

Otter Harvest 2015-16

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Abstract

Wisconsin trappers and citizens reported 1,251 otters during the 2015-16 season, including 997 taken with DNR issued permits, 35 taken off reservation by native trappers, 21 taken on reservations, and 189 turned in as incidentals, this includes road kills, but are primarily the result of beaver trapping efforts by citizen trappers or government agents. This was a total increase of 4% from the otter reported in 2014-15. The counties of highest harvest were Oneida (54), Burnett (43), Barron (43) and Douglas (41).

Background

Bluett (1985) described the procedures for obtaining otter tags, and registering/tagging otters in Wisconsin. Dhuey, et al. (2015) described the results of the 2014-15 otter trapping season. Otter harvest goals are set annually for each otter management zone based upon population size in relation to management goals. The number of harvest permits issued are based on the highest trapper success rate during the previous three years in each respective zone. Negotiated amounts of the harvest in each zone within the ceded territory are allotted to Native American (Chippewa) trappers.

Methods

Non-Chippewa trappers are required to obtain an otter trapping permit before pursuing otter in Wisconsin. The application fee for an otter permit is \$3.00, (included in the Patron license fee). Trappers were required to register all harvested otters with the DNR.

The 2015-16 otter season ran from 7 November 2015 - 30 April 2016 in the Northern Zone and 7 November 2014 - 31 March 2015 in the Central and Southern Zones (Fig. 1). Trappers were required to register all otters with DNR personnel. The area of kill (county and deer management unit), date of kill, sex of the animal, type of trap used, type of animal (fur farm or wild), and the name and address of the trapper were recorded for each otter registered. Reported data were entered into the DNR production server by district personnel and summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). Otters trapped by Native Americans on ceded lands were included in the harvest summary. Data on off-reservation treaty otter harvest was provided by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (Jonathan Gilbert; pers. comm.).

Results

A total of 15,234 applicants (9,320 applied for a kill permit and 5,914 applied for a preference point) applied for the 5,260 otter tags issued in 2015-16 season (Table 1). The average number of tags per kill permit applicant was 0.56. There were 4% fewer applicants for permits and 32% more permits available than in 2014-15 season. In addition, a Chippewa allocation of 75 otters for the North Zone was agreed to for their use during the Chippewa off-reservation trapping season (1 November 2015 to 31 March 2016) on ceded lands. A threshold agreement was developed for tribal harvest of 15% of the non-native harvest for each respective zone in the ceded territory. If or when tribal harvest exceeds the 15% threshold for a specific zone, a declaration is required in that zone for the following harvest season. No declarations were

required for otters in 2015-16.

A total of 1,251 otters were registered by tribal and non-tribal trappers or reported as incidentals during the 2015-16 season. This was an increase of 4% from last year and the 20th highest total take since the state started registering otter in 1976. Permit success for the 2015-16 season (19.0%) was less than last year (21.7%) (Table 1). Chippewa trappers took 35 otters on ceded lands; 41 fewer than were taken in the 2014-15 season (these data were provided by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, P.O. Box 9, Odanah, WI, 54861). A total of 21 otter were registered with kill locations on Wisconsin's reservations. A total of 198 otters were registered as incidental, these were taken accidentally to other trapping activity, found dead, or road kills. All of these kill types are included in the statewide totals.

Weather during the otter season was above average for temperature and below average for snowfall. These conditions may have encourage mid-winter trapping activity and lengthened the open-water spring season. The average price paid for otter pelts by fur buyers was \$19.98 in 2015-16. This was less than the \$30.86 paid for otter pelts in 2014-15, and below the long-term average of \$45.51 (Table 2).

Oneida county had the highest number of otters harvested 54, Burnett (45), Barron (43), and Douglas (41) counties followed (Fig. 1). Game management Unit 65B was the leading unit of harvest with 30 otters registered (Fig. 2). More males (746; or 59.6%) were trapped than females (438; or 35.0%). Sixty-seven (5.4%) registration forms did not report the sex of the otter or reported the sex as unknown.

Body-grip traps accounted for 82% of the otters harvested in 2015-16, and foothold traps accounted for 18% of the otter trapped. Less than one percent of otters trapped were caught in water snares or a cage.

Sixteen percent of the otters registered this season were reported as being incidentally taken. These include otter taken while trapping for other species, found dead, or road kill. The regular beaver season ran concurrent with the otter season in each respective zone. The WDNR Furbearer Advisory Committee recommended a statewide harvest goal of 2,000 otter in the 2016-17 season, proportioned at 40% in the Northern Otter Zone, and 30% in the each of the Central and Southern Otter Zones.

Literature Cited

Bluett, R.1985. The 1983-84 Otter Tagging Report. Wis. Dep. Nat. Resour. 7 pp.

Dhuey B. and J. Olson. 2015. Otter Harvest, 2014-15. IN: The Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys Report. August 2015. Document on file at the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources, Bureau of Research, Madison, WI. 53711.

Table 1. 2015-16 Wisconsin state otter harvest goal and applicant results.

Zone	State Harvest Goal	Permits Issued	Applicants for Kill Tag	Applicants for Preference Point	Tags/ Applicant	State Harvest*	Percent Success
North	680	1,880	3,765	NA	0.50	405	21.5%
Central	510	1,340	3,061	NA	0.44	295	22.0%
South	510	2,040	2,494	NA	0.82	296	14.5%
Unknown						1	
Total	1,700	5,260	9,320	5,914	0.56	997	19.0%

* Does not include incidental or tribal otter harvest

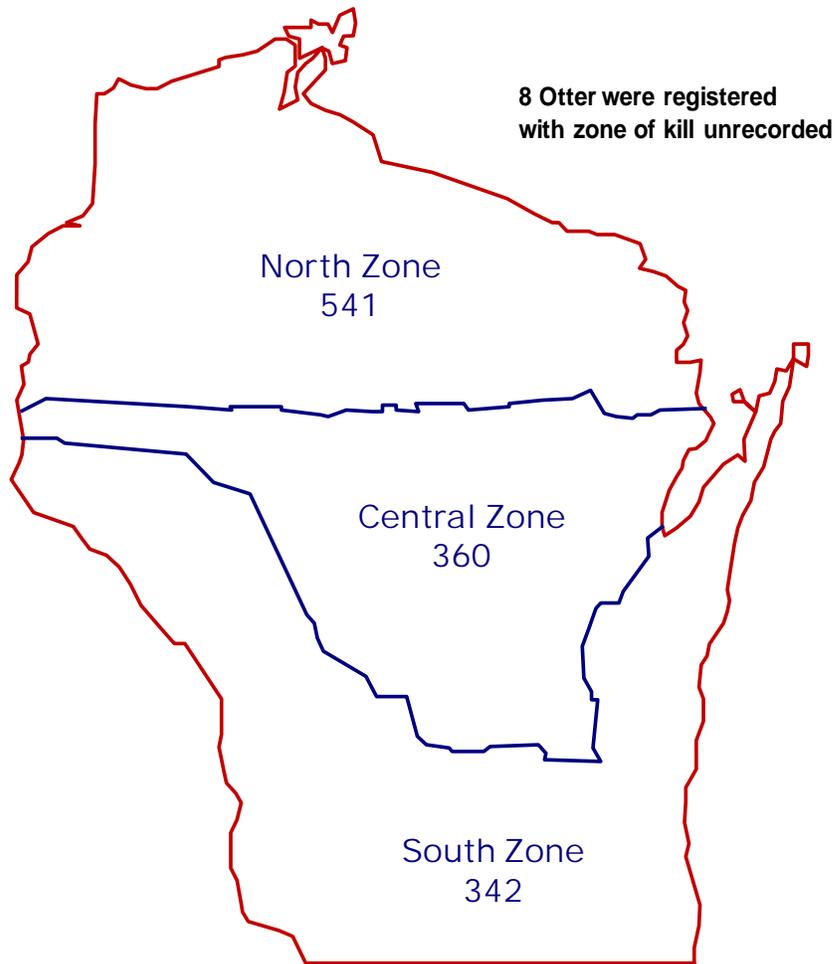


Figure 1. 2015-16 Otter kill by Zone.

Table 2. *The annual number of otter permits mailed to Wisconsin trappers, total registered otter harvest, and average pelt price, 1976-2015.*

Year	Number of Permits Mailed	Total Registered Harvest	Average Pelt Price (\$)
1976-77	5,050	1,271	
1977-78	5,218	1,113	47.83
1978-79	4,914	962	82.15
1979-80	5,754	1,448	60.05
1980-81	7,269	1,122	33.79
1981-82	8,256	1,024	26.89
1982-83	7,403	960	24.70
1983-84	8,294	995	25.68
1984-85	7,516	1,213	24.41
1985-86	7,104	960	22.84
1986-87	6,599	1,588	29.62
1987-88	9,360	1,724	23.87
1988-89	7,838	1,127	20.14
1989-90	6,360	1,213	24.11
1990-91	4,613	744	14.39
1991-92	2,799	762	12.50
1992-93	3,201	969	33.24
1993-94	5,531	1,130	57.30
1994-95	9,282	1,816	48.76
1995-96	14,800	1,517	44.47
1996-97	16,457	2,443	45.66
1997-98	15,429	2,704	43.70
1998-99	10,898	1,530	37.05
1999-2000	12,510	2,178	46.48
2000-01	11,180	1,844	54.01
2001-02	12,119	2,601	56.00
2002-03	8,370	2,053	77.12
2003-04	4,810	1,588	89.49
2004-05	4,240	1,322	78.03
2005-06	4,180	1,518	101.32
2006-07	4,335	1,458	44.28
2007-08	4,625	990	35.18
2008-09	2,410	710	33.04
2009-10	2,420	753	34.70
2010-11	3,770	913	46.05
2011-12	4,260	1,487	70.54
2012-13	3,335	1,445	85.18
2013-14	2,980	907	63.98
2014-15	3,985	1,204	30.86
2015-16	5,260	1,251	19.98

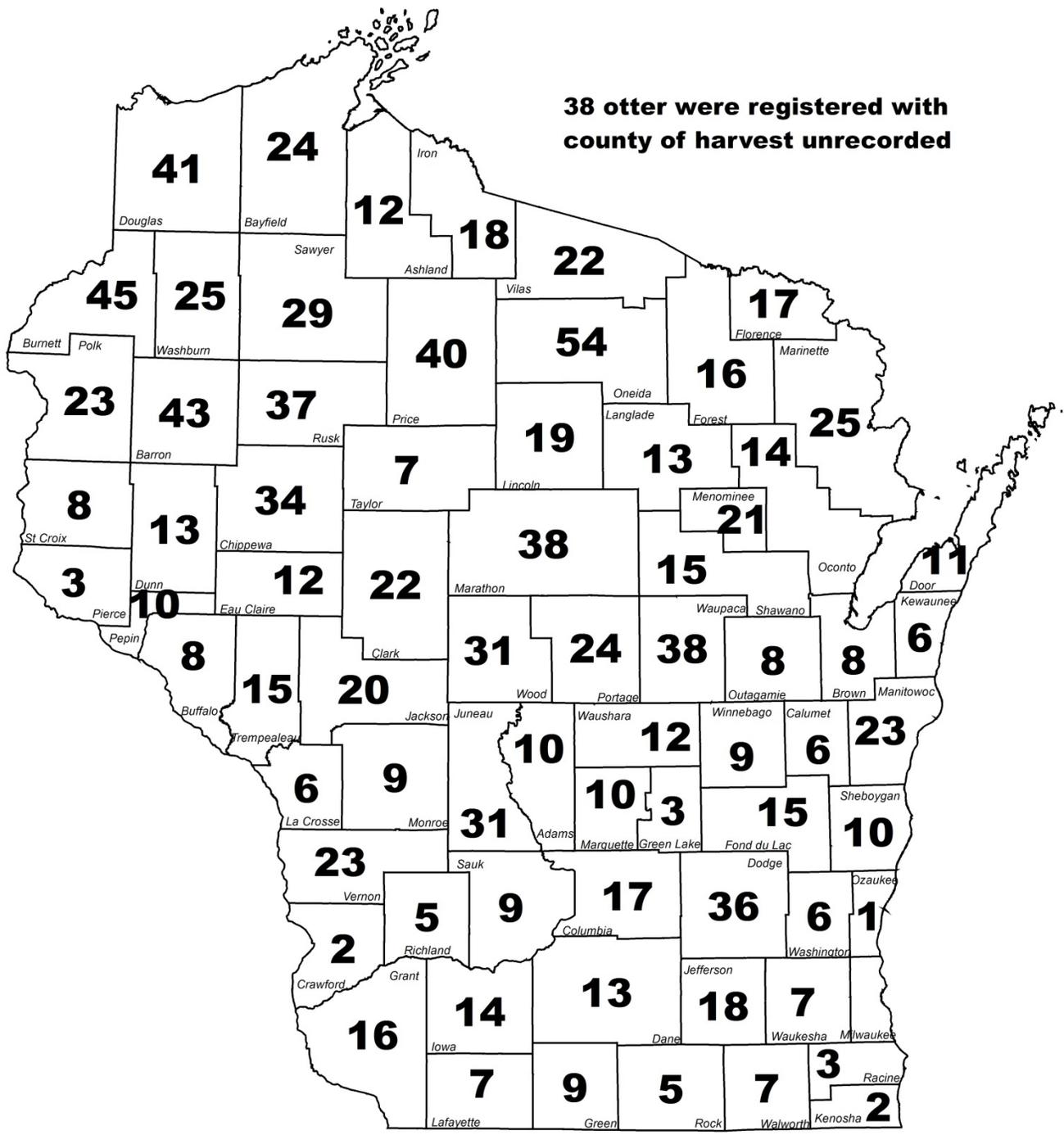


Figure 2. The 2015-16 otter harvest by county.

