

2021-2022 TRAPPING SEASON ANNUAL REPORT

Introduction

The 2021-22 trapping season saw changes in both the licenses required to participate in the Louisiana fur industry as well as a shift towards a more comprehensive way of tracking harvest. House Bill 691 passed in the summer of 2021 and served to overhaul the license structure and fees. Declining fur prices and shipments coupled with increased trapping license sales likely means fewer people are trapping for economic reasons. As a result, fur harvest can no longer be reliably counted from pelt sales.

In order to better capture trapper motivations and have a more reliable index of harvest, a trapper harvest survey was conducted at the conclusion of the 2021-2022 season. This methodology allows managers to track harvest trends independent of fur prices and the market. An additional benefit is that the survey allows managers to collect demographic data on the user population, which could be useful in decision-making.

Trapping Licenses

House Bill 691 went into effect on November 15, 2021. Any trapping licenses sold prior to that date followed the previous license structure with a \$25.00 license needed for any resident trapper 15 and older and a \$5.00 license needed for any resident trapper 14 and under. Licenses purchased after this date are \$32.50 for resident trappers 18 and older. Participants 17 and under no longer need a separate trapping license, instead they can purchase a \$5.00 youth hunting license that includes trapping with their hunting privileges. Although this may increase interest in trapping for participants under 18, it also makes it impossible for the department to track youth hunting license holders who are specifically participating in trapping activities. Thus making it more difficult for the department to track youth recruitment.

For the sixth year in a row, trapping license sales increased (Table 1). A total of 3,180 trapping licenses were sold whereas, a total of 3,127 were sold in 2020-2021. Resident trappers 18 and older purchased 2,761 licenses and resident trappers 14 and under purchased (prior to November 15, 2021) 357 licenses. Trapping license sales to non-residents also increased from 53 to 62.

Trapper Harvest Survey

2022 was the first year of our trapper harvest survey. With the online licensing system, the department had email addresses for approximately 70 percent of trapping license holders allowing the department to utilize inexpensive online survey tools. Reported harvest of furbearers by trappers has been undercounted in recent years because the department previously utilized only fur shipment data as a means of estimating harvest (Table 2.)

The survey was promoted through social media pages by both the department and the Louisiana Trappers and Alligator Hunters Association (LATHA). Responses were received from 647 individuals (28.7% of survey recipients) with 415 of those having trapped during the 2021-22 season. A trapping license is required for participation in the Coastwide Nutria Control Program even though most participants choose to harvest with a firearm instead of traps.

The most common reason for trappers to participate in the activity was for nuisance control (27.2%) followed by people that participate in the Coastwide Nutria Control Program (17.4%). People that participate in nuisance control and also enjoy trapping as a recreational

activity and/or sell fur followed at 12.6%. The Parishes with the highest reported trapping activity were Rapides (4.8%), Sabine (4.5%), Terrebonne (3.5%), and Bienville (3.1%). Trapping activity was reported in 63 of Louisiana's 64 parishes.

Approximately 28% of trappers reported to be strictly land trappers or mostly land trappers. Twenty-eight percent reported to trap land and water equally while primarily or only water trappers accounted for 5% or less of respondents. The most commonly used trap was the foothold trap (78%) with the average trapper running a line with 21 traps. Body grip traps were used by 38% of respondents. Thirty-three percent reported using cable restraints with the average use per trapper being 16. Twenty-eight percent reported using cage or corral traps with the average number of traps per trapper being 4.

The average age of respondents was 46.7 years of age, with the average trapper having participated in the activity for 13 years. Over half (54%) reported taking a youth trapper with them while running trap-lines. Most (90%) reported that they are not members of the LATHA with 83% having not attended a trapper's education course.

Fur Market Summary

For the 2021-2022 season, fur prices have remained low with auctions still deeply impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. Heavy lockdowns in China have made it difficult for people and products to travel in or out of the country with many Chinese consumers not spending money on luxury items. The importation of raw skins is banned in China forcing sellers to find tanneries or intermediaries to process the product before it can enter the Chinese market. Supply chain disruptions continue to make certain items scarce and delay shipping. As a result, these disruptions cause a great deal of economic uncertainty. The market was further complicated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022, which effectively stopped sales of skins to two of the world's largest consumers of fur apparel.

With Covid outbreaks on mink farms, annual ranch mink production fell from 100 million pelts to just over 12 million pelts. However, pelts that have been stockpiled during previous years are still available and will likely impact the sale of wild mink for several future seasons. With the ongoing concerns over zoonotic diseases including Covid 19, it is unlikely that ranch mink production will reach pre-pandemic levels again.

For the third year in a row, Fur Harvesters Auction Inc., the only remaining Fur Auction house left in North American was forced to hold its auctions virtually. With buyers unable to examine products in person making them more cautious about competing in the bidding process. However, in demand pelts such as beaver and skunk sold well at their June auction with overall increases in prices.

The Louisiana species currently with the most demand on the international market are beaver and nutria. High quality beaver and nutria pelts that aren't sold for the garment industry will be scooped up by the hatter market and turned into felt. After Canada Goose opted to go "fur free", coyotes which had been in high demand for trim, are now much less fashionable. Castoreum continues to be in high demand and is selling at approximately \$100 per pound.

The total number of Louisiana pelts sold in the 2021-2022 season was 4,239 (Table 3); this was an increase of 341 compared to the total pelt harvest of 3,898 in 2020-2021. The total pelt value has also increased and is estimated to have been \$42,641.94 compared to the estimated total value of \$26,403.46 in the 2020-2021 season (Table 3).

Nutria Harvest

The 2021-2022 season saw a drop in participation due to the variety of hardships that impacted coastal Louisiana residents. The warmer and drier than average winter weather pattern resulted in decreased access to marsh habitat heavily utilized by nutria. The impact to Southeastern Louisiana from hurricane Ida in August 2021 also resulted in severe damage to the homes of many participants in the region.

Nutria harvest as part of the Coastwide Nutria Control Program (CNCP) decreased from 312,118 to 203,824. For comparison, the 2019-2020 season had a total harvest of 245,865. Harvest had spiked during the pandemic season of 2020-21 but may be returning to a pre-pandemic level.

In 2021-2022, approximately 926 nutria carcasses were removed from the marsh to be utilized for meat and or fur. This was a decrease from the previous season's total of 2,846. For the third season in a row, the trappers reported that none of the carcasses carried out of the marsh were sold for meat or fur and all were kept for personal consumption. According to shipping reports, trappers and fur dealers reported shipping 11 pelts. Likely, these pelts originated from nutria caught in parishes outside of the CNCP because the majority of the nutria harvested as part of the program originate from areas that are known to have lower quality pelts. The trapper harvest survey estimated a total of 38,200 nutria harvested via traps. This number would include nutria harvested with traps both inside and outside of the program.

Conservatively, the average nutria price paid by local dealers for green pelts during this past season has stayed consistent at \$2.00. There is a growing market for nutria felt for the luxury hat market, which may result in higher prices for the pelts in the future. An additional \$6.00 is paid for all nutria taken from coastal areas by registered participants as part of the CNCP. The total value of the nutria harvested from the CNCP decreased from \$1,872,708 to \$1,222,944.

Coastwide Nutria Control Program

There were 200 active participants in the CNCP this year. This is down from the previous year's total of 284. The fewest number of tails turned in by a single participant was 13 and the greatest number of tails by a single participant was 9,778. Approximately 33% of active participants turned in 800 or more tails. Of the 66 participants who turned in 800 or more tails, 14% turned in more than 4,000 tails.

There were nineteen parishes represented in the program with harvests of nutria ranging from 114 to 44,085. St. Mary Parish reported the highest number of tails (44,085) followed by Terrebonne and Plaquemines Parishes with 41,530 and 19,071 respectively.

Most nutria taken as part of the program are harvested by firearm. The method of take for harvested nutria was identified as: 16% of the nutria harvested were trapped, 50% of the nutria harvested were shot with a rifle, and 35% of the nutria harvested were shot with a shotgun.

Because of the late season rain, March ended up being the most active month for harvesting nutria (65,281) while November (4,353 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 2022, a coast wide aerial survey was conducted covering the coastal parishes of Louisiana. There were 23 sites included in the vegetative damage survey. Of the 23 sites, all were previously observed locations of nutria herbivory. One of the sites was identified as recovered and no new sites were recorded for a total of 22 sites to be checked next year.

The 2022 vegetative damage survey yielded a total of 1,248 observed acres of damage (extrapolated to be 4,682 acres coast wide). This is a decrease from the previous season. When compared to 2021 (2,250 acres or 8,436 acres extrapolated coast wide), the present damage represents approximately a 45% decrease in the number of acres damaged by nutria. The decrease in nutria damage is due to storm damage, as well as the 34 acres that have converted to open water and the 22 acres marked as recovered.

Four parishes were observed to have nutria damage in 2022. Terrebonne and St. Mary respectively are the parishes that were the most impacted by nutria herbivory. Of the 22 sites surveyed, Terrebonne Parish contained the largest number of damaged sites, 17 sites (1,052 ac), followed by St. Mary (4 sites; 83 ac), St. Charles Parish (1 site; 63ac) and Cameron (1 sites; 50ac). (See CNCP Report, CWPPRA Project LA-03b, <https://www.nutria.com/site13.php>).

Fur Marketing and Education

For the past six years, alligator and fur staff have 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 as well as to preserve the cultural role that trapping holds in Louisiana's history. Over the six years of the program, trapping license sales have increased by 46 percent.

Moving forward, the trapper education program will be partnered with hunter education, which will be able to provide some additional funding through Pittman-Robertson Act funds as well as access to their online resources to better advertise classes and streamline registration.

The educational program hosted five hands-on trapper workshops, which educated about 150 trapping students. Over 60 of these students also attended one of the three intensive, three-day trapper schools hosted at either Woodworth Education Center or Hodges Garden LEAF center. 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 an optional self-study for those interested in expanding their knowledge base beyond the classroom.

Outreach remains an important goal for the LFAC. Alligator and fur staff along with volunteers from both the LFAC and the LTAHA promoted trapping as a management tool at dozens of 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 Fur and Wildlife Festival, 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 1,459 to 937 pelts (Table 2). Demand for raccoon pelts is low with only the highest quality western pelts being bought by overseas buyers. The number of raccoons harvested by hunters for sport was approximately 27,800 as reported by hunters during the annual LDWF hunter harvest survey. This is a decrease from the previous year's take of 30,500. The LDWF trapper harvest survey estimated that 25,000 raccoons were harvested by trappers. Raccoons are plentiful and relatively easy to catch leading them to be a popular target for beginner trappers and those performing nuisance control on hunting leases.

Coyote and Fox Harvest

32 coyotes were harvested by trappers for fur during the 2021-2022 season (Table 2). Pelts sold for an average price of \$5.16, a decrease from the previous year's average price of \$7.85 (Table 2). Hunters reported during the LDWF annual hunter harvest survey an approximate take of 43,500 coyotes. When averaged over the 274,906 hunters in Louisiana, this comes to about 1 coyote harvested per every 6 hunters. The trapper harvest survey estimated approximately 6,600 coyotes harvested by trappers. When averaged over the 3,180 Louisiana trappers, this comes out to approximately 2 coyotes harvested per trapper.

Nine red foxes and 36 grey foxes were harvested for fur during the 2021-2022 trapping season (Table 2). Red foxes and grey foxes commanded an average value of \$5.58 and \$6.16, respectively (Table 2).

As of 2022, there are currently 23 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 increased from \$16.60 per pelt last year to \$23.23 (Table 2). The otter had the second highest average price of all pelts and the highest value (Table 3). Harvest for fur increased from 572 to 856 this past season (Table 2) while the trapper harvest survey estimated that approximately 1,700 river otter were harvested. A total of 611 CITES tags were requested for river otter, which is an increase from the previous season's total of 572.

Bobcat

The bobcat harvest by trappers for fur increased from 111 in the 2020-2021 season to 208 in the 2021-2022 season (Table 2). The average price paid by dealers, buyers, and at auction increased from \$27.00 this past season to \$33.10 (Table 2). Bobcat had the highest average price of all pelts, which coincides with increasing demand for the pelts in Korea. A total of 178 bobcat CITES tags were requested which is an increase from the previous season's request of 154.

In the 2021-22 season, approximately 5,900 bobcats were reported to have been harvested by big game hunters (Figure 1). This is an increase from the previous season's total of 5,200. It is estimated that trappers took approximately 1,100 bobcats during the 2021-22 season.

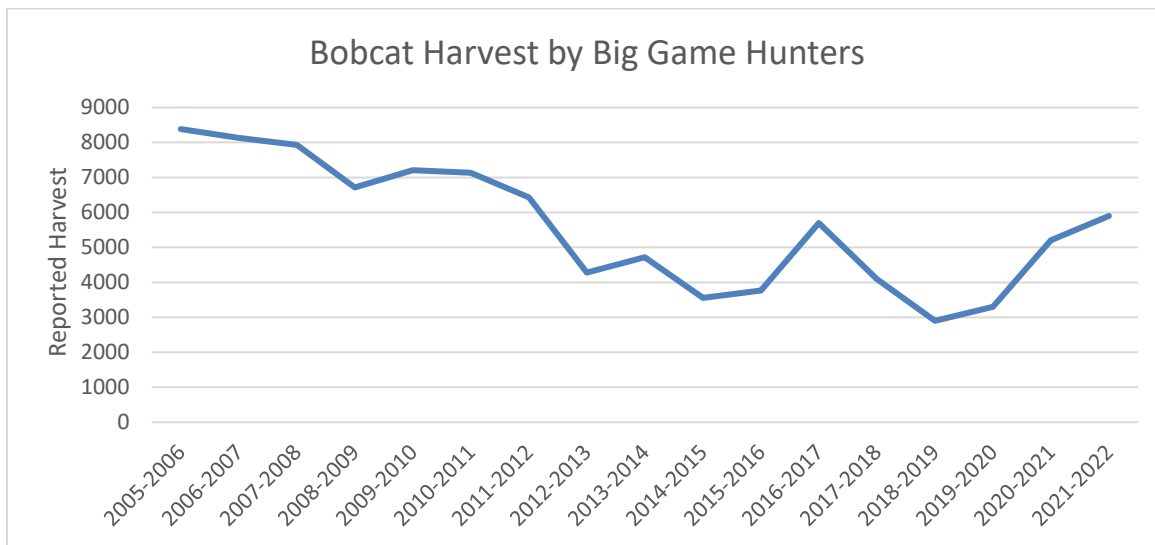


Figure 1. Estimated take of bobcats by big games hunters since 2005. Formerly, holders of a big game license could take one bobcat per calendar year. With the elimination of the big game license in 2021, any hunter with a basic license can legally take a bobcat.

Beaver Harvest

The number of beaver sold increased from 1,210 to 1,577 pelts (Table 2). The beaver price stayed the same at an average of \$6.95 (Table 2). 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. According to the trapper harvest survey, trappers reported to have harvested approximately 9,300 beaver during the 2021-22 season.

Beaver castor (castoreum) is still in high demand and can sell for as much as \$120.00 a pound with many Louisiana trappers taking advantage of this. Castoreum is used in the manufacture of many commercial items.

Regulation Changes and Discussion

The Trapping Season dates are November 20th to March 31st as set by the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission and do not change from year to year. 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.

With the passing of HB691, fees collected for trapping licenses, and for resident and non-resident fur dealer and fur buyer permits changed on November 15, 2021. Fees for most of the licenses increased with the non-resident trapper decreasing from \$200 to \$130. Trapping licenses will also be good for one year from date of purchase while the buyer and dealer permits will remain good for the fiscal year. With the fur program being entirely self-funded through the sale of these licenses, we are hopeful that the extra funds may better provide for the management of Louisiana’s 14 furbearer species and help grow our trapper education program.

Total Number of Trapping Licenses Sold by Season in Louisiana					
Season	Licenses sold	Season	Licenses sold	Season	Licenses sold
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	2020-21	3,127
1967-68	2,495	1994-95	1,686	2021-22	3,180
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		

Table 1. Trapping license sales from 1950-present. Traditionally, total license sales were heavily impacted by the international fur market. Today's trapper is less concerned about fur prices and more motivated by the need for predator management.

2021-22 Trapper Harvest Survey Reported Harvest

Species	Reported Harvest	Number reported sold for meat or fur	Number sold alive
Muskrat	680 ± 1,000	30 ± 40	0
Nutria	38,200 ± 31,200	8,800 ± 10,000	0
Opposum	7,600 ± 1,900	200 ± 140	0
Raccoon	25,000 ± 5,000	6,400 ± 2,900	0
Mink	3,800 ± 3,00	1,700 ± 2,100	0
Striped Skunk	500 ± 290	5 ± 10	0
River Otter	1,700 ± 720	880 ± 530	150 ± 290
Bobcat	1,100 ± 340	250 ± 190	0
Coyote	6,600 ± 2,400	180 ± 160	1,100 ± 850
Red Fox	350 ± 150	50 ± 85	40 ± 60
Gray Fox	1,200 ± 550	150 ± 130	60 ± 60
Beaver	9,300 ± 4,300	1,900 ± 1,000	0
Long-tailed Weasel	0	0	0
Spotted Skunk	0	0	0
Ringtail	0	0	0
Hog	6,100 ± 3,700	30 ± 50	0

Table 2. Extrapolated results from the 2021-2022 trapper harvest survey. This was the first season that the survey was conducted. Long-term data from this survey will provide an index of harvest over time.

Total Fur Harvest for the 2021-22 Season and Average Price Paid

Species	Totals	Average price paid *
Muskrat	56	\$1.81
Nutria	11	\$1.92
Opossum	5	\$1.74
Raccoon	937	\$1.93
Mink	511	\$4.94
Skunk	0	\$0.00
Otter	856	\$23.23
Bobcat	208	\$33.10
Coyote	32	\$5.16
Red Fox	9	\$5.58
Gray Fox	36	\$6.16
Beaver	1,577	\$6.95
Total Harvest and Value	4,239	\$42,641.94

Table 3. Total number of furbearers by species reported to have been bought by licensed fur dealers or shipped by trappers for the 2021-2022 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 (2012-13 - 2021-22)**

Species	No. of Pelts	Approx. price	Value
Muskrat	609	\$2.55	\$2,748.78
Nutria*	5,685	\$1.97	\$12,161.30
Opossum	165	\$0.74	\$154.01
Raccoon	5,421	\$3.67	\$28,935.17
Mink	630	\$7.49	\$5,385.30
River Otter	1,427	\$31.79	\$58,915.25
Bobcat	439	\$36.23	\$19,528.95
Coyote	86	\$8.58	\$678.94
Red Fox	53	\$11.89	\$896.84
Gray Fox	301	\$9.96	\$3,870.75
Beaver	<u>1,719</u>	<u>\$7.14</u>	\$13,192.36
Avg. total pelts	16,556	Avg. total value	\$146,467.64

Table 4. Average annual harvest, price paid per pelt, and value for the past 10 years by species. Includes fur shipment data only.

