

Fur Trapper Survey

2020-21

By Brian Dhuey, and Shawn Rossler

Abstract

The number of licensed trappers actively trapping was up slightly from the total of the previous trapping season. Forty-three percent of respondents said they trapped during the 2020-21 season. Trappers used a total of 167,401 sets on 552,577 nights during the 2020-21 trapping season. Muskrat was the most frequently trapped furbearer and gray fox the least.

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 2020-21 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 2,733 of 6,000 trappers surveyed. The resulting response rate was 45.5%.

Forty-three percent of the respondents actively trapped for furbearers during the 2020-21 season, slightly lower than the 44% 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 (63% vs. 28%). Both conservation patron and fur trapper license holders were about as active during the 2020-21 trapping season as during the 2019-20 season, with patrons being active 28% of the time and fur trapper license with 63%.

The largest number of respondents (27.1%) trapped in the Northern Region of the state (Table 1). During the 2020-21 season, trappers trapped an average of 39.4 days, higher than the 2019-20 season (37.7). The average trapper incurred \$324.88 of expenses on such things as traps, lures, gas, and a license. This is less than the 2019-20 average of \$333.79. The mean number of days spent trapping ranged from 32 to 44 days among regions, while the mean trapping expense ranged from \$271.72 to \$409.84 among regions (Table 2). Statewide, 19% of trappers also hunted furbearers in 2020-21.

When the results of this survey are expanded to the larger population of licensed furbearer trappers, we can approximate that 7,776 licensed trappers actively trapped, and 4,040 trappers also hunted furbearers during the 2020-21 season. An estimate of \$2,526,269 was spent by 7,776 active licensed trappers on basic expenses. Slightly less than 3% of licensed furbearer trappers pursued woodchuck, while 43% pursued raccoons (Table 3). Furbearers harvested by trappers while hunting include: red fox, 388, gray fox, 33, coyote, 9,968 and raccoon, 9,647 (Table 4). A summary of 2020-21 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 is 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.

Foothold and body grip traps (33.0%) were more frequently used than any other type of trap, cable restraints 10.8%, cage trap 7.3%, enclosed trigger 6.5%, colony 5.4%, snares 2.6% and foot hold traps with teeth 1.2%. Trappers averaged 15.7 foot hold (without teeth) traps per trapper, followed by cable restraint, body grip, enclosed trigger, snares, foot hold (with teeth), colony, and cage traps at 12.7, 10.7, 10.1, 9.7, 7.1, 5.6, and 3.4 respectively.

Wisconsin licensed trappers during the 2020-21 regulated seasons accounted for approximately 3.6 million trap nights in legal pursuit of furbearers; this was about the same as the 3.7 million during 2019-20 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. Wisconsin trappers used cable restraints 10.8% of the time averaging 12.7 set in 2020-21 during the open season. During the 2019-20 season, 9.4 percent used cable restraints and averaged 13.1 sets. Trappers were asked, “Overall, how did cable restraints work for you”; 71.6% said “Excellent” or “Good”, while 28.4% said “Fair” or “Poor”. Ninety-six percent of cable restraint users reported not catching a dog. Of those that did, the mean number of dogs caught and released being 1.

Table 1. DNR regions where furbearer trappers did most of their trapping, 2020-21.

Region	# of responses	Percent of Trappers
Northern	318	27.1%
Northeast	246	20.9%
West Central	314	26.7%
Southeast	62	5.3%
South Central	182	15.5%
Unrecorded	53	4.5%
Totals	1,175	100%

Table 2. Percent of furbearer trappers that hunted, average number of days spent trapping, and average trapping expenses by DNR region during the 2020-21 trapping season.

Region	% of Trappers who hunted	Average number of days trapped	Average trapping expense
Northern	18.2%	36.9	\$283.85
Northeast	17.1%	43.7	\$319.01
West Central	20.1%	40.5	\$329.38
Southeast	14.5%	31.8	\$271.72
South Central	22.1%	40.8	\$397.21
Unrecorded	20.9%	32.1	\$409.84
Statewide	18.6%	39.4	\$324.88

Table 3. *Estimated number of active furbearer trappers pursuing each furbearer species, and percent of active trappers trapping for each species, 2020-21.*

Species	# of Trappers	% of Trappers
Bobcat	806	10.4%
Coyote	2,676	34.4%
Fisher	1,037	13.3%
Gray Fox	244	3.1%
Mink	1,196	15.4%
Muskrat	2,834	36.5%
Otter	2,200	28.6%
Opossum	813	10.5%
Raccoon	3,323	42.7%
Red Fox	1,242	16.0%
Skunk	767	9.9%
Weasel	515	6.6%
Woodchuck	225	2.9%

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 2020-21 fur harvest season.*

Species	Number Trapped	Number Hunted	Total Harvest (Trapping + Hunting)
Coyote	7,393	9,968	17,361
Gray Fox	108	33	141
Red Fox	1,974	388	2,362
Raccoon	23,175	9,647	32,822
Total	32,650	20,036	52,686

Table 5. *The 2020-21 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	865	6,350	28,153	46	20
Coyote	14,932	33,302	98,738	6,126	2,066
Fisher	760	4,291	19,969	86	53
Gray Fox	218	2,535	10,001	72	0
Mink	3,875	8,363	30,378	2,304	1,116
Muskrat	152,107	47,534	68,142	81,153	36,180
Otter	2,696	9,419	65,824	583	291
Opossum	8,971	6,139	34,160	614	106
Raccoon	46,808	28,411	101,187	15,222	5,314
Red Fox	3,987	11,770	43,250	2,000	132
Skunk	4,370	5,954	32,721	766	53
Weasel	1,729	2,277	13,407	337	277
Woodchuck	1,360	1,056	6,647	0	0
Total	242,678	167,401	552,577	109,309	45,608

Dear Wisconsin Furbearer Trapper:

You have been selected to help gather information on regulated fur trapping. 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 #9 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 you provide is essential in managing Wisconsin's valuable fur resource. 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 postage paid enclosed envelope. 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																																																																																					
<p>1. Did you trap for furbearers in Wisconsin during the 2020-2021 season?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (Go to #9)</p>	<p>2. What percent of your trapping effort occurred in the following DNR regions? (See DNR regions map)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">___% Northern ___% West Central ___% South Central</p> <p style="text-align: center;">___% Northeast ___% South East</p>																																																																																				
<p>3. How many days did you trap during the regular season?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border-bottom: 1px solid black;"><u>Regular Trapping Season:</u></td> <td style="width: 50%; border-bottom: 1px solid black;"><u>Add'l Nuisance Trapping:</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"> <table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">OCT</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">NOV</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">DEC</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">JAN</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">FEB</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">MAR</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">APR</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"># of Days: _____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> </table> </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> <table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Month: _____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"># of Days: _____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> </table> </td> </tr> </table>		<u>Regular Trapping Season:</u>	<u>Add'l Nuisance Trapping:</u>	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">OCT</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">NOV</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">DEC</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">JAN</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">FEB</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">MAR</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">APR</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"># of Days: _____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> </table>	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	# of Days: _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Month: _____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"># of Days: _____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> </table>	Month: _____	_____	_____	# of Days: _____	_____	_____																																																												
<u>Regular Trapping Season:</u>	<u>Add'l Nuisance Trapping:</u>																																																																																				
<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">OCT</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">NOV</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">DEC</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">JAN</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">FEB</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">MAR</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">APR</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"># of Days: _____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> </table>	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	# of Days: _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Month: _____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"># of Days: _____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> </table>	Month: _____	_____	_____	# of Days: _____	_____	_____																																																																
OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR																																																																															
# of Days: _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____																																																																															
Month: _____	_____	_____																																																																																			
# of Days: _____	_____	_____																																																																																			
<p>4. Please fill in all five blanks for each kind of furbearer you trapped in Wisconsin during the past season:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 15%;"></th> <th style="width: 15%;">Number Caught in Traps</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Average Number of Sets</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Total Days Trapped</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Number SOLID in Wisconsin</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Number SOLID Out of State</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Otter</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Muskrat</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Mink</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Raccoon</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Red Fox</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Gray Fox</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Coyote</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Bobcat</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Fisher</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Skunk</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Opossum</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Weasel</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: left;">Woodchuck</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table>			Number Caught in Traps	Average Number of Sets	Total Days Trapped	Number SOLID in Wisconsin	Number SOLID Out of State	Otter						Muskrat						Mink						Raccoon						Red Fox						Gray Fox						Coyote						Bobcat						Fisher						Skunk						Opossum						Weasel						Woodchuck					
	Number Caught in Traps	Average Number of Sets	Total Days Trapped	Number SOLID in Wisconsin	Number SOLID Out of State																																																																																
Otter																																																																																					
Muskrat																																																																																					
Mink																																																																																					
Raccoon																																																																																					
Red Fox																																																																																					
Gray Fox																																																																																					
Coyote																																																																																					
Bobcat																																																																																					
Fisher																																																																																					
Skunk																																																																																					
Opossum																																																																																					
Weasel																																																																																					
Woodchuck																																																																																					

Figure 1. The 2020-21 furtrapper questionnaire.

<p>5. Of furs you took, what percentage were sold....</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">directly to fur buyers: _____%</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">sent to auction houses: _____%</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">kept for personal use: _____%</p>	<p>6. Estimate your total trapping expenses for the past season: (traps, lures, gas, license, etc.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$ _____</p>																														
<p>7. During the past trapping season, how many traps did you use?</p> <p>_____ foothold _____ foothold (<i>with teeth</i>*)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(<i>without teeth</i>) *legal if completely submerged</p> <p>_____ cable restraints _____ snare</p> <p>_____ colony trap _____ enclosed trigger trap</p> <p>_____ body-gripper _____ cage</p>	<p>8. If you used cable restraints, overall how did they work for you?</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>9. Did you HUNT furbearers with a gun and/or dogs during the past season? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>If yes, please give the number of each kind taken: _____ Red Fox _____ Gray Fox</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">_____ Coyote _____ Raccoon</p>																															
<p>PART II.</p>																															
<p>1. Did you trap beaver during the 2020-2021 season?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No (Please stop here and return the questionnaire)</p>	<p>2. What percentage of your beaver SETS use body-grip traps, what percentage use foothold traps, and what percentage uses snares?</p> <p>_____ % Body-grip _____ % Foothold _____ % Snares</p>																														
<p>3. What percentage of your beaver CATCH came from body-grip traps, what percentage from foothold traps, and what percentage from snares?</p> <p>_____ % Body-grip _____ % Foothold _____ % Snares</p>	<p>4. Circle the month you did MOST of your beaver trapping. (Circle ONLY one)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Oct. Nov. Dec. Jan. Feb. Mar. Apr.</p>																														
<p>5. What percent of your catch did you sell: _____ % In Wisconsin _____ % Outside Wisconsin</p>																															
<p>6. Which beaver management zone did you trap most? (see beaver zone map)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Zone A (north of Hwy 64, west of Hwy 13) <input type="checkbox"/> Zone C (south of Hwy 64)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Zone B (north of Hwy 64, east of Hwy 13) <input type="checkbox"/> Zone D (Mississippi River)</p>																															
<p>7. Please fill in the blanks below for each zone in which you trapped for beaver during the 2020-2021 season regardless of whether you caught any beaver: (see beaver zone map)</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 15%;">Zone</th> <th style="width: 20%;">Average Number of Sets</th> <th style="width: 20%;">Number of Days Trapped</th> <th style="width: 20%;">No. of Beaver Caught Regular Season</th> <th style="width: 25%;">No. of Beaver Caught Damage Programs</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Zone	Average Number of Sets	Number of Days Trapped	No. of Beaver Caught Regular Season	No. of Beaver Caught Damage Programs																									
Zone	Average Number of Sets	Number of Days Trapped	No. of Beaver Caught Regular Season	No. of Beaver Caught Damage Programs																											

Figure 1. Continued.