May 30, 2017: Day 1 – Reports and Updates

Furbearer and Fur School updates by Shawn Rossler – A Trapping Matters Workshop was held at the University of Wisconsin (UW) Stevens Point and is one day of training on regulated trapping. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), Max McGraw Institute, the Wisconsin Trappers Association (WTA) and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Four Fur schools were held this year at Northland College, UW Stevens Point, UW Madison and a Wildlife Fur School at the Fur Resources Training Center in Deforest. Fur schools will be continuing at college campuses and for wildlife and law enforcement professionals. Last year’s otter drawing error was discussed – extra otter tags (385) went out to the central zone due to the northern zone permit level being entered for the central zone during the drawing process. What do we do to prevent this in the future? Consolidate data, increase coordination between wildlife and customer service with scheduled checkpoints throughout the process to reduce the chance of a similar mishap. Permit paper stock ran out last season so we are in the process of ordering and testing new permit stock.
**Trapper Ed updates** by Curtis Twellmann – We are adding an online Trapper Education class that along with the correspondence class will offer two remote class options for our students. The online class should be launched this summer. Both remote class options will require students to pass a field test after finishing the course to be certified. The field test options are also new as of this year. There have been two field tests administered to date with five graduates total. Though it is early, what we have learned so far is that students may need some trap setting instruction prior to being graded on the trap setting portion of the field test. This is one aspect of the class that is difficult to prepare for if you don’t have traps at home to tinker with. Trapper education classes and graduates were down again last year likely as a result of the low fur prices. We had 902 graduates of the “in person” Trapper Ed classes and 599 graduates of the correspondence course. The correspondence course saw a bit of an increase most likely due to the coming field test out requirement (students who finished in 2016 did not have to take the test out). We are in the process of testing a paper type called “Synaps xm” in the sizes of 5 mil, 8 mil and 10 mil to replenish the stock of bobcat, fisher and otter (BFO) carcass tags. The paper holds the ink really well but may be easier to tear than paper we have used in the past. We are continuing the testing on this paper’s durability and plan to decide if it will work for us by early summer. We tested Tyvek paper as well but encountered problems with the printer feed and so it was deemed not suitable for our purpose.

**Wisconsin Trapper’s Association updates** by Scott Zimmerman – The WTA again held the Learn to Trap event at Horicon. This event continues to be well received by the participants and instructors alike. The WTA testified on 3 bills this year including: the Railroad Crossing Bill, the Right Of Way dispatch bill and the Youth Mentor Bill with corrected language from last year’s version that the WTA opposed. The WTA is also commenting on other legislation including: uniform season open and end dates and the woodchuck season resolution that would create a season for woodchucks in Wisconsin. A season for woodchucks will help decrease nuisance issues as well as provide opportunity for harvest on a healthy population. Next June we will be hosting the Fur Takers of America (FTA) convention here in Wisconsin. Our fall rendezvous in Marshfield is scheduled for September 8th and 9th at the Central Wisconsin fairgrounds. District rendezvous season is upon us. Check the WTA website about the district rendezvous coming up.

**Tribal Furbearer Research and Management update** by Nick McCann – The marten abundance and habitat use study is ongoing. This season we had 11 total marten captures. Three of the captured marten were new to the project with the remainder being recaptures that allowed for data acquisition and collar swapping. A recent mark recapture study using genetics to “mark” and identify individuals concluded that marten population growth is low in Wisconsin at about 2%. In the Eagle River District marten populations appear to be stable or slightly increasing while in the Great Divide District populations have declined. In the Great Divide District adult marten’s survival rate was not low but considering low rates of juvenile capture, recruitment and/or reproduction may be low to moderate. Prevalence of shrews in marten diets may indicate prey limitations. Martens were tougher to find this year than in previous years. Some small pockets of marten had seemingly vanished though it is not known if they emigrated or died. We are not sure why as it seems habitat is unchanged as is fisher abundance but we will continue to monitor the situation. There is a GLIFWC publication going out in the
Wildlife Society Bulletin about track identification between fisher and marten. Small female fisher tracks and large male marten tracks can be difficult to differentiate. This publication should help with track identification in the field. Our marten collars have about a 50% fail rate, which is high but not unexpected with new technology. The collars we had been using have been discontinued so we are searching for comparable collars that will work for our purpose.

**Furbearer Surveys update** by Nathan Roberts – We completed 27 track survey routes throughout the state this past season. Confidence bars were placed on these counts to offer transparency. We also began looking at scent station track surveys in 4 counties to determine if they might be a useful tool in our arsenal. This survey method consisted of scent posts with fatty acid tablets placed along the route to draw animals onto the transect. Some animals (like bobcats) may run perpendicular to roadways more often than on them, making them tougher to detect on a track survey than animals that routinely run the roads (like coyotes). We hope that the scent post stations may increase detection for some of these tougher to pick up furbearers. To further test our detection rate, we set out encrypted cameras along track surveys to see how often the surveyor correctly identifies tracks. Preliminary analysis shows a high rate of misidentifying tracks by surveyors with some species having lower rates of detection/higher rates of misidentification than others. We will continue to test scent posts throughout the state. Otter flights were up this year thanks to more volunteers wanting to fly (27 transects completed). More transects equal more confidence in the numbers generated. Of the surveyed transects 24% (plus or minus 6%) had otter sign. We are searching for an optimal sample size to be efficient while preserving a high level of confidence in the data generated. Aerial otter surveys have some limitations (high cost, can be dangerous, dependent on appropriate weather) so we have been developing some new survey methods to test. One of these new survey methods is a citizen science bridge crossing survey, using volunteers of interested public to monitor animal signs at bridges. This would be cost effective but there are questions about bias with this methodology. To help remedy the bias, we are developing an app that lists bridges to survey and would require surveyors to photograph the tracks at each location which will be geotagged by the device’s (smart phone most likely) GPS. The app will also prioritize bridges that have yet to be surveyed to encourage more coverage. This is still in the testing phase now. This fall we will probably be looking for volunteers for the bridge crossing survey.

**Carcass collections** by Nathan Roberts – This year (2016/17) we collected bobcat carcasses and fisher skulls. By collecting the entire bobcat carcass we can gather age structure and age specific reproduction. We collect a tooth for aging and the reproductive tracts of females to estimate litter size. For fisher we collect skulls only (pull a tooth for aging) as reproduction is more stable and does not need to be monitored every year. For river otter (which we collect every three years) here in Wisconsin, 1.98 years is the mean age of otter harvested, which is relatively old when compared to that of nearby states. Carcass collection is expensive in both time and resources with returning skulls to the successful trapper/hunter taking up a considerable portion of that time and money. To cut back on this expense next year we are having trappers send in fisher jaws and not the entire skull. This helps protect the skull which is usually a trophy to the hunter/trapper and will save us considerable time and money not having to return those skulls. We will still be returning bobcat skulls to trappers/hunters but they will need to include a note stating that they want it returned (instead of clipping the tag corner like last year) and
their current address. This should further reduce the amount of skulls we have to ship and ensure that
the ones we do ship go to the right address the first time. This will be in the regulations booklet this year
with instructions on how to properly remove a section of the jaw for fisher. If this test works we may
expand this to reduce our handling of all skulls. Due to increased numbers of otter – we randomly
sampled 100 rather than processing all animals. Results were similar to previous years using this sample.
To maintain efficiency we will continue to process a representative sample of otter carcasses.

**Wildlife Services Beaver Control updates** by David Ruid - Beaver numbers appear to be high and
increasing. Habitat has increased over much of Wisconsin with higher water levels this spring and there
have been fewer fur trappers going after beaver. These conditions combined make it busy times for
Wildlife Services (WS). We have removed 900 beaver so far this spring, which puts us on pace for a
record year. In 2016 WS removed 1,958 beaver, nearly a record year. Only in 1996 did WS remove more
beaver (1,976). In 2016, 864 of the beaver removed were taken for trout habitat protection with the
remaining 1,094 being removed due to damage complaints. We have continued to monitor incidental
otter captures. About 1 otter was incidentally taken for every 20 beaver caught last year. The overall
trend shows that even though last year was pretty good, in general more and more otter are being
trapped per beaver in Wisconsin. In 2015 and 2016 WS continued testing trigger position for reducing
non targets (otter). The first trigger position in our study was centered and twisted together. The second
trigger position is offset and twisted together like suggested in the “Otter Avoidance” brochure. Total
sample equaled: 219 beaver 16 otter 5 muskrat and 1 raccoon. With 134 cervical catches 57 double
(suitcase catch) and 26 hip catches. The middle trigger resulted in: 116 beaver, 8 otter and 3 muskrat
captures. The offset trigger resulted in: 103 beaver and 8 otter captured. We recorded strike location
with the middle trigger set of traps having 81 cervical catches (perfect strike location), 27 double (or
suitcase catch) and 8 hip catches (poor strike location). The set with offset triggers had 53 cervical, 30
double and 18 hip catches. So though the trigger position didn’t significantly reduce otter captures it did
result in less humane catches. This conclusion doesn’t match up with previous similar studies that have
shown that the offset trigger placement does reduce incidental otter captures. The Office of Applied
Science will work with WS to further test otter avoidance measures like trigger placement.

**Committee recommendation:** Stop using the otter avoidance brochure until more data is available.

**Beaver Management Plan update** by Shawn Rossler – In October 2015 we finalized the Beaver
Management Plan (BMP). Biannual meetings are recommended to keep folks informed and on the same
page regarding beaver management. This spring we had BMP meetings in 5 regions across Wisconsin.
They were held in Fitchburg, Eau Claire, Mountain, Spooner and Rhinelander all in March. The meetings
all seemed to go smoothly. The only topic that resulted in any real debate dealt was public access and
regulations versus the access and regulations that WS operates within. Private trappers want the same
access as WS has in nuisance cases like trapping on dams and using lure/bait out of season. The Beaver
task force reconvenes in 2020. During the regional meetings, opinions on local beaver populations were
also discussed. In Zone A, beaver populations are thought to be increasing. In Zone B there was no
discussion on current population trends. Trappers in the south thought that beaver numbers were
increasing. Timing of the meetings (evenings) was discussed. They were held in the evening to allow the
public to attend but agency staff wanted them held during the work day. We will revisit meeting times prior to the next regional meetings in 2019.

**Beaver survey updates** by Nathan Roberts - We attempt to monitor the trends in beaver populations rather than establish a statewide population estimate. We have monitored beaver trends in the following ways: end of the year trapper surveys giving us a rough catch per unit effort, fur buyer surveys to get an idea of total take (minus what goes to brokers) and aerial surveys by helicopter. The helicopter survey provides a population estimate in the two northern beaver zones, but has some limitations. The same 60 blocks have always been used which may not give us a good representation of beaver trends statewide and helicopter surveys are expensive ($10,000/day). Our cost for helicopter surveys have went up drastically recently as the pilot we once used has retired. We are initiating a study to test fixed winged surveys (less than 1000 per day with state pilots) to evaluate the efficiency as a replacement to the helicopter surveys. We may try to survey a sample and not all 60 blocks each year to further reduce the cost. Remote sensing might offer a much cheaper way to count feeding caches from the air. We intend to use satellite imagery to record fresh beaver sign in the same way we did from the helicopter and compare these results to that of other methods to determine if this survey type is feasible. This is a 2 year project but we should have some initial results on alternative monitoring methods for beaver by this time next year. Possibly in the future drones will be another option to evaluate.

**CITES Species updates** by Nathan Roberts - Lynx are classified as threatened in the lower 48. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) were sued for not doing enough to recover lynx in the lower 48. A species status assessment (SSA) was initiated for lynx in the lower 48 in response to that lawsuit. Wisconsin is categorized as a distinct population segment (DPS) for lynx and is not in their core range. Lynx occasionally show up in WI as a periodic visitor usually coinciding with a lynx boom and hare bust. Through the SSA it was determined that lynx in WI do not significantly contribute to the total conservation of lynx. The entire DPS (made up of several states) is only about 3% of the lynx’s range. The FWS was also sued regarding CITES export species (river otter and bobcats in Wisconsin) because the proper Environmental Assessment (EA) was not completed prior to the implementation of the CITES export program. FWS initiated an EA in response to this lawsuit. The FWS received comments on proposed changes, with the record of decision being that the CITES export can continue as is. Now it must pass through the courts but all signs point to no change. We are in the last year for the current river otter and bobcat state assessment (range wide no detriment findings). Range wide no detriment findings are used to show that state’s harvest do not jeopardize the entire population of otter and bobcat. We will need to renew this range wide no detriment findings.

**Furbearer Health updates** by Lindsey Long – We have been updating wildlife health database and making improvements. We are better able to track wildlife diseases but plotting these reports on maps is still a weakness. We hope to improve our plotting capabilities but for now hand drawn maps are utilized. Canine distemper (CDT) is the primary disease impacting WI furbearers currently. CDT is found in dogs, other canids (especially tough on gray fox), mustelids and raccoons. We have seen the most CDT reports for raccoons. Starting last fall we saw an increase in CDT prevalence in gray fox, skunks and raccoons. There are probably no population level impacts though local impacts may be observed. Most
mortality involves other issues since animals can recover from CDT if otherwise healthy. Other than the increase in CDT there have been no noteworthy concerns.

**Bobcat Research updates** by Nathan Roberts – In 2016 we completed the 3rd year of our bobcat study in the North. We have expanded the study area to 12 counties and have collared 52 bobcats. This is an excellent sample size for bobcats. Most of these bobcats were incidental captures by fur trappers. This has been a great example of teamwork between DNR researchers and fur trappers in the north. Mean home range sizes have been about 12 square miles, which is as expected. What is surprising is the amount of overlap in home ranges. We have seen a lot of overlap of home ranges in collared animals. We have also been surprised at habitat utilization with bobcats regularly using all habitat types. When we came up with the population number of 1000 bobcats in the south, only prime habitat was considered suitable and no overlap was taken into account. If we update the model to reflect more suitable habitat and some home range overlap the population estimate would increase significantly. Roads don’t seem to be an impediment to bobcat movements at least in the North. Survivorship is really high. Females showed an over 80% survivorship with males coming in around 60%. This may be due to harvest selectivity and hunters waiting for a larger cat (males tend to be larger). Harvest mortality appears lower than we account for in our current population analysis. If this is corrected to agree with the findings from our study than the population estimate would increase. It is possible that there is some bias when it comes to harvesting collared animals. We are looking into ways to see if this harvest bias exists for or against collared animals. The bobcat study in the north will continue this year and then we will need to determine if and how long we will continue into the future. In the south the study area is centered on Iowa County but includes 7 or 8 counties. This past year was the first year collaring bobcats in the south. We collared 8 bobcats to date for the southern area. Fewer trappers trapping and fewer trappers working with the DNR is the primary reason for the smaller numbers. This cooperation may improve as trust is built between trappers and DNR in the south. Even with small sample sizes we have seen a couple interesting things in the south. Four bobcats were caught on one 40 acre parcel with more collarless bobcats observed on camera. There may be some dense pockets of bobcats in the south.

**Bobcat Reproductive Rates updates** by Nathan Roberts - A perceived fall in reproduction may have more to do with changes in observers and technique than actual reproductive trends. We did a multiple state review to help ensure that our placental scar count methodology is consistent with other states. In Wisconsin all placental scars have been graded on a scale of 1-6 by how dark or fresh the scar appears to be (1 being light and 6 being darkest). Scars graded 3 or below were not counted as true scars for the current breeding season historically here in Wisconsin. This is inconsistent with how other states count placental scars. It is thought that bobcats don’t retain scars for more than one year. We think for about 10 years we may have been counting these scars more conservatively than our neighboring states. We first discovered this problem when yearling cats were having scars discounted because they were graded 1 – 3 meaning they were from a previous year, which is impossible for yearling animals. When corrected we see adult litter sizes of about 2.7 which is similar to other states.

**Bobcat Population Model updates** by Nathan Roberts – Pregnancy rates were updated in our population model after our correction. This increased the harvestable population in our model. We also identified some other inconsistencies in our population model and corrected them. Road kills ended up
in the column of harvested animals in the past which was corrected since we already have a metric on non-harvest mortality that would include road kills. Incidentals were also counted twice in the model as both incidentals and within harvest mortality. Correcting this double counting of certain types of mortality influenced our model output. Small changes in the mortality equal big changes in the population model. A harvest mortality of about 20% is what we aim for. All indications are that our previous models and estimates have been conservative on multiple parameters and the actual bobcat population in Wisconsin may be higher than we previously thought. We will continue to refine our parameters to generate the most accurate population data possible. We can use adaptive management as a way to proof population models. This entails using altered management strategies (higher or lower quota) and then evaluating the data to determine if harvest at that level is sustainable and how it affects the total bobcat population. We could use an experimental bobcat harvest structure where higher quotas are assigned to a localized area as a way to test and refine our statewide population model. This was done in New York with no negative impacts. New York has fewer trappers and far fewer hound hunters than we have in Wisconsin so an experimental season here may be more difficult to manage. We would have to consider every possible outcome to ensure that an increased harvest would not significantly impact statewide bobcat populations. A sub-committee of this committee will be formed to determine how best to proof and increase the precision of our population models for bobcats and if an experimental season has merit in refining our model. This sub-committee can also discuss new and better survey methods.

May 31, 2017: Day 2 – Quota Setting and Rule Proposals

Meeting initiated at 8:01 AM with agenda repairs and logistics. The committee was reminded that all quota decisions will be recommendations and subject to final approval. Much of the harvest and survey data presented is considered preliminary at the time of this meeting.

Fisher Management

Statewide Fisher seasons review by Nathan Roberts - Last season the harvest goal was set at 985. The observed harvest was 573 fishers. We have seen success rates decrease in all of our zones except zone F. Zone D had a significant decrease in success. Zone C and D also saw some decline in the track count indices. The track count indices are used to look at trends over time but may not be as useful as a year to year indicator as tracking conditions may have as much or more to do with detection as abundance. Age distribution and adult to juvenile ratio have been pretty consistent. In zone A the population model shows the population is stable. Remember that for fisher we are looking at a change down to 2 zones for the 2018-19 season. The consolidation of zones will cause us to lose some precision with our data, but will allow development of population models for each zone. Regionally fisher have declined throughout their core range but the range appears to be expanding. We’re not sure as to why this shift from core range to the periphery has occurred but it’s not unique to Wisconsin.

ZONE A
Tribal fisher update - We exceeded the threshold value in zone A (meaning we were over 15% of the total zone quota). In zone A the tribes harvested 20 fishers primarily in Burnett County. The remaining zones were below threshold.

Fisher season review – Our harvest goal last year was 150 fishers but we harvested just 56 in zone A. The low harvest may have more to do with effort than population levels. The OAS suggests leaving the harvest goal at 150. Note: For the 2016 draw, Conservation Patrons (CP) license holders could apply for limited draw furbearer tags without being Trapper Education (TE) certified for the first time. This may lower success rates depending upon if permit winners were able to become TE certified in time to trap. Low fur prices have been correlated with reduced effort in some areas but the limited draw system in Wisconsin may provide enough novelty appeal to dilute market dependent swings in trapper effort.

Committee Recommendation: A harvest goal of 150 fishers for zone A.

Zone B

The population model shows a slight increase even though the track counts indicate otherwise. According to the model a harvest of 75 (our goal last season) would allow for continued growth. Our current estimate is 2316 animals with a goal of 3000. The OAS suggests a harvest goal of 75 fishers in Zone B.

Committee Recommendation: A harvest goal of 75 fishers for zone B.

Zone C

In the central northern forest of zone C our population model suggests a stable fisher population. We observed a decline in the track counts but this has bounced back and forth and may not be well suited to indicate year to year population fluctuations. The model suggests 1220 is our pop estimate with 1600 being the goal. Last year the harvest was set at 60. The OAS suggests that we stay the course at a harvest goal of 60 animals.

Committee Recommendation: A harvest goal of 60 fishers for zone C.

Zone D

1800 is our current estimate. Our population model is stable with 1800 fisher estimated in zone D. Track count indices have been erratic. The population model suggests a harvest of 75 - 100 as sustainable. Last year we set a harvest goal of 100. We are under goal according to the model so this zone would be the easiest to justify a decrease but the OAS recommendation is to stay the course at 100 animals.

Committee Recommendation: A harvest goal of 100 fishers in zone D.

Zone E

Zone E is the south central area of Wisconsin. Zone F is the rest of the state. There are no population models for either of these zones. We want to provide opportunity if available and monitor indices to
make sure the harvest is sustainable. The harvest was 122 last year with the harvest goal of 250 in zone E. We have observed a gradual decrease in success rates over the past couple years. This periphery is interesting to watch as the population shifts here over time with more utilization of farmland habitat types. The OAS suggests remaining at a harvest recommendation of 250 for Zone E.

**Committee Recommendation:** A harvest goal of 250 fishers in zone E.

**Zone F**

Zone F is similar to E with no objective or model. The past 2 years we had 15.3 percent success rate in this periphery range area. All indices appear similar so the OAS suggests staying the course with our harvest goal of 350.

**Committee Recommendation:** A harvest goal of 350 fishers in zone F.

All fisher quota recommendations will be identical to last season. Ways to better track effort in terms of fisher harvest will be considered before next season. Additional trapper surveys might be the way to go but adding this at the time of buying a license may slow down the process too much.

**River Otter Management**

**Statewide otter season review** – by Nathan Roberts - Last year we had issues with the drawing that resulted in 385 extra otter permits being issued for the central zone. There was a mistake in the automated drawing system that caused the issue. To prevent this in the future we have adopted more checks and balances throughout the drawing and permit mailing procedures between WM and COS. We had a harvest goal of 2000 otters last year. We have been creeping up the quota each year. As of today (numbers may change slightly if more otters still need to be entered into the data) our observed take was 1457 otters last year which was a significant increase. We would like to drive down the number of incidentals while maintaining our harvest to a sustainable amount. If animals are dying (many otter are incidentally taken while beaver trapping) we would rather they go to trappers than be incidentals. Incidental otter have been as high as 300 animals reported with a total harvest goal of 900. One third of the total goal was incidentally taken and we assume some percentage of incidental otter do not get reported. This number includes APHIS and recreational trapper’s incidentals. Statewide otter harvest has increased while the proportion of incidentals has decreased. Success rates are slightly decreasing over time but the highest success rates have been in the North. Our aerial otter survey is used as one index and is most useful in the North with 27 transects. Fewer transects are done in the central and south which equals less confidence in the data. Increasing this sample size will make these numbers better. Only 3 surveys in the central zone and 14 in the south zone were completed last season. The new survey methods proposed yesterday for testing should provide us with more and better data to use when making management decisions for river otter. The track surveys aren’t really made for otter, being along the road. Confidence intervals overlap in the track surveys and so are of little use for otter management decisions. Archer surveys are also not well suited for otter detection as otter are rare sightings for archers. Age distribution data shows 1.98 years being the mean age. This is pretty old for a harvested population. This may indicate low harvest mortality. Due to different methods of take there is not much
(if any) selection bias for otter so age distribution is more important for otter than bobcats. Pregnancy rates are stable. We sub sampled the carcasses collected for efficiency as we discussed yesterday. We will continue to sub sample the animals to be more efficient. The aerial surveys are variable and all over the board. Success rates are up and down and don’t match the population model. We’ve been under goal for quite a while. The population goal is 13,000 otters and we are significantly under goal by our model. We estimate 11,000 river otters in Wisconsin. We estimate that our take is about 15% of the population. We do not have much confidence in this 11,000 number so we should focus more on the trends. We probably have a higher otter density than nearby states but our estimate doesn’t show that. Everybody in the central and south gets tags but there is still a 2 year wait in the north. Is the “40 30 30” allocation method fair and do we want to stick with it? We’re taking a higher percentage than the model suggests is sustainable. The other indices show otherwise. The OAS suggests we reconsider the allocation of tags to be more equitable but stay the course of a harvest goal of 2,000 animals.

Committee discussion: Keep in mind that the otter zones may be changing for the 2018-19 season. Most committee members were in favor of changing the otter permit allocation to be more equitable throughout the state. There was a suggestion that the actual number of permits issued should be calculated using past success rates, but instead of allocating the tags as in the past a different approach using the prior year’s application rate for each zone should be used to allow for more even distribution based on interest. This recommendation for distributing tags would result in more tags in the north and should help to decrease incidentals. In 2015, 9200 people applied and at 20% success and a harvest goal of 2000 that would equal 10000 tags. 3765 trappers in north applied, 2494 in south and the rest in central. In 2016, applicant levels for the North, Central, and South otter zone were 3,820; 3,430; and 2,550, respectively. If these numbers remained consistent everyone could get a tag in 2017, potentially. We can still initiate an emergency closure if the harvest quota is met prior to the season end date. We can remind trappers that an emergency closure may go into effect and it is the trapper’s responsibility to monitor the season status. If we allocate tags using this method we would only need a statewide harvest recommendation rather than zone specific quotas. The otter tags will still be zone specific to maintain our data and because changing that would require a rule change. Next year we may move away from managing towards the population goal of 13,000 otters which would offer us greater flexibility in trying to reduce incidentals and increase opportunity managing according to trends.

Committee recommendation: For the 2017-18 season, the committee recommends that otter permit are issued proportional to previous years’ (2016-17) application level in each respective zone. This is a new approach to permit allocation with goals to distribute permits equitably based on prior trapper interest and to minimize incidental take across all zones.

Tribal harvest updates by Nick McCann – We were well below threshold for river otter. The total Tribal harvest was 13 otters.

Committee recommendation: A harvest goal of 2000 otters statewide.

Bobcat Management
Statewide bobcat season review – by Nathan Roberts - We made some slight alterations to the reported number of bobcats harvested on the state side. We had been double counting some forms of mortality like incidental take and road kills. Non harvest mortality already captures road kill and the few incidentals taken as well. We assume that in addition to the legal harvest that 20% are illegally harvested or incidentals. Harvest trends are not necessarily directly related to the population. We see over time a trend that more bobcats are taken with the use of dogs and less by trapping. This allows for more harvest bias selecting for bigger and so older animals. We also see some harvest bias by sex with a higher percentage of males being harvested. This is likely a product of selectivity as well. Hunters and trappers have to wait up to 10 years for a bobcat tag so we probably have a great deal of selectivity that alters the data to not truly represent the statewide population. We are unsure if the population is getting older or if this is just selectivity alone. The trend of harvesting older animals can be seen in the trapper harvest as well but not to the extent of the hound hunter harvest. Trapper’s data may be a better representation of the population as a whole. We discovered some issues with the way reproductive rates were calculated previously. These issues with observers and technique may have skewed the data. Placental scars were graded on a scale of 1-6 by how dark they were. Scars graded 3 or below were not considered fresh but placental scars in bobcats don’t usually persist for more than one year. We originally found this error when we noticed that yearling cats had some scars not counted because they were considered a scar from a previous year (not possible in a yearling). We have this straightened out now after conducting a thorough literature review to standardize our methods with the rest of the region. Adult reproductive rates are more important than the yearling reproductive rates but this technique likely lowered our estimates for both cohorts’ reproduction rates in Wisconsin. We are consistent now with the literature and other states. We completed 27 transects this year which gives us more confidence in our track count numbers due to a larger sample size. There is no statistical difference between years in the track surveys as the confidence intervals overlap year to year. The deer hunter survey is more provided for deer information but we get some utility as a survey for bobcats. The bobcat sightings are low enough that these data are not statistically significant. Hunter/trapper opinions of bobcat populations from last year indicate that they are about the same or more abundant. Trends in opinions over time indicate that the bobcat population is stable or slightly increasing. With our harvester’s surveys we looked at catch per unit effort and also what was the number of tracks seen while hunting since the number of cats treed or bayed may not be as indicative as the number of tracks seen. Last season the quota in the north was set at 225 and the southern quota was set at 150.

Northern Zone

Bobcat season review – by Nathan Roberts - The population model shows an increase from last year but we made some adjustments to the model so this apparent increase may not be attributed to any population growth. Our population goal for bobcats in the north is 2500 plus or minus 500. Whether or not this number is useful is open to debate but monitoring trends in all the data probably should have more weight than simply looking at our population estimate compared to our population goal. In the south there is no population goal, we pull a quota with the information we have and keep an eye on the data for red flags. In the south we manage according to trends rather than absolute numbers. The success rate has varied over time; we see mixed signals in some of our indices. In our bobcat collar study
we see high survivorship in the north. We see decent sized home ranges and overlap along with all habitats being utilized. In the south we have few animals on air to date and so not much information on the status of our southern bobcats. If we adjust reproductive rates and how incidentals are handled in the model the population estimate will swell, suggesting a higher sustainable yield is harvestable. We have not incorporated the high survivorship observed in the population model as of yet so we feel that the estimates are still conservative. We want more information on any selectivity occurring on collared animals to make sure that the data in our study is indicative of the total population (might hunters pass on a collared animal?). We feel this is a conservative model by not incorporating the home range overlap observed. 2500 is the objective in the north but we need to decide if we manage towards this goal or manage according to trends. I don’t think we need to drive the population down to 2500 animals. The quota the model suggests is between 500 – 600 animals in the north. The OAS recommends 550 as a harvest goal for bobcats in the north.

Committee discussion: With the corrections to the data and what the OAS is learning about bobcats in northern Wisconsin through the collar study most of the committee feels that raising the harvest recommendation to 550 is justifiable. All of the nearby states except Illinois (which is just initiating a bobcat harvest) harvest substantially more bobcats than we do here in Wisconsin. Some data indicates that the population in Minnesota may be decreasing, so it’s possible they are over harvesting. The GLIFWC representative felt that raising the harvest recommendation to 550 is too aggressive though some increase would be justified if undertaken slowly. The GLIFWC representative pointed out multiple trends, including those from the winter track count survey and the catch per unit effort estimates that we derive from our harvester surveys, which show a decreasing or stable bobcat population over the last 10 years – but do not show any increase. Most of this data is imperfect but the track count trend captures the population growth that we believe happened in the 1990’s but has since leveled off or decreased. The committee generally feels that the information provided supports a harvest recommendation of 550 though the GLIFWC biologist did not support this recommendation as several indices indicated stable or declining bobcat numbers. A sub-committee will be formed to discuss better ways to monitor bobcat population trends and what indices should be weighted and considered more meaningful. This sub-committee can also discuss the possibility of using adaptive management at some scale as a way to ground proof the current population estimate and model.

Tribal bobcat updates by Nick McCann - The state harvested 171 bobcats in the north with the tribes having a threshold of 15% of the total. This means the tribes could harvest 26 bobcats in the north but the tribes went 2 over that and harvested 28. Do we want to go through the declaration process for being 2 animals over threshold? If we included incidentals in the state harvest, that would increase the threshold to 28 and eliminate the need for a declaration. We could also ignore being two over threshold to avoid more work for the state if that flexibility exists.

Committee discussion: If there is a tribal declaration, we use the average tribal harvest over the past three years to calculate the allocation of the harvest. Including incidentals in the state harvest is not advisable. A similar situation occurred with deer recently. It was recommended that a declaration by the Tribes was not necessary in that circumstance due to only being over the threshold slightly. Most
committee members supported ignoring the 2 over threshold but there will be further discussion on this topic. We will let GLIFWC know our recommendation as soon as possible.

**Committee recommendation:** A harvest goal of 550 bobcats in the north.

**Southern Zone**

**Bobcat season review** by Nathan Roberts - We are in our 3rd year of harvest in the southern zone. We started at a quota of 50 then upped to 100 and then up again to 150 for last season. We used a rough population estimate to set this quota as we have far less data currently on bobcats in the southern zone. We assumed a population of 1000 using land area available. We used mean home range sizes to figure how many bobcats may occupy what was considered good bobcat habitat. This calculation did not take into account any possible home range overlaps or that bobcats may be using all habitat types. We took 139 bobcats total last year in the south. Success rate was 46% with the early season having a lower success rate than the late season which is typical. Catch per unit effort has risen. We are managing more by trends in the south since we have no population goal set. We have been slowly increasing quotas and monitoring trends for signs of sustainability. We have 8 bobcats collared in the south so the sample size is too small to get much from. The south looks like great bobcat habitat anecdotally. We have seen some pockets of dense populations in our collar study in the south. On one 40 acre property, we collared 4 bobcats and observed more un-collared bobcats by trail camera. The OAS recommends a harvest goal of 200 this year to continue to bump up the quota.

**Committee discussion:** Seems everyone is on board with bumping up the quota for bobcats in the south to 200.

**Committee recommendation:** A harvest goal of 200 bobcats in the southern zone.

**Trap incidents update** by Nathan Kroeplin – Nathan will be getting the trap incident reports from now on to be more efficient. This past year reports got hung up as they were funneled through others before coming to me. In 2016 there were 16 dog captures with 2 fatalities. This is consistent with previous years. Two body grip incidents occurred with 1 body grip incident resulting in a fatality (no incidents involved 220 body-grips this past year). The other fatality came from an illegally set cable restraint near entanglement hazards.

**Spring hearings results update** by Shawn Rossler – This year we had 3 questions involving furbearers. One involved reducing and consolidating fisher zones to just two, another would allow us to eliminate the specific population goal for otter (13000) and the final question called for a consolidation down to 2 zones for otter. All passed and are progressing through the system. We need to consider what the zone consolidations might do to the tribes and the tribal allocation.

**Tribal representative response** by Nick McCann – Currently the bands have the same 4 zones in the northern parts of the states. We calculate the threshold using these four zones. If these zones get consolidated how do we calculate a threshold? Do we continue to use the old zones for the tribes, do we ask the bands to accept the consolidated zones or do we make new calculations to determine the
new threshold. In terms of fisher harvest we have had one extremely successful harvester in Zone A who usually takes a significant portion of the entire tribe’s quota. I would have concerns if the threshold was higher that he might expand his trap line possibly causing local impacts to fisher populations. In the deer world the bands still use game management zones and have not adopted the states use of counties. Almost all of our harvest comes from zones A and B. We are less concerned about otter since the tribal otter harvest has historically been so low.

**Committee discussion:** The fisher zones are not equal in size so if we used the old zones we would want to calculate thresholds by zone area. Area based thresholds seem to be the most fair way to do it. The zone consolidation would likely occur for the 2018-19 season.

**Committee recommendation:** Unless the new fisher zones are adopted by the tribes, the committee recommends the continuation of the old zones for tribal allocation and calculate threshold using the percentage of area in each zone.

**Advisory questions update** by Ed Harvey – There was a resolution about aquatic furbearer research funding, to fund furbearer research through a surcharge on the otter drawings which passed. Legalizing cable restraints earlier on private land was another that passed. Going to a 2 season format for mink and muskrats passed as well. Southern trappers wanted a split season to offer better opportunity for trapping prime muskrats. The actual question changed a bit from the original but this passed statewide. We also received resolutions from 4 counties that wanted three zones back. Another wanted to grant access to use lights after dark when predator calling to scan, which passed. This resolution could lead to problems with law enforcement. You would need to have a predator call to scan. The beaver resolution was about considering the good aspects of beaver when making decisions and it passed. The last advisory question was about an increase in the max spread for footholds but the resolution was worded poorly. This may need to be fixed next year as the resolution was directed at a certain trap but the cited dimensions were off. We also had several county resolutions involving furbearers including: Make the assistant furbearer/Trapper Education coordinator position permanent, hunter must remain in line of sight of hounds, to end coyote hunting with dogs, going back to 3 muskrat zones, a 7 AM trapping opener and in one county a resolution to end trapping all together failed.

**Marten Protection Area (MPA) updates** – this committee discussed adding the Apostle Islands as a third Marten Protection Area in Wisconsin last year. Our discussion was back and forth due to limited access and trapping on the islands but the Marten committee recommended sending this issue to the Furbearer Team for consideration. The American Marten Advisory Committee recommends that the DNR adds all Apostle Islands except Madeline and Long Island as a 3rd MPA. This recommendation is also supported by the National Park Service.

**Committee discussion:** In addition to adding the new zone to the MPAs the committee discussed allowing different trap types in the MPAs. A state legislator is exploring the idea of allowing additional traps for wolves (and other large furbearers) and weasels in the MPAs. Additional opportunities being discussed include weasel boxes (which would have a maximum allowable hole diameter to deny access by American martens) and dryland footholds with mandatory pan tension devices to protect the much
smaller marten. The genetic study being done on the Apostle Islands martens shows that their origin is not from the martens released there previously in the Chequamegon National Forest. They may be a remnant population residing on the islands but the genetic analysis is currently inconclusive. In terms of the 2 current mainland populations we are seeing limited success. If the islands became a 3rd MPA, it would be best if regulations were consistent across all three areas.

There could be a lot of opportunities to trap in the MRA. Roberts reported that MPAs in the BMP had over 200 captures of wolves with no martens captured and with no rabbits or squirrels or similar sized animals caught either. Roberts also reported that 2,038 wolves capture records in MN with BMP traps had zero marten captures. Currently trappers can use body grip traps on the Apostle Islands but access is so limited and there are so few trappers using the islands that not many people would be impacted.

There are so few trappers using the islands that not many people would be impacted. The state has authority over the regulations on the islands but the Park Service could eliminate all opportunities to trap if they feel there is a danger to marten. Putting some protective measures in place might preserve some trapping opportunities on the island. The park service is supportive of making the islands the MPA. We do not want to expand the current MPAs even though marten ranges don’t fit exactly in the MRAs. The committee is generally for allowing MPAs. In terms of the different trap types to allow wolf and weasel trapping while still providing protections for marten. Enforcement might present a challenge especially considering a pan tension of specified poundage when dealing with changing environmental factors. LE could make sure that some pan tension device is being used.

Trappers could be required to use an under-pan device such as a piece of foam. This would need to be tested but could be enforced if a suitable material was identified. We may be able to use incidental fur funds to test the tension device. Our current 4 day check weasel boxes were designed to exclude marten using a 1 3/8” entrance. If we stick to the “4 day check” weasel box parameters, marten should be sufficiently protected from these boxes while providing weasel trapping opportunities in this currently closed area.

**Committee recommendation:** Create a third MPA to include the Apostle Islands (less Madeline and Long Island) and allow dryland footholds with a pan tension device (yet to be determined) and weasel boxes (4 day check boxes e.g. 1 3/8” entrance) as allowable in the MPAs.

**Rule proposals** by Shawn Rossler – One proposal is related to incidental coon caught in beaver traps after the coon season is closed and the other is about allowing private nuisance trappers the ability to trap on dams and use baits/lures during the closed season. Individuals have caught coons in beaver traps after season and had to turn over or discard. Trappers would like to be able to retain these incidental raccoons like they do with muskrats. Nuisance trappers want to be able to work as efficiently as USDA WS.

**Committee discussion:** In regards to incidental raccoons captured in beaver traps would this be enforceable? There are trap type restrictions that would allow LE to determine if trappers were targeting raccoons for the most part. Allowing trappers to retain these raccoons would reduce incidental calls to wardens. In regards to private nuisance trappers having the ability to trap on dams and use lure/bait outside of the season, WS has data on every otter caught and more were caught in runs than on dams. Using bait and lure outside of the season may help to target beaver and reduce incidentals.
What will constitute a “nuisance” trapper though? Could we expand the ability to trap on dams to all trappers? For LE sake it might be better to allow everyone (nuisance and fur trappers) to trap on dams. This would eliminate any questions as to what defines a “nuisance” trapper. We will need to research this further to allow all trappers to set on dams so for now let’s just deal with trappers with written permission from the land owner.

**Committee recommendation:** Propose two rule proposals. First proposal would allow trappers to retain incidental raccoons caught in beaver traps after the close of the raccoon season. Second proposal would allow use of lure/bait outside of the season and allow trappers to set traps on beaver dams found on private land, with written permission from the landowner.

**Other business:** Badger season, what happened? It was pushed up through leadership and was at a standstill somewhere along the way. It seems that we have a badger population that would allow for some harvest so why not provide opportunity?

Mention to allow coon hunting during the 9 day gun season statewide. It is already allowed in the south farmland zones. Possibly limited to hound hunters only but the fur quality is usually peaking at about that time.

Meeting Adjourned Safe Travels