2018-19 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #19-3

The Fur Harvest Survey provides estimates of (1) numbers of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, (2) values of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, and (3) distribution of the harvest among resource users. This project is supported in part by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program (Project W-99-R, Study X).

METHODS

State law requires licensed fur buyers to maintain records and submit reports of all raw furs purchased. We mailed report forms and written instructions to licensed buyers about 10 days before the opening of the muskrat trapping season. Buyers who failed to report by the deadline were sent 2 reminders by first class mail.

Buyers provided estimates of (1) raw fur purchases from Illinois hunters and trappers, (2) average pelt prices for all sizes and grades, and (3) percentages of pelts taken by fur hunters. We corrected estimates for non-response and out-of-state pelt sales reported by Conat et al. (2016). Individuals who captured a river otter or bobcat were required to purchase a permit within 48 hours; sales of pelts were based on sales of permits.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Department issued 46 permits to fur buyers during 2018-19. Based on a 81% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 65,278, an increase of 4% from 2017-18 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers decreased 19% to $436,893. Raccoon and muskrat accounted for 76% of the total harvest and 47% of its value. Coyote pelts were almost 14% of the total harvest and comprised 37% of the total fur value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 4% for striped skunk to 43% for raccoon; they were intermediate for opossum (9%), red fox (20%) and coyote (25%). Hunters accounted for 43% of the raccoon harvest in 2018-19.

Today, pelt values are driven mainly by demand from foreign markets such as Russia and China. Economic conditions, monetary exchange rates, political events and severity of winters in overseas countries shape fur markets in North America and contribute to their volatility. Overall, demand for wild furs remained relatively poor during 2018-19 because of economic conditions in major markets and a glut of wild and ranch-raised goods from past seasons. Pelt values were still good for western coyote and bobcat but overall, prices remained at very low levels.

Sales of trapping licenses increased from 6036 in 2017-18 to 6463 in 2018-19. During 2017 - 18, approximately 7,061 raccoon hunters spent 81,883 days afield and 29,978 coyote hunters spent 303,500 days afield (Williams et al. 2018).

Pelts sales for most species fell short of historical averages during the 2018-19 season except for badger (up 28%) and coyote (up 35%).

LITERATURE CITED

Williams, B.D., L.K. Campbell and C.A. Miller. 2018. 2017-2018 Illinois Trapper Report: Harvest, Effort, and Marketing Practices. Job Completion Report, Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration W-112-R-27. INHS Technical Report 2018 (39). Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, IL. 49pp.

Williams, B.D. and C.A. Miller. 2018. 2017-2018 Illinois hunter harvest report. Illinois Natural History Survey Technical Report 41. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, USA.

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Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2018-19 vs. *2017-18.

Species	Number of pelts sold[a]		Change in sales	Average price per pelt (dollars)		Total value to fur-takers (dollars)		Change in value from	
	2018-19	2017-18	from 2017-18[b]	2018-19	2017-18	2018-19	2017-18 (dollars)	2018-19 - 2017-18	
Muskrat	4,615	11,690	(-60)	2.87	3.0	13,245.05	35,537.6	-22,292.55	(-63)
Mink	594	1002	(-41)	3.71	6.62	2203.74	6633.24	-4429.50	(-67)
Raccoon	44,889	38,837	(+15)	4.35	3.99	195,267.15	154,959.63	+40,307.52	(+26)
Opossum	295	978	(-70)	0.63	0.63	185.85	616.14	-430.29	(-70)
Red fox	380	565	(+51)	7.44	10.05	2827.20	5678.25	-2851.05	(-50)
Gray fox	4	11	(-63)	13.67	9.27	54.68	101.97	-47.29	(-46)
Beaver	3,749	4,510	(-17)	6.70	9.78	25,118.30	44,107.80	-18,989.50	(-43)
River otter	1060[c]	1118[c]	(-5)	22.05	21.70	23,373.00	24,260.60	-887.60	(-4)
Striped skunk	355	189	(+88)	5.61	2.79	1991.55	527.31	+1464.24	(+278)
Weasel	0	4	(-)	-	1.51	0	6.04	-6.04	(-)
Coyote	8994	6208	(+45)	18.13	41.48	163,061.22	257,507.84	-94,446.62	(-37)
Badger	37	15	(+147)	5.30	7.98	196.10	119.70	+76.40	(+64)
Bobcat	306[c,d,]	318[c]	(-4)	30.62	41.37	9369.72	13,155.66	-3785.94	(-29[d])
Total/mean	65,278	65,132	(-)			436,893.56	543,211.78	-106,318.22	(-19)

[a]Includes correction for non-response and allowances for out-of-state pelt sales as estimated by Conat et al. (2016).

[b]Numbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.

[c]Based on sales of Temporary Pelt Permits.

[d]Third bobcat season – data not comparable

* Data from 2017-18 were corrected due to calculation errors