

Bobcat Harvest 2014

By Brian Dhuey and John Olson

Abstract

Wisconsin's bobcat season had two zones each with two time periods for bobcat trappers/hunters for the 2014 season. For the first time since 1979 bobcats were legal for harvest south of Highway 64. In each zone the first period ran from the 18th October through the 25th of December with the second period from the 26th of December through the 31st of January. During the 2014 season 337 bobcats were registered or reported with the state, including 218 taken with WDNR issued permits, 2 taken on reservations, and 54 taken off reservation by native hunters/trappers, with 63 incidental harvests submitted. The non-treaty harvest included 180 bobcat that were trapped/hunted in the Northern Zone and 38 bobcat taken in the Southern Zone. One hundred forty-three were shot over dogs, 63 were trapped, 6 by calling, and 6 taken with method of harvest unrecorded. The counties of highest harvest were Sawyer (39), Douglas (26), Price (19), Bayfield (18) and Oneida (18). The sex ratio from registration data was 1.07 males to 1 female.

Background

Pils and Bluett (1984) discussed the background of Wisconsin's bobcat harvest management system and Dhuey, et al. (2014) described the results of the 2013 bobcat trapping season. The whole state of Wisconsin had a bobcat season in 2014. The state was divided into two zones, with Highway 64 splitting the state in to Northern and Southern Zones. The season had two periods; 18 October through 25 December, and 26 December through 31 January. All hunters and trappers must obtain a special harvest permit before pursuing bobcats, and the annual bag limit is one bobcat per permit. The application fee for bobcat harvest permits is \$6.00, with \$3.00 earmarked specifically for bobcat research. Successful applicants are selected by random drawing. Bobcat harvest goals are set annually based upon population size in relation to management goals. The number of harvest permits issued was based on the highest success rate during the previous three years for the first time period and a conservative, high success rate for the later, new time period.

Methods

In 2014, similar to the past four bobcat seasons, was the requirement that all state issued permit holders were required to call-in the harvest of their bobcats to a 1-800 number. All bobcats must still be registered by DNR authorized personnel and their carcasses turned over to the DNR for research purposes. The area of harvest (county and game management unit), date of harvest, sex of the animal, method of harvest, and the name and address of the state hunter or trapper were recorded for each bobcat registered. These data were entered into the DNR production server by district personnel and summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). All bobcat carcasses collected were examined to document the sex and age structure of the harvest, and to determine reproductive and mortality rates in the population.

Results

A total of 16,047 (8,598 applied for a harvest tag, 7,449 for a preference point) hunters and trappers applied for 386 bobcat harvest permits available in 2014 (Table 1). In addition, a Chippewa allocation of 65 bobcats was determined for their use during the Chippewa off-reservation trapping season (1 November 2014 to 31 March 2015) on ceded lands in the state. State issued permit holders harvested 218 bobcats; 180 in the north and 38 in the south. Total known bobcat take was 337 cats taken in 2014. This included the regulated harvest of non-tribal (218), tribal (54), on reservation (2), and incidental bobcat submissions (63). This was above last year's submissions of 226, above the 1980-2013 average of 235, and shy of the record total take of 497 in 2005 (Table 2). A threshold agreement was developed for tribal harvest of 15% of the non-native harvest for each respective zone in the ceded territory. When tribal harvest exceeds the 15% threshold for a specific zone, a declaration is required in that zone for the following harvest season. A tribal declaration occurred for the 2014-15 Bobcat Northern Zone.

Sixty-six percent of the bobcats harvested in 2014 were shot over dogs and 29% were trapped (Table 3). In 2013, 77% of the bobcats were taken over dogs and 16% were trapped. Bobcats taken by calling comprised 1% of the harvest. Techniques varied by period as 46% of the first period harvest was hunted, whereas 86% of the second season harvest was hunted.

In 2014, Chippewa hunters/trappers took 54 bobcats on ceded lands (data provided by Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission; Jonathan Gilbert, April 2015 email). Two bobcat were registered with a harvest location on a Wisconsin reservation. These harvests were included in the statewide totals.

Sixty-three bobcats harvested incidentally were reported to the WDNR in 2014. This is more than the 48 incidental bobcats received in 2013.

The average pelt price for bobcats in 2014 was \$77.52 and ranged from \$52.96 to \$150.00. This was lower than in 2013 (\$97.60). Many bobcats in Wisconsin are not harvested for fur but as a life accomplishment for the hunter or trapper, subsequently tanned or made into a mount.

Sawyer County led all other counties with a harvest of 39 bobcat, followed by Douglas with 26, Price 19, Oneida 18, and Bayfield 18 (Fig. 1). Game Management Unit 13 had the highest harvest at 22, followed by unit 04 (16), unit 19 (11), and unit 26 (11; Fig. 2).

Weather conditions, particularly the number of days with new snowfall, can have a major effect on the success rate of bobcat hunters/trappers. Weather conditions during the 2014-15 season were normal with frost-free conditions into mid-November, in the north average snows and moderate temperatures in late November and through December made for excellent conditions for locating and pursuing bobcats. Average temperatures and continued snow during the second time period made for good conditions in January. Non-tribal permit success was 56.5% in 2014-15 (Table 1); slightly lower than the 57.4% in 2013 and only third to 2012 for any time prior to the season split.

Bobcat populations seem to have stabilized in recent years in the portion of the state that allowed harvest. Winter track surveys suggest a long-term decline may have leveled off in 2012 with a general increase in track survey results and improved reproductive rates in yearling and adult females. The WDNR Furbearer Advisory Committee recommended a Northern Zone quota of 300 (an increase over the 240 quota the past two seasons) and a Southern quota of 100 (an increase of 50 from the initial year this portion of the state was opened, 2014).

Literature Cited

Dhuey, B. and J. Olson. 2014. Bobcat Harvest, 2013. IN: The Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys Report, August 2014. Document on file at the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources, Bureau of Science Services, Madison, WI 53716

Pils, C.M. and R. Bluett. 1984. The 1984 Wisconsin bobcat harvest summary. Wis. Dep. of Nat. Resour. 8pp.

Table 1. *The 2014 Wisconsin bobcat harvest goal and applicant results by zone and period.*

Zone	Period	Quota	Applicants for Permit	Permits Available	Permits/ Applicant	Harvest	% Success
Northern	1	88	2,797	190	0.07	95	50.0%
Northern	2	88	4,249	120	0.03	85	70.8%
Northern Total		176	7,046	310	0.04	180	58.1%
Southern	1	23	808	38	0.05	16	42.1%
Southern	2	23	744	38	0.05	22	57.9%
Southern Total		46	1,552	76	0.05	38	50.0%
Preference Point			7,449				
Statewide Total		222	16,047	386	0.02	218	56.5%

The total Wisconsin harvest goal was 290 bobcats which includes a tribal allocation of 70.

Table 2. Total number of permits issued, total bobcats reported, and average pelt price from 1980 to 2014.

Year	# of Permits Issued	Total Reported Take	Average Pelt Price (\$)
1980	1,840	90	84.00
1981	2,675	208	78.93
1982	2,972	139	70.67
1983	3,214	206	61.91
1984	3,089	260	71.93
1985	4,191	189	61.78
1986	4,064	183	86.55
1987	5,114	247	85.37
1988	5,285	165	55.34
1989	5,051	136	48.08
1990	4,359	98	56.79
1991	2,358	71	35.24
1992	2,300	217	37.52
1993	2,000	160	45.02
1994	2,000	169	36.17
1995	2,000	111	45.47
1996	2,000	166	44.75
1997	2,000	216	43.70
1998	1,860	194	41.25
1999	1,540	187	46.24
2000	1,490	280	41.88
2001	781	152	41.81
2002	1,330	253	46.31
2003	1,380	371	67.23
2004	1,370	364	73.11
2005	1,540	497	90.88
2006	1,000	356	71.03
2007	1,030	477	74.45
2008	540	367	38.55
2009	475	271	45.58
2010	455	349	61.44
2011	475	357	91.67
2012	165	242	126.60
2013	216	226	97.60
2014	386	337	77.52

Table 3. The 2014 Wisconsin bobcat harvest by zone, period, and method of harvest. These data do not include incidental or tribal harvest.

Zone	Period	Shot over Dogs	Shot without Dogs	Trapped	Unknown	Total
Northern	1	48	2	43	2	95
Northern	2	75	1	7	2	85
Northern Total		123	3	50	4	180
Southern	1	3	2	10	1	16
Southern	2	17	1	3	1	22
Southern Total		20	3	13	2	38
Statewide Total		143	6	63	6	218

