

**Minutes of the Furbearer Advisory Committee
May 30 & 31, 2013
Midway Motor Lodge, Wausau, WI**

DNR Committee Attendance: John Olson, WM, Linda Olver CS&L; Jim Woodford, ER; Chris Cole, WM SOD; Jake Fries, WM NED; Brandon Stefanski, WM, WCD; Todd Naas and Pat Beringer, WM, NOD; Nate Kroepelin, LE; Robert Rolley, SS.

Invited Committee Members in Attendance: Jim Hanson, WBHA; Al Lobner, HRC; Virgil Schroeder, WTA; Ralph Fritsch, WWF; Ed Harvey Jr., WCC; Dave Ruid, USDA-WS; Dan Eklund, USFS;

Invited Native American Biologist in Attendance: Jonathan Gilbert, GLIFWC

Advisory Committee Assistant: Geriann Albers, WM

Invited Department Experts: Geriann Albers, WM; Dave MacFarland and Brian Dhuey SS; and John Clare, UW-Stevens Point.

Public in Attendance: Dan Carroll, Hubert Malsin Jr., Laurie Groskopf, Scott Zimmerman and Justin Hughes.

The meeting was called to order at 9:03 a.m. by John Olson, Committee Chair. An overview of the committee structure, committee protocols and function was provided.

Day 1: Reports and Updates.

Trapper Education. Geriann Albers presented program updates including the graduate rate from last year, dedication of the volunteer instructors from the Wisconsin Trappers Association, training of State Parks staff in Trapper Education, Wolf Trapper Education updates, Fur Schools, the status of the New Manual and other publications that are in the works, Online Trapper Education progress, the FFA State Wildlife Exam (with the WTA), the Winter Track Workshop last December, the development of a Furbearer website, and the upcoming State Parks LTE staff training and Ag Education Teacher Trapper Education Instructor training.

Wildlife Fur Schools. John Olson gave an update of the six Fur Schools held during the past year including: Law Enforcement, Wildlife, two Universities (UW-Madison and Stevens Point), one college (Northland) and Kentucky LE/WM Fur School, led by John Welke of LE and John Irwin of the WTA. Success of the program is the diversity and quality of instructors that includes GLIFWC, USDA, USFWS, WTA, LE, WM, and retirees. Participants in WI included two biologists from China and the Oklahoma Furbearer Biologist. This is the record number of training workshops and even a new record size (47 students at Stevens Point!). In 2014 we'll have four fur schools, LE in December followed by Northland College and Stevens Point and wrapping up in March with the Wildlife Fur School.

Wisconsin Trappers Association. Virgil Schroeder, president said the WTA had a good year. Highlights include the first successful wolf trapping season; few trap incidents reported; slightly lower harvests due to drought conditions and disease (distemper in raccoons), but fur prices were strong. The WTA is hosting the Fur Takers of America National Rendezvous at the Marshfield

fairgrounds in late June. Trapper concerns include declining beaver populations, availability of muskrats, and bobcat populations although variable by location, seem to be up and people can't get tags. Trapper Education programs are working, with trappers becoming more aware of where to set, and where to not set traps. In addition, the increased use of dog proof traps has reduced the incidental take of other species, especially dogs. New laws allowing trapping in State Parks, is a good thing, but somewhat of a concern. With the restriction to just dog proof traps on land, we shouldn't see many problems. Overall, 2012 was a good year for trappers.

U.S. Forest Service. Dan Eklund outlined the support the Forest Service provides to the Furbearer Program including track surveys and collaborating with DNR and GLIFWC on marten restoration. Last winter, the U.S. Forest Service collaborated on marten winter hair snare surveys and with marten habitat mapping projects on the forest. Beaver control program is ongoing and they're reviewing beaver control on trout streams, mostly in the northeast where trout streams are more plentiful. Currently working with UW-Madison and Wildlife Services to see how populations and colonization rates have changed since the control program began with results possible in 6 to 8 months. Trappers are provided maps of known beaver colonies as well. Concerns with the wolf season didn't occur with only one minor incident. Other activities include timber harvest plans and incorporating beaver habitat into scoping statements for applicable projects.

Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife (GLIFWC). Jonathan Gilbert reported that tribal harvest has increased in the last few years. In 2012-13, the tribes set record harvests for bobcat and otter and closed fisher harvest early in two zones. The US Fish and Wildlife Service granted GLIFWC the authority for their own CITES program for bobcat and otter. With tribal harvest slowly increasing and our overall quotas stabilized or decreasing, tribal harvest is now approaching the 50/50 split for some furbearer species. Collection of tribal furbearer carcasses will now become an important need and in 2012-13 bobcat carcasses were required and data collected was incorporated into the model. Currently, we are working with Professor John Pauley and UW-Madison graduate students to identify marten food habits using stable isotope analysis with work completed later this summer.

Trap Incident Report. Nate Kroepelin summarized the trap incident report data from the beginning in 1997 through 2012. Background on the report was given, and graphs depicting trends were reviewed. One potential "red flag" is the 160 body grip use in road right-of-ways.

Furbearer Survey Update. Brian Dhuey (invited expert) provided an overview, highlighting the need for a wide diversity of surveys to monitor the numerous furbearer species. The *Small Game Survey* collects information on huntable species such as coyote, fox, and raccoons while the *Summer Wildlife Survey* collects observations from rural landowners on coyote, fox, and skunk. This survey suggests coyote sightings are increasing slightly with fox and skunk sightings stable. The *Bobcat Hunter/Trapper Survey* collects information from all who receive a permit. Results give us an indication of participation rates, techniques used, observations while afield, and input on potential changes such as the recent split season framework. The *Fur Trapper Survey* provides valuable information on harvest estimates, number and type of traps used, expenses, etc. The *Beaver Trapper Survey* provides details on trapper effort (by zone), harvest, etc. The *Fur Buyer Report*, a mandatory survey, gathers information regarding furs

purchased and the average pelt price. Results are only a fraction of the total, as fur brokerages, such as North American Fur Auctions, Inc. and Fur Harvesters are not included. Last year fur buyers alone purchased furs valued at \$ 5.8 million. The annual *Mammal Survey* collects observations from department personnel on several furbearers, by county and is the only consistent input on badger observations. The *Rare Mammal Observation Report* collects detailed information on species such as lynx, cougar, and wolf by the public, on our website. The *Deer Hunter Wildlife Survey* collects information on several furbearers as well.

Robert Rolley reported on additional surveys including: the *Winter Track Survey*, the *Otter Aerial Survey* and *Carcass Collections Survey*. There were 26 winter track surveys run this past winter, which is the average number of completions. Expansion into central and southwestern Wisconsin has had limited success due to lack of adequate snow conditions.

Dave MacFarland reported on the timeline for age data from furbearers. Age determination is contracted to Matson's La in Milltown, Montana. Cost-benefit analysis shows this to be the most timely, economical and practical. The process includes decalcification (removing calcium before they can age) and sophisticated tools to cut and develop quality cross-sections. With other high priority species from Wisconsin (bears and wolves) and the length of furbearer seasons, we usually receive furbearer data back in December.

Furbearer Survey Review. Dave MacFarland reported on the request to review our furbearer surveys and the current status of the Furbearer Survey ad hoc committee. The goal of this committee was to review surveys to determine their usefulness and accuracy. Those gaps in surveys are being identified with suggested alternatives developed which could include changes in current protocols or new surveys entirely. Initial work occurred between last fall/winter with a focus on winter track, and the bobcat, fisher and otter surveys. Status as of the meeting included draft language developed for some priority animals like bobcat, fisher, otter, and coyote and at least a list of potential recommendations. The committee will concentrate on new population index development to compliment current indices and the relationship of sample size (i.e. track survey) and an understanding of the relationship between data collected and actual population size. Potential survey technique includes a revised bow hunter survey, a camera survey and a population reconstruction survey. The latter survey requires annual data collection such as harvest and age data and might be of value with bobcat, fisher and otter management. In addition, the *Volunteer Carnivore Track Survey* is focused on wolves, but collects track data on other furbearers as well. This data could give us an index of abundance for several furbearers. With 150 tracking blocks in wolf range (northern 2/3rds of the state) and a mixture of volunteers and agency staff, the potential for additional information at an economical cost is possible.

Beaver Management Plan. John Olson provided an update on the Beaver Task Force efforts and recent lull in effort (primarily due to wolf harvest workloads). Size of the task force and variety of interests resulted in contracting to a professional facilitator. Outreach occurred around the state at a series of informational meetings in addition to Internet surveys coordinated by University of Wisconsin Extension Service. A rough draft is nearing completion with a task force meeting later this summer/fall to work out additional details.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Trapping. John Olson provided an update on this national trap research effort. Initiated in 1997, supported by all 50 state agencies, this effort is ongoing but has already developed publications on the initial humane trap recommendations for 21 furbearer species in North America with only the wolf, arctic fox and wolverine remaining. The wolf BMP work is being conducted in Canada, Wisconsin and Minnesota with the initial publication expected out later this year. Members of this committee meet annually with the Joint Management Committee, which is EU, Russia, and Canada. The U.S. has “observer status” because we didn’t sign the binding contract, instead agreeing to actions spelled out in an Agreed Minute document. A recent challenge by the EU has caused this committee to review our efforts and strategies with additional directions to be recommended later this year.

USDA-Wildlife Services Report. Dave Ruid provided an update on the beaver damage program. Initiated in 1988, work began with USFS and WDNR on beaver control in north eastern Wisconsin trout streams. Program has expanded since then, predominantly in within the northern portion of the state. Their focus has been trout and the cold water resources, and have agreements with a number of counties and townships to protect roads. They also work with the department on wild rice management where impoundments can have an effect. On average, the program takes 1,300 beaver annually. In 2012, the program took 964 beaver: 414 on trout streams, 550 damage (road complaints), 24 wild rice lakes, and 16 railroad sites. They salvaged 221 beaver in spring and 172 in fall (393 total), which are put on a bid-style auction with fur buyers. Funds from fur and castor sales generated are plowed back into the program.

Law Enforcement. Nate Kroepelin reported on the warden Fur School last year which included 11 warden recruits, additional GLIFWC staff, and other agency personnel with interest. Next year they anticipate 18 warden recruits with the program scheduled for early December. With the increased interest in trapping, wardens expected, but did not see an increase in violations, a great compliment to all of the education efforts conducted! New challenge will be the retirement and replacement of key enforcement positions including the division administrator, bureau chief and the legal/policy officer.

American Marten. Jim Woodford reported on the status of this rare furbearer that has been on the state endangered species list since 1972. Several monitoring efforts including snow tracking, den box surveys, rare mammal reports, and winter trail camera surveys are being conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and GLIFWC. The *Marten Track Survey* is slightly different from the other tracking surveys and covers 140 miles in the Nicolet and 100 in the Chequamegon. Last winter’s result showed a detection of 18 marten in the Nicolet and 16 in the Chequamegon (this latter population benefited from a three year restocking a few years ago). The Nicolet population appears stable and the Chequamegon saw a big decline, and now seems to be coming back.

On average there are one to three marten incidentally trapped per year. In 2012/13 there were no such reports. Of 30 den boxes placed last summer none were used, but will be checked again in late summer. Sites selected were areas with small diameter trees lacking good den sites. Forest management guidelines for marten are being developed through the marten committee. This guidance will be designed to retain suitable habitat and/or to develop suitable habitat in marginal areas. Also the results of ~200 hair snare stations throughout the release area are promising, with

“hits” found in areas where tracks weren’t recorded. These hair samples will provide genetic markers useful in a “mark-recapture” population assessment.

Wildlife Health. Lindsey Long, State Veterinarian, via email, reported on a Canine Distemper outbreak identified in Northwestern Wisconsin with cases submitted from Dec 2012 –March 2013 impacting mostly raccoons in addition to one confirmation of a gray fox. A raccoon polyomavirus was recently isolated from raccoons in California and Oregon where brain tumors were also discovered, however, it is not yet known if there is an association between the two, with research occurring at UC Davis. Lindsey would like additional discussions on possible furbearer projects, especially fisher.

Midwest Furbearer Workshop. Geriann Albers (non-member) summarized the 2013 Midwest Furbearer Workshop in Illinois. Eleven Midwest member states attended, including Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin, as well as representatives from Cook County Forest Preserve District, Wildlife Control Technology Group, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, Illinois Natural History Survey, University of Illinois, and Southern Illinois University. Speakers at the meeting presented on various topics including the value of long-term research for monitoring wildlife diseases; management of urban coyotes and perceived risks to residents of Chicago; management of feral swine in Illinois; food habits and activity of river otters in Illinois; cougars in the Midwest; role of furbearers as nest predators; and using technology to improve efficiency and accuracy of surveys.

There is interest in collectively developing a Statistical Population Reconstruction model through a grant process sponsored by Illinois. This first step will be to gather what data is currently being collected by Midwest states so a coordinated data collection plan could be established and then initiating software development. Those present at the business meeting discussed the collection of genetics to assist in the evaluation of the Prairie Gray Fox and Plains Spotted Skunk potentially being listed under the Endangered Species Act. The committee was asked to review a National Wildlife Control Training Program developed by Cornell University and the University of Nebraska. This program may provide opportunities for those states that require certification of Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators. The committee also discussed the management of cougars and challenges and issues that may be arising in upcoming years, and the possibility of developing regional, cooperative research on species of interest.

CITES Update. John Olson reported the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agreed to go to a 5 year non-detriment finding (instead of annual), for bobcat and otter which is to go into effect this next year. This is the result of a failed request at the COP (Convention of Parties) to remove bobcat from Appendix II of CITES. Another request of going to a paper process of CITES acknowledgement rather than a physical tag ended in no change due to additional requirements imposed by the Service.

Additional activities included a CITES tag issue this year in the states of California and Colorado which the Service eventually worked out with the large auction houses. Also, a formal request to list the prairie grey fox and plains spotted skunk as federally protected is “precluded” until 2015 by higher priority workloads, thus allowing the states time to conduct a genetic review. Finally, wolves are a CITES approved species in Alaska, but not elsewhere. The USFWS initiated work 18 months ago to change the federal register to allow CITES approval of wolves, for other states.

The public review is complete, but the Service informed us nothing will happen until 2014 at the earliest.

Public input was allowed before meeting adjourned.

Thursday Evening Program

Bobcat Research. John Clare, UW–Stevens Point graduate student presented the results of the bobcat research he conducted in central Wisconsin, under Dr. Eric Anderson. The presentation provided a summary of the study design, as well as density and population estimates for the study area. Good exchange of questions, answers and ideas occurred following John’s excellent presentation.

Day Two: Harvest & Rule Recommendations

The session on May 31 was called to order at 7:30 A.M. by John Olson.

Fisher. Data on fisher were presented including 2012 harvest quota, 2012 harvest by zone, incidental harvest, and reported off and on-reservation tribal harvest. Maps showing harvest density were provided to Committee Members. Members discuss field observations and general opinion of the fisher population, which varied by zone and within zones. In most areas members reflected on populations being stable to increasing, except in northern Wisconsin. Success rates and projected population modeling were reviewed. Clarification was made that we do not include incidentals in harvest data but are included in the population model.

Zone A quota recommendation varied from 125 to 150. **Committee consensus was a recommendation of 140.**

Zone B discussion included the accuracy of the population goal with most members recommending a quota of 100, with a few recommending 125. **Committee consensus was a recommendation of 100.** Of concern by minority is the actual population goal which may need to be re-evaluated.

Zone C quota discussion resulted in members suggesting a harvest of 50 to 75. **Committee consensus was a recommendation of 60.**

Zone D discussion resulted in total agreement to recommend the status quota at 50. **Committee consensus was a recommendation of 50.**

Zones E and F do not have population goals or models, with quotas set by a thorough review of harvest and success rates.

Committee consensus for Zone E was a recommendation of 225.

Committee consensus for Zone F was a recommendation of 240.

Otter. The 2012-13 quota, state harvest, incidental harvest and tribal harvest were reviewed. Member input on harvest and populations in their perspective areas, including review of population model resulted in consensus of a stable to increasing otter population, contradictory to

the model. High incidental take of otter was discussed, as was the incomplete aerial survey data due to poor weather conditions, and the comparison of various data that show no correlations or trends. It was noted that the population model for otter is statewide and part of the committee's recommendations should include a breakdown of how the quota should be split amongst the three zones. Initial member quota recommendations ranged from 1100 to 1200 with most agreeing to an equal split between the three zones.

Committee consensus was a primary quota recommendation of 1,200 split equally. Committee secondary recommendation is a quota of 1,100 with a split of 40/30/30. Additional Committee recommendation of a 40/30/30 split if the final harvest quota is anything less than 1,200.

Bobcat. The 2012-13 quota, state harvest, incidental harvest, and on and off-reservation harvest were reviewed. An increase in tribal trapper harvest off-reservation was noted. Population model was adjusted to more closely match the winter track survey index, and as a result the estimated population is near goal. Members discussed opinions and field views of populations, which generally seem to be stable, with some thinking it increased slightly.

Committee members initially recommended quotas of 225 to 250.
Committee consensus was a quota recommendation of 240.

Department Rule Proposals. Results of the 2013 Spring Hearing were discussed, with all five proposals receiving strong support by popular and county votes. This included: Twenty-four hour reporting of fisher and otter harvest; expansion of the bobcat harvest zone; a four-day trap check for specific weasel boxes; simplified mink and muskrat seasons; and allowing the cutting of willow stakes on public land to be used as a trapping tool. The mink and muskrat proposal was tabled at the Natural Resources Board meeting for additional input with the remainder on track for probable implementation in the 2014 season.

Spring Hearing WCC Advisory Proposals. Questions were discussed and recommendations made on tabling or advancing. Expansion of trapping opportunities in State Parks by adopting the Department's proposal versus the Natural Resource Board decision resulted in a split decision with no consensus, thus it was tabled.

Allow any type of light at point of kill while predator hunting, not just a flashlight was determined to be a legislative change, not a rule change and made no recommendations, thus it was tabled.

Allow trapping on National Park Service lands would require federal legislation, not a state legislative or rule change. No recommendation made, this it was tabled.

Change of the mink and muskrat season to begin the third Saturday in October. This needs revision and the committee decided to table and discuss during rule proposals later in the meeting. Expansion of bobcat harvest was also temporarily tabled.

County Resolutions. This set of proposals will be discussed by the Conservation Congress's Fur Harvest Committee in August. The Furbearer Committee reviewed primarily for informational purposes, suggestions or concerns. Resolutions included: eliminating trap check hours; restoring beaver to the protective status; limiting trapping to private lands; allow for mentored trapping; open trapping opening day at 7 A.M.; allow for lights to scan for predators; require Parton license holders to pay the \$3 fee for fisher and otter; remove the Trapper Education exemption for farmers when not trapping on their own land; and to change mandatory Trapper Education year to 1999 to match the DNR's electronic records.

Elimination of trap check hours; restoring beaver to protected status; limiting trapping to private lands; and changing trapping hours on opening day were not supported by the committee. Allowing lights had no consensus and was tabled. A mentored trapping license; removing the farmer trapper education exemption and changing the trapper education date were supported, but all would require legislation, not a rule change.

Public input was allowed before Rule Proposal discussions were had.

Rule Proposals. Additional discussion on the muskrat and mink season resulted in a recommendation to eliminate the Winnebago Zone. After discussion, many agreed seasons should stay as they are, though some suggested opening everything except raccoon on the last Saturday in October. It was decided that a new committee evaluating rule simplification will likely be discussing these issues further.

Bobcat Harvest Expansion. Following a thorough discussion the committee consensus was to recommend: establishing four bobcat zones in the state - the current zone open to harvest to become the North Bobcat Zone; a Central Bobcat Zone open to harvest; and South West Bobcat Zone closed to harvest at this time (pending additional review) and a South East Zone closed to harvest (See map insert). It was recommended we do not establish a management goal and next year when quotas are recommended to work toward a quota of 10% of the estimated population, similar to the current harvest zone. A thorough review of suitable habitat is needed to allow Science Services the tools to estimate the population. Methods of harvest, bag limit of 1, drawing by application, split season dates, season start and end dates, and zone specific harvest would be recommended to be the same as is currently used for the northern zone.



Otter Zones. Elimination of otter zones was discussed, but the Committee decided to table.

Badger Harvest Season. A potential badger harvest season was discussed. Active research may provide insight into badger population dynamics with possible consideration of regulated harvest in the future. Committee agreed to encourage additional badger research in Wisconsin with intention of answering questions related to regulated take in the future.

Meeting adjourned at 3:38 p.m.