

# Fur Trapper Survey 2017-2018

By Brian Dhuey, and Shawn Rossler

## **Abstract**

The number of licensed trappers actively trapping was down slightly from the total of the previous trapping season. Forty-three percent of respondents said they trapped during the 2017-18 season. Trappers used a total of 215,493 sets on 500,728 nights during the 2017-18 trapping season.

## **Methods**

The Fur Trapper Survey was mailed to a sample of 6,000 people who purchased a resident trapping license, or a conservation patron license. The sample was selected from the 2017-18 resident trapping ( $\approx 3,000$ ) and the conservation patron ( $\approx 3,000$ ) license holders who indicated they were trappers. A second mailing was sent to non-respondents. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part I questioned trappers on their trapping season including; number and species of furbearers trapped, average number of sets used, number of days spent trapping, total trapping expenses, and number of furs sold in and out of Wisconsin (Fig. 1). Part I also included questions on the hunting of furbearers by trappers. Part II pertained only to beaver trappers and will not be discussed in this summary. Please refer to the Beaver Trapper Report in this publication for this information. Data from all returned questionnaires were entered into the DNR production server and summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

## **Results**

All duplicate responses were removed from the survey pool. Responses were received from 2,343 of 6,000 trappers surveyed. The resulting response rate was 39.1%.

Forty-three percent of the respondents actively trapped for furbearers during the 2017-18 season, slightly higher than the 42% last year. As has been the norm for several years for trappers, fur trapper license holders were about two times as likely to trap as conservation patron license holders (60% vs. 30%). Conservation patron license holders were more active during the 2017-18 trapping season (30%) than during the 2016-17 season (27%) and fur trapper license holders were less active with 60% actively trapping in 2017-18 and 61% in 2016-17 seasons.

The largest number of respondents (25.3%) trapped in the Western Region of the state (Table 1). During the 2017-18 season, trappers trapped an average of 40.8 days, higher than the 2016-17 season (38.9). The average trapper incurred \$297.09 of expenses on such things as traps, lures, gas, and a license. This is less than the 2016-17 average of \$304.99. The mean number of days spent trapping ranged from 36 to 52 days among regions, while the mean trapping expense ranged from \$279.03 to \$397.77 among regions (Table 2). Statewide, 18.2% of trappers also hunted furbearers in 2017-18.

When the results of this survey are expanded to the larger population of licensed furbearer trappers, we can approximate that 7,482 licensed trappers actively trapped and 3,765 trappers also hunted furbearers during the 2017-18 season. An estimate of \$2,222,827 was spent by

7,482 active, licensed trappers on basic expenses. Slightly more than 4% of licensed furbearer trappers pursued gray fox, while 46% pursued raccoons (Table 3). Furbearers harvested by trappers while hunting include: red fox, 467, gray fox, 27, coyote, 9,335 and raccoon, 6,596 (Table 4). A summary of 2017-18 furbearer harvests and sales can be found in Table 5. Of the furs took, most trappers sold directly to fur buyers.

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

Foot hold traps without teeth (32.4%) were more frequently used than any other type of trap, body grip 30.5%, cable restraints 9.5%, enclosed trigger 8.9%, cage trap 8.1%, colony 7.3%, snares 2.4% and foot hold traps with teeth 0.8%. Trappers averaged 20.9 foot hold (without teeth) traps per trapper, followed by cable restraint, enclosed trigger, body grip, snares, foot hold (with teeth), colony, and cage traps at 14.5, 13.3, 13.2, 8.7, 7.7, 7.5, and 4.3 respectively. All total, Wisconsin licensed trappers, during the 2017-18 regulated seasons accounted for approximately 4.4 million trap nights in legal pursuit of furbearers; this was more than the 4.1 million during 2016-17 season.

Cable restraints became legal for fox and coyote during the latter portion of the existing canine season (January 1 – February 15) in 2004. During the 2009-10 season the cable restraint season was extended with the opening date moved up to December 1, while ending as usual on February 15. More Wisconsin trappers used cable restraints in 2017-18, with 9.5% using cable restraints and averaged 14.5 sets during the open season. During the 2016-17 season, 8.2 percent used cable restraints and averaged 13.7 sets. Trappers were asked, “Overall, how did cable restraints work for you”; 61.7% said “Excellent” or “Good”, while 38.2% said “Fair” or “Poor”. Ninety-three percent of cable restraint users reported not catching a dog. Of those that did, the mean number of dogs caught and released being 2.1.

Sixty-seven (68.3) percent of trappers are aware of the term Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping. The most common way trappers have become aware of the BMPs effort is through articles/websites/videos. The ways in which trappers have used BMPs for trapping is either by currently using BMPs traps on the trap line or expanding the types of traps they use. Trappers get information on trapping in Wisconsin from trapping regulations (21.7%), trapping magazines & books (18.0%), other trappers (17.9%) and personal experience (17.7%).

Seventy-five percent of trappers trap on 20 or less different water bodies or marshes during the season and on average, and travel 50 miles or less to check their trap line (56.5%). Before moving to a different water body or marsh, 77.0% of trappers using stakes, 66.5% of trappers using boots/waders, and 62.0% of trappers using other trapping equipment (shovels, buckets, baskets) always inspect and remove mud and plant material.

**Table 1.** *DNR regions where furbearer trappers did most of their trapping, 2017-18.*

Region	# of responses	Percent of Trappers
Northern	249	24.6
Northeast	210	20.7
West Central	256	25.3
Southeast	71	7.0
South Central	171	16.9
Unrecorded	56	5.5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,013</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2.** *Percent of furbearer trappers that hunted, average number of days spent trapping, and average trapping expenses by DNR region during the 2017-18 trapping season.*

Region	% of Trappers who hunted	Average number of days trapped	Average trapping expense
Northern	12.9%	36.5	\$279.03
Northeast	16.7%	41.8	\$280.73
West Central	21.9%	44.1	\$291.67
Southeast	21.1%	52.3	\$371.16
South Central	23.4%	37.4	\$291.53
Unrecorded	10.7%	36.0	\$397.77
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>40.8</b>	<b>\$297.09</b>

**Table 3.** *Estimated number of active furbearer trappers pursuing each furbearer species, and percent of active trappers trapping for each species, 2017-18.*

Species	# of Trappers	% of Trappers
Bobcat	414	5.5%
Coyote	2,312	30.9%
Fisher	872	11.7%
Gray Fox	317	4.2%
Mink	1,255	16.8%
Muskrat	3,132	41.9%
Otter	1,869	25.0%
Opossum	842	11.3%
Raccoon	3,420	45.7%
Red Fox	1,122	15.0%
Skunk	761	10.2%
Weasel	532	7.1%

**Table 4.** *Harvest of furbearers by trappers who hunted, and total harvest (trapping harvest + hunting harvest) for each of the commonly hunted species during the 2017-18 fur harvest season.*

Species	Number Trapped	Number Hunted	Total Harvest (Trapping + Hunting)
Coyote	13,398	9,335	22,733
Gray Fox	569	27	596
Red Fox	3,686	467	4,153
Raccoon	54,664	6,596	61,260
<b>Total</b>	<b>72,317</b>	<b>16,425</b>	<b>88,742</b>

**Table 5.** *The 2017-18 fur harvest summary based on responses from licensed furbearer trappers.*

Furbearer	# Caught in Traps	# Sets Used	Total Days Trapped	# Sold in Wisconsin	# Sold out of State
Bobcat	399	3,715	9,602	22	0
Coyote	13,398	32,602	90,271	5,695	3,206
Fisher	660	4,093	15,854	104	59
Gray Fox	569	3,575	12,925	222	89
Mink	6,153	16,892	36,346	2,164	2,977
Muskrat	223,936	75,167	81,911	101,890	87,598
Otter	1,510	6,631	41,081	333	207
Opossum	15,112	7,334	32,919	945	1,581
Raccoon	54,664	39,640	94,696	16,855	20,415
Red Fox	3,686	15,392	41,746	1,407	1,108
Skunk	5,325	6,825	28,118	391	672
Weasel	2,238	3,627	15,259	968	281
<b>Total</b>	<b>327,650</b>	<b>215,493</b>	<b>500,728</b>	<b>130,996</b>	<b>118,193</b>

Dear Wisconsin Furbearer Trapper:

You have been selected to help gather information on regulated fur trapping. Completion is voluntary, but you can make an important contribution to the future of Wisconsin's fur harvest and trapping activity by taking time to complete the attached survey. If you did not trap furbearers, simply answer questions #1 and #16 and return the survey. If you did trap, please fill out Part I of the survey. If you trapped beaver, please complete Part II of the survey as well.

The information requested from you and other trappers is essential in managing Wisconsin's valuable fur resource. Through your cooperation we can estimate catch, trapping success, trapping pressure, and trapper characteristics on a statewide basis. These facts are necessary for a better understanding of how regulations affect your trapping and your insights into the welfare of furbearer populations. With your help, the future of regulated trapping will be assured as we face challenges locally and globally.

Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey. Return the survey in the enclosed envelope. Using your stamp will save funds for management even though no postage is required to return the survey. Please reply even if you did not trap this season or were not successful.

Sincerely,

*Shawn Rossler*

Shawn Rossler  
Furbearer Ecologist  
Bureau of Wildlife Management

PART I.					
<b>1. Did you trap for furbearers in Wisconsin during the 2017/2018 season?</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No ( <b>Go to #16</b> )		<b>2. What percent of your trapping effort occurred in the following DNR regions? (See attached DNR regions map)</b>  ___% Northern    ___% West Central    ___% South Central ___% Northeast    ___% South East			
<b>3. How many days did you trap during the regular season?</b> <u>Regular Trapping Season:</u> <u>Add'l Nuisance Trapping:</u> OCT   NOV   DEC   JAN   FEB   MAR   APR    Month: ___ ___ ___ # of Days: ___ ___ ___    # of Days: ___ ___ ___					
<b>4. Please fill in all five blanks for each kind of furbearer you trapped in Wisconsin during the past season:</b>					
	Number Caught in Traps	Average Number of Sets	Total Days Trapped	Number SOLD in Wisconsin	Number SOLD Out of State
Otter					
Muskrat					
Mink					
Raccoon					
Red Fox					
Gray Fox					
Coyote					
Bobcat					
Fisher					
Skunk					
Opossum					
Weasel					
<b>5. Of furs you took, what percentage were sold...</b> directly to fur buyers: ___% sent to auction houses: ___% kept for personal use: ___%			<b>6. Estimate your total trapping expenses for the past season: (traps, lures, gas, license, etc.)</b>  \$ _____		

**Figure 1.** The 2017-18 furtrapper questionnaire.

<p><b>7. Are you aware of the term Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No (<b>Go to #8</b>)</p> <p>If yes, in what ways have you become aware of the BMPs effort (<b>check all that apply</b>):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Through articles/websites/videos</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> At trapper education class/other meetings</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Through personal communications</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Some other way: _____</p>	<p><b>7A. In what ways have you used Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping? (Check all that apply)</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I currently use BMPs traps on the trap line</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I expanded the types of traps I used</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I told others about BMPs</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I used brochures/website materials</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Some other way: _____</p>																																																					
<p><b>8. During the past trapping season, how many traps did you use?</b></p> <p>_____ foothold (without teeth)      _____ foothold (with teeth*)  <small>*legal if completely submerged</small></p> <p>_____ cable restraints      _____ snare</p> <p>_____ colony trap      _____ enclosed trigger trap</p> <p>_____ body-gripper      _____ cage</p>	<p><b>9. If you used cable restraints, overall how did they work for you?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Excellent   <input type="checkbox"/> Good   <input type="checkbox"/> Fair   <input type="checkbox"/> Poor</p> <p>Did you restrain and successfully release any dogs?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes   If yes, how many? _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>																																																					
<p><b>10. In what ways do you get information on trapping in Wisconsin? (check all that apply)</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other trappers      <input type="checkbox"/> DNR personnel      <input type="checkbox"/> Personal experience</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Trapping regulations   <input type="checkbox"/> Trapping magazines &amp; books   <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Online websites      <input type="checkbox"/> Trapper education class &amp; materials      _____</p>																																																						
<p><b>11. During the past trapping season, how many different water bodies or marshes did you trap?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 0 (<b>Go to #16</b>)   <input type="checkbox"/> 2   <input type="checkbox"/> 6-20</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1   <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5   <input type="checkbox"/> &gt;20</p>	<p><b>12. On average, how many miles do you travel to check your trap line?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 0 miles      <input type="checkbox"/> 11-99 miles</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1-10 miles      <input type="checkbox"/> &gt;100 miles</p>																																																					
<p><b>13. Before moving traps or stakes to a different water body or marsh, do you inspect and remove mud and plant material?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Always      <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes      <input type="checkbox"/> Never</p>	<p><b>14. Before moving to a different water body or marsh, do you inspect and remove mud and plant material from boots/waders?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Always      <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes      <input type="checkbox"/> Never</p>																																																					
<p><b>15. Before moving to a different water body or marsh, do you inspect and remove mud and plant material from other equipment (shovels, other tools, buckets, baskets)?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Always      <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes      <input type="checkbox"/> Never</p>	<p><b>16. Did you HUNT furbearers with a gun and/or dogs during the past season?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>If yes, please give the number of each kind taken:</p> <p>_____ Red Fox      _____ Coyote</p> <p>_____ Gray Fox      _____ Raccoon</p>																																																					
<p><b>17. Of the foxes, coyotes, and raccoons that you hunted or trapped, how many had mange or showed signs of distemper (a virus causing nasal discharge, diarrhea, neurologic convulsions or tremors, and crusty eyes or foot pads)?</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">County</th> <th colspan="2"># of Red Fox</th> <th colspan="2"># of Gray Fox</th> <th colspan="2"># of Coyote</th> <th colspan="2"># of Raccoon</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Mange</th> <th>Distemper</th> <th>Mange</th> <th>Distemper</th> <th>Mange</th> <th>Distemper</th> <th>Mange</th> <th>Distemper</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>		County	# of Red Fox		# of Gray Fox		# of Coyote		# of Raccoon		Mange	Distemper	Mange	Distemper	Mange	Distemper	Mange	Distemper																																				
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**Figure 1. Continued.**