central zones. Trappers with permits harvested 950, incidental take 175 (38 of those were from APHIS), off reservation tribal harvest 35 and 21 on reservation tribal harvest. The majority of harvest was in the northern zone and on private property. The bulk of the harvest was in December. Total incidentals decreased in 2014 and trapper harvest increased putting otter in the hands of trappers, not the state. Total harvest of otter was down from 2014's 1200 harvested otter.

Otter Model & 2016/2017 Harvest Recommendations: There was a drop in permit success in all three zones. Aerial otter surveys were flown to index populations: 16/23 routes in northern, 15/23 in central and 4/23 in southern due to poor snow and ice conditions. The percentage of stream and river crossings with otter tracks was 16% in the northern zone, 10% in the central zone and 5% in the southern zone. Trends in aerial survey indices suggest an initial decline with stabilization in the northern zone and central zone and no consistent trend in the southern zone. Beaver trapper opinion shows that there was an increase in trend for otter abundance in all zones. The northern winter track surveys are not designed for otter detection and show little to no trend (aerial surveys, harvest success rates and trapper opinions surveys). The deer hunter wildlife survey is not a reliable source for otter detection. The three main indices for otter population trend diverge in different directions and show no consistencies. Model shows we're below population goal with a slow growth in the population. Model would suggest a quota of 1200 would grow the population while a goal of 1500 would decrease the population. The model has not been recalibrated in a number of years due to inconsistent trends among indices; hence there is uncertainty about the estimates generated from the model. In 2015 the quota increased 30%, there was a decrease in incidental otter and an increase in otter observations by trappers. Another 30% increase would be a quota of 2,200 otters. Allocation in 2015 remained at 40%N-30%C-30%S. Recommendations ranged from 2000 to 2200.

Committee Recommendation: State Otter Quota of 2000 with a 40-30-30 allocation.

Bobcat Harvest & Season Review 2015: In 2015, there was a harvest quota of 400 bobcats: 300 in the northern zone and 100 in the southern. The total harvest is 263 by state permit holders, 46 incidentals, 6 on reservation and 50 off reservation with a total harvest of 365. 63% were taken by hunters over dogs and 31% trapped. 57% on public land and 37% private. The majority of incidental harvest was road kills with 28 reported. Majority of southern bobcats were harvested in the northernmost portion of the southern zone. The total number of carcasses handled by the DNR was one of the highest with 326 carcasses processed. Committee discussed local bobcat sightings, nuisance bobcat, decreased pregnancy rates and prey concerns.

Bobcat Model & 2016 Harvest Recommendations: Harvest success rates dropped this year. Hunting over dogs was 63% of harvest. Composition of harvest has been skewed to adults. Hunter selection or the low pregnancy rates could drive this.

Northern Zone: 21 transects winter-track transects were completed in northern WI with bobcats being detected on 2 of them (10%), the lowest percentage of transects in many years. Deer hunter wildlife surveys showed lower observations of bobcats in the north. Trapper/hunter opinion expresses that populations have remained stable or slightly decreased. Hunter/trapper harvest/effort has decreased in the past 5 years. Population model shows that we are at the low end of the goal range in the northern forest bobcat zone. The model suggests that to stabilize the population, limiting the harvest to 125-150 might be needed. Laurie Groskopf, representative of the WWF, believes that the committee should not be concerned with low pregnancy rates since personnel are seeing more bobcats on the landscape. Laurie would like to see an increase in

permits. The Committee continued to discuss the decreasing pregnancy rates, downward track trends, prey abundance, and hunter observation numbers when compared to the last 5 years. Recommendations ranged from 125 to 300. Majority was in favor of a set quota of 225 bobcats.

Committee Recommendation: Bobcat Northern Zone Quota of 225.

Southern Zone: Southern bobcat season opened in 2014 with a harvest goal of 50 and increased to 100 in 2015. Routes in central and southern zone were at a low of 8 with two routes detecting bobcats. There was a drop in success rate the first period and an increase in the second period. Southern zone does not have an established population goal or model due to lack of indices to calibrate the model and relies on success rate to inform us. Recommendations ranged from 100 to 150.

Committee Recommendation: Bobcat Northern Zone Quota of 150.

Public Input with 3 min. time limit: none.

2016 Spring Hearing Results, DNR Advisory Questions:

DNR Q.7&8. Shorten beaver and otter season in Zone A and B: Shawn Rossler presented and handed out the voting results per county for question of 7 and 8. Currently our population survey data show a long-term decline in the northern beaver population. Support to shorten the beaver season in zones A and B was given at the WCC spring meeting. There was a proposal to shorten the beaver season three times in the last seven years. The Beaver Management Plan mentions changing seasons or management to increase or maintain beaver populations in Zones A and B. Trap effort is strongly correlated to the fur market. Relying on fur prices long-term is not a reliable method to ensure and increase or maintenance of beaver populations. Writing a flexible season into administrative rule will allow more immediate adjustment of season dates when needed. Seasons could be revisited every three to five years. Using emergency ruling was used too often in the past and is not looked highly upon.

The committee recommends creating a flexible, adjustable spring beaver and otter trapping season to increase/maintain the beaver population in Zones A & B.

DNR Q.11. NRB: Establish consistent season end dates for fall turkey, pheasant, partridge, fisher and archery deer. There was little discussion on the topic and all members are in favor.

The committee supports a consistent season end date among the above harvest animals.

Results of the 2016 Conservation Congress Meeting:

WCC Q.24. Single dry land trapping opener: Passed in 45/72 counties. Consistent dryland opener was not supported by the WTA. 10 of the 27 of the counties that would have a shortened season would prevent trappers from taking advantage of foothold traps in certain years due to weather. WCC has sent this back to the fur harvest committee to discuss in August. Furbearer Advisory Committee will not move forward on this at this time.

WCC Q.25: Establish an otter bag limit. Some trappers are not happy with the lottery format. Otters have a robust population statewide and therefore a species of interest by all user groups. Last spring bag limits on otter were voted down by the Furbearer Advisory Committee. The proposal passed the Conservation Congress meeting again with 63/72 counties in favor of it. To establish otter bag limits, the season will be significantly shorter and a quota will still be followed. If a one-bag otter limit for just those trappers who have applied on a yearly basis using the same success rate would result in the north zone tripling in harvest. This means we would have to create an emergency closure that would most likely close before Christmas. The prohibited “loan and borrow” issues would be a greater problem for LE since everyone would have a tag and trappers who incidentally caught an otter wouldn’t have to search very hard for another trapper with an open tag. Although the committee does not support the otter bag limit, they are willing to draft the same question with language of a quota recommendation and emergency closure to the Fur Harvest Committee and allow citizens to vote on it next spring.

Proposing an otter bag limit with a quota and emergency closure rule will be drafted to the Fur Harvest Committee.

Conservation Congress County Resolutions:

Res.130516. End the hunting of coyote with dogs.

Res.131216. Stop trapping and killing river otters.

Res.280116, 540916, 650216. Return to having a southern zone for mink and muskrat season.

Res.280216. Institute a bounty to control coyotes. Fluctuations due to fur market can cause risk to coyote populations during times of high fur prices. Members were not supportive.

Res.370216. Landowner coyote cable restraint.

Res.450516. Use of lights to scan after dark for predator calling.

Res.540516. Early use of cable restraints.

Res.710416. Critical review for otter population and increase permit fee. Increase funds for wetland furbearers. Committee was supportive.

Res.710516. Trapping season simplification.

Res.720416. Increase harvest of predators.

Marten Management on the Apostle Islands: Todd, Jonathon, and John provided background information. The Apostle Island National Lakeshore (National Park Service) put together a chronology of martens on the Apostle Islands. Ten martens were released in the 1950s and they were last observed in 1969 on the ice near Stockton Island. In 2010 and 2014 marten were identified on the island. Since 2014, cameras and scat indicated that there were more marten on

six different islands than they originally thought. National Park Service staff are wondering if trapping may have an adverse effect on marten populations. Is it necessary or appropriate for the Park Service to adopt similar restrictions as Marten Restoration Areas in other areas of Wisconsin? Currently there is no known trapping on the islands. Potential trappers must obtain an access permit prior to trapping on the islands. When trapping season starts in October for most species, it is difficult to safely access the islands. Creating a Marten Restoration Area on the Islands would have little impact on trappers. Committee wants to be proactive in saving an endangered resource, but there is no legitimate concern that trapping will negatively impact marten. The Committee has no recommendations at this time.

Department Rule Proposal Considerations 2017:

Rule change/language for beaver season: The committee proposes creating a flexible, adjustable spring beaver and otter trapping season to increase/maintain the beaver population in Zones A & B.

Fisher/Otter management zone adjustments: Simplifying zones and looking at trend based goals rather than specific population zone goals will be beneficial. The committee proposes simplifying fisher and otter zones into larger zones consistent with the bobcat northern and southern zones. Committee recommends the otter season follow similar management goals of beaver.

Regulated badger season: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee established that Wisconsin has a healthy, viable, genetically diverse badger population in all 72 counties. The research showed that Wisconsin had the healthiest population when comparing it to neighboring states. The committee approved the 2014 proposal to create a statewide badger trapping season but it did get support from the Wildlife Policy Team.

The committee recommends drafting rule language to open a trapping season on badger.

Non-resident raccoon opener same as resident: Never made it to the senate due to opposition.

Permit citizens to trap on beaver dam during nuisance control work: This question originated from public input from the beaver management plan. Currently landowners and wildlife services can trap on dams. Some stakeholders would like to see consistency; either no trapping on dams for all or trapping on dams for all. Trapping on dams will negatively impact otters. When USDA did the 5 year review on trapping on dams, very few otters were taken incidentally. The ones that were caught were caught on crossovers or scent mounds. Notching into the dams – as some trappers may want to do – will increase incidental take. Committee is not supportive of allowing citizens to trap on beaver dams during nuisance control work.

Nuisance/damage control agent certification: Last year the committee was supportive. Nuisance wildlife control agent licensing paperwork would have to be written up from Brad Koele. Committee is supportive.

Incidental pelting fee: Minnesota does this for river otter and has seen problems in the past and have combatted those difficulties. Committee is not supportive.

Housekeeping update: NR 10 Reference to drowning language. New language will be “submersion sets” and defined as a trap capable of full submersion which results in irreversible unconsciousness. The maximum size of a colony trap will be changed to 6.5” x 6.5” x 36.5”. Steel-jawed trap will now be referred to as ‘jawed trap’ as there are plastic traps on the market.

Fur farm otter harvest: Except for otter, a license is not needed to trap nuisance furbearers. Do fur farm owners need to have a trapping license? Currently fur farms get one permit per farm.

Meeting Review & Future Agenda Items: Discussion of coyote abundance and competition for prey resources and competition may be affecting bobcat and fisher.