

SUMMARY OF THE 2019-2020 TRAPPING SEASON

Trapping Licenses

Despite the challenges impacting the international fur market, the total number of trapping licenses sold increased this year by 3%. Records indicate a total of 2,642 trapping licenses were sold during the 2019-2020 trapping season whereas, a total of 2,572 were sold the previous season.

The resident trappers 15 and older purchased 2,358 licenses. The number of licenses purchased by resident trappers 14 and under increased from 234 to 255, and licenses purchased by non-residents increased from 28 to 29. Attached is a copy of trapping license sales from the season 1950-1951 – through the 2019-2020 season (Table 4).

Fur Harvest

Prices of fur have remained low and with auctions deeply impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic, 2020 has been a record low year for fur sales. China has long been a major consumer of fur pelts but the pandemic effectively stopped all imports around the beginning of the year. Live auctions across Europe and Canada were cancelled right as the 2019-2020 trapping season would have peaked. This in conjunction with the bankruptcy of North American Fur Auctions (NAFA) has made it very difficult for fur dealers and trappers to move their product. Online auctions with Fur Harvesters of America have continued but fur is a difficult product to sell when buyers are unable to inspect the product in person.

The species with the most demand on the international market are beaver and coyote. Coyote continues to be a popular material for trim on luxury parkas. Because the price of beaver pelts are low, it's likely they are being purchased as lining in lieu of traditionally less expensive furs. Castoreum also continues to be in high demand and is used in the manufacturing of a variety of products from baits and lures, food products, homeopathic medicines and cosmetics.

At the early spring auctions in March and April, most foxes, muskrat, bobcat, otter and mink went unsold. This is likely due to the pandemic and not because of lack of interest.

The total number of pelts harvested for the fur market in the 2019-2020 season was 2,372; this was a decrease of 3,023 compared to a total of 5,395 pelts sold in 2018-2019. The total pelt value also decreased in 2019-2020 and was estimated to be approximately \$14,488.04 (Table 2.), compared to an estimated total value of \$48,074.68 in the 2018-2019 season. A comparative analysis of take for the last ten years can be found in Table 3.

Nutria Harvest

It was decided during the 2018-19 season to increase the bounty from \$5.00 to \$6.00. This went into effect for the 2019-2020 season. As a result, we saw an increase in harvest from 223,155 in 2018-2019 to 245, 865; however, take was still below the average annual harvest indicating that incentive payment is not the only factor influencing take.

In 2019-2020, approximately 2,163 nutria carcasses were removed from the marsh. This is a sharp decrease from the previous season's total of 16,122. The trappers reported that all of the carcasses removed from the marsh were kept for personal use rather than sold for meat or fur. According to shipping reports, trappers and fur dealers reported shipping 44 pelts. Shipping may have been complicated by the Covid 19 related shutdowns which likely impacted the number of furs purchased by dealers.

Conservatively, the average nutria price paid by local dealers for green pelts during this past season has stayed consistent at \$2.00 (Table 2.). There is also a market for the meat within the specialty pet food market. This often allows trappers to sell nutria whole instead of having to pelt the carcasses first. An additional \$6.00 is paid for all nutria taken by registered participants as part of the Coastwide Nutria Control Program (CNCP). The total value of the nutria harvested from the CNCP increased from \$1,115,775 to \$1,475,190.

Coastwide Nutria Control Program

There were 259 active participants in the Coastwide Nutria Control program this year. This is up from the previous year's total of 241. The fewest number of tails turned in by a single participant was 3 and the greatest number of tails by a single participant was 12,281. Approximately 34% of active participants turned in 800 or more tails. Of the 89 participants who turned in 800 or more tails, 9% turned in more than 4,000 tails.

There were twenty parishes represented in the program with harvests of nutria ranging from 271 to 62,380. Plaquemines Parish reported the highest number of tails (62,380) followed by Terrebonne and St. Mary Parishes with 45,208 and 27,963 respectively.

The method of take for nutria was identified as: 19% of the nutria harvested were trapped, 62% of the nutria harvested were shot with a rifle, and 19% of the nutria harvested were shot with a shotgun.

February was the most active month for harvesting nutria (80,622) while November (8,222 tails) was the least active month (see CNCP Report, Coastal Wetlands Protection Planning Restoration Act (CWPPRA) Project LA-03b, <https://www.nutria.com/site13.php>).

Vegetative Damage Caused by Nutria

In the spring of 2020, a coast wide aerial survey was conducted covering the coastal parishes of Louisiana. The overall number of damage sites due to nutria herbivory stayed the same with 260 acres converted to open water.

There were 25 sites included in the 2020 vegetative damage survey. All of the 25 sites were previously identified as damaged sites with no new sites being documented. Two sites were identified as recovered for a total of 23 sites to be checked next year.

The 2020 vegetative damage survey yielded a total of 3,654 observed acres of damage, (extrapolated to be 13,702 acres coast wide). This is a slight decrease from the previous season. When compared to 2019 (3,907 acres or 14,652 acres extrapolated coast wide), the present damage represents approximately a 6.5% decrease in the number of damaged acres. The decrease in damage is due to the 206 acres that have converted to open water and the 168 acres marked as recovered.

Four parishes were observed to have nutria damage in 2020. Terrebonne and St. Mary respectively are the parishes that were the most impacted by nutria herbivory. Of the 23 sites currently being impacted by nutria herbivory damage, Terrebonne Parish contained the largest number of damaged sites, 19 sites (3,456 ac), followed by St. Mary (2 sites; 110 ac), St. Charles Parish (1 site; 49ac) and Cameron (1 sites; 39ac). (See CNCP Report, CWPPRA Project LA-03b, <https://www.nutria.com/site13.php>).

Fur Marketing and Education

For the past four years, the Coastal and Nongame Resources Division staff has worked closely with the Louisiana Trappers and Alligator Hunters Association (LTAHA) and the Louisiana Fur Advisory Council (LFAC) on trapper education. The LFAC provided financing for this project and provided trapping supplies for the workshops. The purpose of the program is to preserve trapping as a management tool, a recreational activity, and an economic benefit to Louisiana citizens and to preserve the culture and heritage of Louisiana. Over the four years of the program, trapping license sales have increased a total of 23 percent.

The educational program hosted five hands-on trapper workshops, which educated 110 trapping students. Twenty of these students also attended an end-of-season, intensive, three-day trapper school. A second trapping school was planned but canceled as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. The online trapper course, developed with the assistance of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, continued to reach a wider audience and provided fundamental background material as a prerequisite for the hands-on workshops.

Outreach remained an important goal for the Fur Advisory Council. Coastal and Nongame Resources Division staff along with volunteers from both the LFAC and the LTAHA promoted trapping as a management tool at over a dozen events. Other LDWF biologists and educators were provided with furs and background information so that they could likewise talk about the fur industry at public events and schools. The LFAC also partnered with several other organizations such as the Louisiana Department of Agriculture, the Audubon Zoo and Nature Center and the Wetland Watchers group to carry this message further.

Education is a valuable tool to enhance the management of Louisiana's fur resources. The fur industry still suffers from public misconceptions, and the Department and Council strive to balance the message through public education. This message of ethical and sustainable use creates an environment where a fur market can be publicly accepted. A strong fur market in turn facilitates a healthy marsh and helps control coastal vegetative damage from nutria. It also promotes economic growth within coastal communities.

Raccoon Harvest

The number of raccoon pelts sold by trappers decreased from 2,119 to 950 pelts reflecting the issues that trappers and dealers had with finding buyers during the pandemic (Table 2.). The number of raccoons harvested by hunters for sport was approximately 21,800 as reported by hunters during the annual LDWF hunter harvest survey. This is an increase from the previous year's take of 15,900. Nuisance wildlife control officers took a reported 498 raccoons during the 2019 calendar year.

Coyote and Fox Harvest

39 coyotes were harvested by trappers for fur during the 2019-2020 season. Pelts sold for an average price of \$10.00, a decrease from the previous year's average price of \$16.50 (Table 2.). Hunters reported during the LDWF annual hunter harvest survey an approximate take of 34,800 coyotes. This is an increase from last year's reported take of 27,400.

Nine red foxes and 80 grey foxes were harvested for fur during the 2019-2020 trapping season. Red foxes and grey foxes commanded an average value of \$5.00 and \$7.59, respectively (Table 2.).

There are currently 31 fox and coyote pens operating within Louisiana, which provide a market for live foxes and coyotes within the state.

River Otter Harvest

The average price for river otter decreased slightly from \$23.05 per pelt last year to \$18.75 (Table 2.). The otter had the second highest average price of all pelts and the highest value. Harvest for fur decreased from 1,091 to 218 this past season. A total of 468 CITES tags were requested for river otter, which is a decrease from the previous season's total of 945.

A healthy live market exists for river otter which may have helped increase interest in the trapping of them. Otters are an attractive exhibit for zoos and aquariums around the world and Louisiana trappers with proper state and federal permits have taken advantage of this. However, the pandemic has made the transfer of river otters around the world difficult.

Bobcat

The bobcat harvest by trappers for fur decreased from 164 in the 2018-2019 season to 91 in the 2019-2020 season. The average price paid by dealers, buyers and at auction decreased from \$26.67 this past season to \$21.16 (Table 2.). Bobcat had the highest average price of all pelts and was once in demand on the international market because of the beautiful coat patterns; however, in recent online auctions, bobcat pelts went unsold. It's likely that sales of bobcat will remain depressed until in person auctions resume. A total of 81 bobcat CITES tags were requested.

In the 2019-20 season, approximately 3,300 bobcats were reported to have been harvested by big game hunters (Table 1.). This is an increase from the previous season's total of 2,900.

Bobcat Harvest by Big Game Hunters LDWF Hunter Harvest Survey		
Season	Reported harvest from hunter survey	Confidence interval
2005-2006	8383	1476
2006-2007	8132	1416
2007-2008	7926	1344
2008-2009	6711	1303
2009-2010	7205	1338
2010-2011	7132	1435
2011-2012	6427	1120
2012-2013	4282	1123
2013-2014	4722	1165
2014-2015	3554	959
2015-2016	3767	971
2016-2017	5,700	1,600
2017-2018	4,100	1,290
2018-2019	2,900	1,050
2019-2020	3,300	1,200

Table 1. Estimated take of bobcats by big games hunters since 2005. Holders of a big game license can take one bobcat per calendar year.

Beaver Harvest

The number of beaver sold decreased from 1,268 to 500 pelts. The beaver price also decreased from an average of \$6.55 to \$5.95 (Table 2.). The lower price for beaver meant that it sold well in online fur auctions. Harvest of beaver is beneficial in the control of timber, agricultural and road damage throughout the state. Some parishes offer incentives through the sheriff's office or contract trappers to decrease beaver populations in areas where they have become overpopulated which typically means there are more beaver pelts on the market than needed to meet the demand. Beaver castor (castoreum) is still in high demand and can sell for as much as \$110.00 a pound with many Louisiana trappers taking advantage of this. Castoreum is used in the manufacture of food and cosmetics.

The 2019-2020 Trapping Season

The Trapping Season dates are November 20th to March 31st as set by the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission. The rule became effective upon the publication of the Louisiana Register

on August 20, 2008. Federal approval to export bobcat and river otter from the United States requires that the department ensure only Louisiana bobcat and river otter are tagged with Louisiana CITES export tags. This requires that all bobcat and river otter pelts be accompanied by completed State Possession Tags once purchased from a trapper and that these tags be kept with the pelts until they are submitted to the department in exchange for CITES export tags.

The nighttime take of outlaw quadrupeds law has changed. Licensed residents may take nutria, coyote and beaver year-round at night on private property without any special permit. This law went into effect August 1, 2020 and will be in place for the upcoming nutria control program season.

Total Fur Harvest for the 2019-20 Season and Average Price Paid

Species	Totals	Average price paid *
Muskrat	50	\$0.86
Nutria	44	\$2.00
Opossum	15	\$0.75
Raccoon	950	\$2.43
Mink	372	\$5.77
Skunk	4	\$0.00
Otter	218	\$18.75
Bobcat	91	\$21.16
Coyote	39	\$10.00
Red Fox	9	\$5.00
Gray Fox	80	\$7.59
Beaver	500	\$5.95
Total Harvest and Value	2,372	\$14,488.04

Table 2. Total number of furbearers by species reported to have been bought by licensed fur dealers or shipped by trappers for the 2019-2020 season.

*Average price paid largely reflects the prices paid by local dealers for green fur which tends to be much less than what trappers may receive for tanned fur sold at auctions.

**Comparative Take of Fur Animals in LA
10 Year Average (2010-11 - 2019-20)**

Species	No. of Pelts	Approx. price	Value
Nutria	6,234	\$1.92	\$12,984.10
Muskrat	652	\$2.73	\$2,831.13
Raccoon	5,968	\$3.92	\$31,881.54
Mink	669	\$7.95	\$5,880.93
Opossum	169	\$0.74	\$155.66
River Otter	1,583	\$33.79	\$65,771.58
Red Fox	58	\$12.51	\$939.09
Gray Fox	333	\$10.76	\$4,354.53
Bobcat	465	\$37.16	\$20,575.98
Beaver	1,724	\$6.93	\$12,957.95
Coyote	<u>85</u>	<u>\$8.30</u>	\$659.82
Avg. total pelts	17,937	Avg. total value	\$158,992.32

Table 3. Average annual harvest, price paid per pelt, and value for the past 10 years by species.

LOUISIANA
NO. OF TRAPPERS LICENSED BY YEAR

1950-51	7,732	1977-78	12,069	2004-05	1,597
1951-52	6,120	1978-79	11,106	2005-06	1,504
1952-53	4,328	1979-80	12,239	2006-07	1,690
1953-54	4,986	1980-81	11,801	2007-08	1,616
1954-55	5,202	1981-82	10,867	2008-09	1,704
1955-56	5,520	1982-83	10,668	2009-10	1,623
1956-57	4,211	1983-84	8,793	2010-11	1,957
1957-58	3,868	1984-85	10,935	2011-12	2,054
1958-59	3,932	1985-86	9,458	2012-13	2,140
1959-60	3,743	1986-87	6,947	2013-14	2,848
1960-61	3,613	1987-88	5,038	2014-15	2,559
1961-62	3,004	1988-89	2,888	2015-16	2,375
1962-63	3,666	1989-90	1,877	2016-17	2,133
1963-64	3,029	1990-91	1,414	2017-18	2,374
1964-65	3,061	1991-92	1,543	2018-19	2,572
1965-66	3,088	1992-93	1,189	2019-20	2,642
1966-67	3,492	1993-94	1,274		
1967-68	2,495	1994-95	1,686		
1968-69	3,601	1995-96	1,700		
1969-70	4,444	1996-97	2,691		
1970-71	3,510	1997-98	2,442		
1971-72	2,761	1998-99	1,578		
1972-73	4,741	1999-00	1,024		
1973-74	6,295	2000-01	987		
1974-75	7,528	2001-02	871		
1975-76	6,404	2002-03	1,589		
1976-77	9,329	2003-04	1,432		