

2016-17 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #17-3

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 84 permits to fur buyers during 2016-17. Based on a 94% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 51,556, a decrease of 27% from 2015-16 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers decreased 29% to \$261,035.15. Raccoon and muskrat accounted for 77% of the total harvest and 55% of its value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 2% for striped skunk to 82% for gray fox; they were intermediate for opossum (15%), red fox (19%) and coyote (22%). Hunters accounted for the same proportion of the raccoon harvest in 2016-17 as 2015-16 (46%).

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 poor during 2016-17 because of economic conditions in major markets and a glut of wild and ranch-raised goods from past seasons. Pelt values improved modestly for muskrat and raccoon. Nevertheless, sales of both species during 2016-17 were the lowest since the Department started keeping records in 1975-76.

Sales of trapping licenses declined from 6,523 in 2015-16 to 5,394 in 2016-17. During 2015-16, approximately 7,600 raccoon hunters spent 78,000 days afield and 27,500 coyote hunters spent 217,000 days afield (Williams et al. 2016).

Sales of pelts during 2016-17 fell short of historical averages (since 1975-76) for beaver (73%), river otter (80%), coyote (69%), badger (31%), raccoon (17%) and weasels (10%). Sales of other species were $\leq 10\%$ of their long-term averages.

LITERATURE CITED

Conat, R.J., B.D. Williams, L.K. Campbell, and C.A. Miller. 2016. 2015-2016 Illinois trapper report: harvest, effort, and motivations. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, USA.

Williams, B.D., R.J. Conat, L.A. Schweizer, L.K. Campbell, and C.A. Miller. 2016. 2015-2016 Illinois hunter harvest report. Illinois Natural History Survey Technical Report 2016 (59). Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, USA.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2016-17 vs. 2015-16.

Species	Number of pelts sold ^a		Change in sales from 2015-16 ^b		Average price per pelt (dollars)		Total value to fur-takers (dollars)		Change in value from 2015-16 (dollars)	
	2016-17	2015-16			2016-17	2015-16	2016-17	2015-16		
Muskrat	10,265	17,400	-7,135	(-41)	3.05	2.40	31,308.25	41,760.00	-10,451.75	(-25)
Mink	692	769	-77	(-10)	5.25	3.95	3,633.00	3,037.55	+595.45	(+20)
Raccoon	29,530	36,834	-7,304	(-20)	3.80	3.40	112,214.00	125,235.60	-13,021.60	(-10)
Opossum	1,246	962	+284	(+29)	0.95	0.90	1,183.70	865.80	+317.90	(+37)
Red fox	372	597	-225	(-38)	8.60	10.20	3,199.20	6,089.40	-2,890.20	(-47)
Gray fox	37	11	+26	(+236)	6.45	10.45	238.65	114.95	+123.70	(+108)
Beaver	3,509	3,146	+363	(+12)	7.00	6.90	24,563.00	21,707.40	+2,855.60	(+13)
River otter	1,033 ^c	980 ^c	+53	(+5)	21.80	18.15	22,519.40	17,787.00	+4,732.40	(+27)
Striped skunk	155	537	-382	(-71)	3.75	3.50	581.25	1,879.50	-1,298.25	(-69)
Weasel	4	2	+2	(+100)	2.00	1.50	8.00	3.00	+5.00	(+167)
Coyote	4,563	8,898	-4,335	(-49)	13.00	16.50	59,319.00	146,817.00	-87,498.00	(-60)
Badger	9	16	-7	(-44)	6.00	5.10	54.00	81.60	-27.60	(-34)
Bobcat	141 ^c	0 ^d	+141	-- ^d	15.70	-- ^d	2,213.70	0.00 ^d	+2,213.70	(-- ^d)
Total/mean	51,556	70,152	-18,596	(-27)	5.0	5.20	261,035.15	365,378.80	-104,343.65	(-29)

^aIncludes correction for non-response and allowances for out-of-state pelt sales as estimated by Conat et al. (2016).^bNumbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.^cBased on sales of Temporary Pelt Permits.^dFirst modern season for bobcat.