

2022-2023

TRAPPING SEASON ANNUAL REPORT



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Introduction

The 2022-23 trapping season served as a transitional period between the old license structure and the new structure instituted in 2021. It was the first full year where the price of licenses were at the new fee of \$32.50. Resident trapping licenses will remain at this price for one more season before increasing to their final price of \$40.00 on June 1, 2024. Non-resident trapping fees will remain at \$160.

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. The 2022-23 season saw the second year of the survey being conducted. 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. Licenses purchased after that 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 awareness of 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 first time since the beginning of the statewide trapper education initiative, trapping license sales have declined. 2,989 trapping licenses were sold whereas, a total of 3,180 were sold in 2021-2022. Resident trappers 18 and older purchased 2,593 licenses. Trapping license sales to non-residents increased from 62 to 70. It's possible that the decrease in license sales could be a reaction to the increase in price or the loss of youth licenses.

Season	Licenses sold
2013-14	2,848
2014-15	2,559
2015-16	2,375
2016-17	2,133
2017-18	2,374
2018-19	2,572
2019-20	2,642
2020-21	3,127
2021-22	3,180
2022-23	2,989

Table 1. Total trapping license sales for the previous 10 seasons

Trapper Harvest Survey

2023 was the second year of our trapper harvest survey. With the online licensing system, the department had email addresses for approximately 80 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. Data on fur shipments is still collected as a means of gauging market value.

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

923 individuals (38.9% of survey recipients) with 457 of those having trapped during the 2022-23 season. This response rate was higher than the previous season's response rate of 29%. 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 (30%) followed by people that participate in the Coastwide Nutria Control Program (15.8%). People that trap as a recreational activity followed at 14.3%. The Parishes with the highest reported trapping activity were Rapides (4.5%), Beauregard (3.4%), Bienville (3.4%), and Sabine (3.4%). Trapping activity was reported in all 64 of Louisiana's parishes.

Approximately 36% of trappers reported to be strictly land trappers or mostly land trappers (23%). Twenty-six percent reported to trap land and water equally while primarily or only water trappers accounted for 9% or less of respondents. The most commonly used trap was the foothold trap (87%) with the average trapper running a line with 26 traps. Body grip traps were used by 36% of respondents. Thirty-three percent reported using cable restraints with the average use per trapper being 16. Thirty-two percent reported using cage or corral traps with the average number of traps per trapper being 6.

The average age of respondents was 49.5 years of age, with the average trapper having participated in the activity for 14 years. Nearly half (47%) reported taking a youth trapper with them while running trap-lines. Most (88%) reported that they are not members of the LATHA with 83% having not attended a trapper's education course.

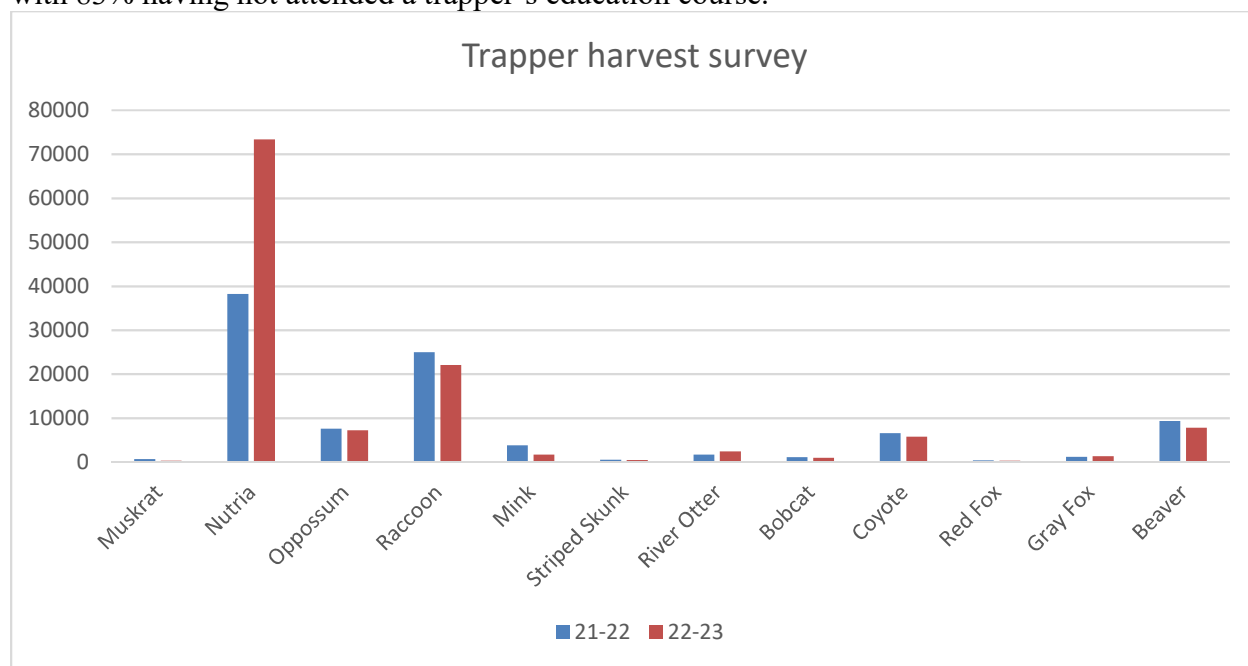


Figure 1. Reported harvest of furbearers for both seasons of the trapper harvest survey.

Fur Market Summary

Fur from Louisiana and the rest of the southeast plays only a small part on the international market due to the warmer winters and the less heavy quality of the pelts. However, when the market is strong, many trappers harvesting in the more northern regions of the state can turn a profit from fur sales.

For the 2022-2023 season, fur prices for some species have rebounded and the auction houses are optimistic. 2023 saw the return of in person auctions for the first time since the start

of the pandemic with attendance increasing throughout the first half of the year. In person auctions allow buyers to inspect the pelts before investing which may lead to competition and higher prices. Buyers from China, Turkey, Korea, Greece, Italy, and the United Kingdom returned to the auctions. Auction prices were higher and nearly all fur sold well. Russia remains excluded from the buying process due to continued sanctions arising from the invasion of Ukraine.

Beaver and nutria pelts are in high demand with prices increasing. The felt market has driven up prices for both items and they have sold well at auction. Conversely, the increasing available of beaver has driven down the price of castoreum and many international buyers continue to have difficulty importing the substance into their countries.

The total number of Louisiana pelts sold in the 2022-2023 season was 5,463 (Table 2); this was an increase of 1,224 compared to the total pelt harvest of 4,239 in 2021-2022. The total pelt value has also increased and is estimated to have been \$85,648.85 compared to the estimated total value of \$42,641.94 in the 2021-2022 season (Table 2).

Total Fur Harvest for the 2022-23 Season and Average Price Paid		
Species	Totals	Average price paid *
Muskrat	18	\$3.79
Nutria	307	\$3.51
Opossum	4	\$1.56
Raccoon	1,379	\$2.07
Mink	339	\$3.18
Skunk	0	\$0.00
Otter	1,106	\$31.53
Bobcat	192	\$56.87
Coyote	5	\$7.00
Red Fox	7	\$5.00
Gray Fox	67	\$6.39
Beaver	2,039	\$16.81
Total Harvest and Value	5,463	\$85,648.85

Table 2. Total number of furbearers by species reported to have been bought by licensed fur dealers or shipped by trappers for the 2022-2023 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.

Nutria Harvest

The 2022-2023 season saw an increase in participation after the devastation of Hurricane Ida drove many of the top harvesters out of their homes in 2021. Participation and harvest was still lower than average indicating that many people have still not returned home after the storm.

Nutria harvest as part of the Coastwide Nutria Control Program (CNCP) increased from 203,824 to 221,404 (Figure 2). For comparison, the 2020-2021 season had a total harvest of 312,118. Harvest had spiked during the pandemic season of 2020-21 but is returning to a pre-pandemic level.

In 2022-2023, approximately 1,399 nutria carcasses were removed from the marsh to be utilized for meat and or fur. This was an increase from the previous season's total of 926. For the fourth 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 307 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 73,400 nutria harvested via traps. This number would include nutria harvested with traps both inside and outside of the program.

The average nutria price paid by local dealers for green pelts during this past season has increased to approximately \$3.51. 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 increased from \$1,222,944 to \$1,328,424.

Coastwide Nutria Control Program

There were 224 active participants in the CNCP this year. This is up from the previous year's total of 200. The fewest number of tails turned in by a single participant was 2 and the greatest number of tails by a single participant was 17,127. Approximately 33% of active participants turned in 800 or more tails. Of the 73 participants who turned in 800 or more tails, 16% turned in more than 4,000 tails.

There were eighteen parishes represented in the program with harvests of nutria ranging from 121 to 45,605. St. Mary Parish reported the highest number of tails (45,605) followed by Terrebonne and St. Martin Parishes with 36,622 and 26,816 respectively.

Most nutria taken as part of the program are harvested by firearm. The method of take for harvested nutria was identified as: 13% of the nutria harvested were trapped, 48% of the nutria harvested were shot with a rifle, and 39% of the nutria harvested were shot with a shotgun.

February ended up being the most active month for harvesting nutria (66,664) while November (6,668 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 2023, a coast wide aerial survey was conducted covering the coastal parishes of Louisiana. There were 24 total sites included in the vegetative damage survey. Of the 24 sites, 22 were previously observed locations of nutria herbivory. Three of the sites were identified as recovered and two new sites were recorded for a total of 21 sites to be checked next year.

The 2023 vegetative damage survey yielded a total of 1,263 observed acres of damage (extrapolated to be 4,737 acres coast wide). This is a small increase from the previous season. When compared to 2022 (1,248 acres or 4,682 acres extrapolated coast wide), the present damage represents approximately a 1% increase in the number of acres damaged by nutria. The increase in nutria damage is insignificant, a total of 49 acres are marked as converted to open water and 102 acres are observed to have recovered.

Four parishes were observed to have nutria damage in 2023. Terrebonne and Vermillion respectively are the parishes that were the most impacted by nutria herbivory. Of the 24 sites surveyed, Terrebonne Parish contained the largest number of damaged sites, 17 sites (1,030 ac), followed by Vermillion (1 site; 106 ac), St. Mary Parish (2 sites; 64ac) and St. Charles (1 site; 62ac). (See CNCP Report, CWPPRA Project LA-03b, <https://www.nutria.com/site13.php>).

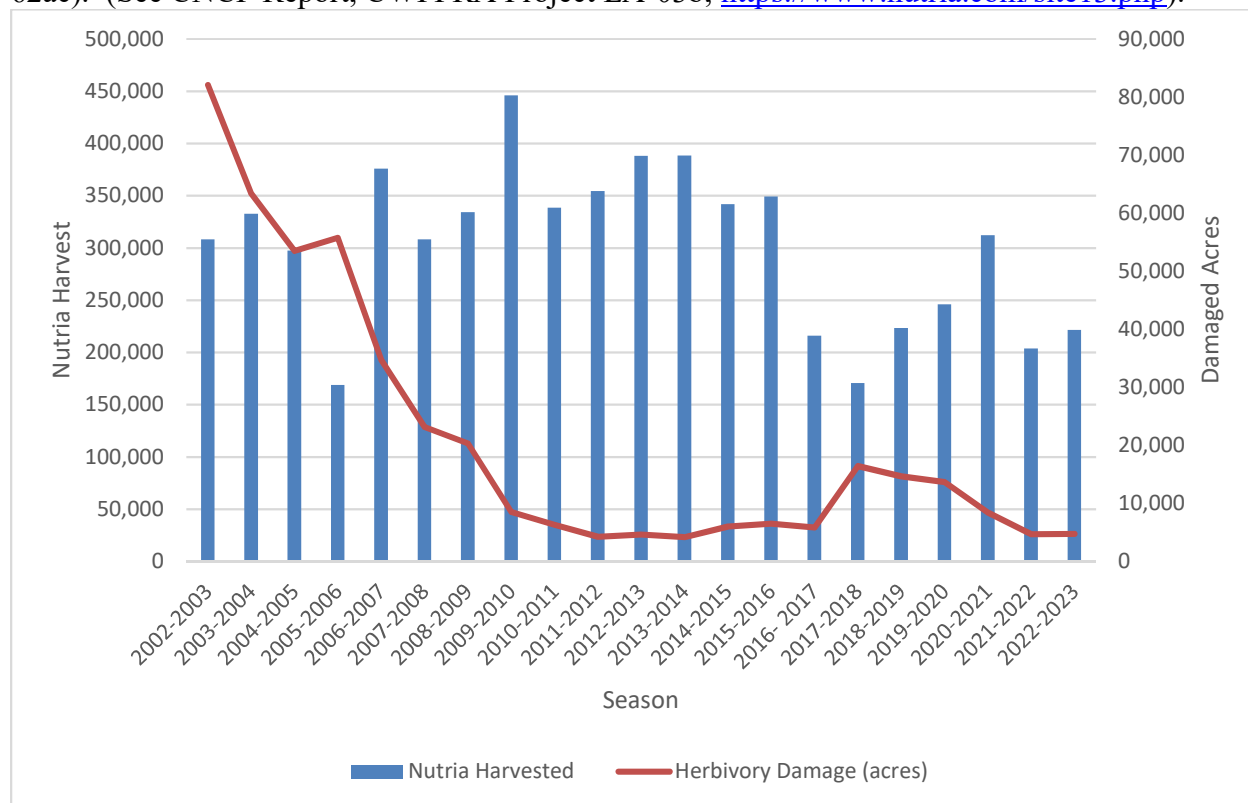


Figure 2. Nutria harvest and estimated damaged acres due to nutria herbivory over the 21 years of the program.

Fur Marketing and Education

For the past seven years, alligator and fur staff have worked closely with the Louisiana Trappers and Alligator Hunters Association (LTAHA), the Louisiana Fur Advisory Council (LFAC), and the LDWF Hunter Education program to educate more than 800 new trappers in the state of Louisiana. The LFAC with the Fur Education and Marketing Funds and the Hunter Education Program with the Pittman-Robertson Act funds 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 first six years of the program, trapping license sales have increased and interest in the classes has stayed strong.

The educational program hosted five hands-on trapper workshops, which educated about 110 trapping students. Twenty of these students also attended one of the two intensive, three-day

trapper schools hosted at either Woodworth Education 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 increased from 937 to 1,379 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 20,500 as reported by hunters during the annual LDWF hunter harvest survey. This is a decrease from the previous year's take of 27,800 (Figure 3). The LDWF trapper harvest survey estimated that 22,100 raccoons were harvested by trappers (Figure 1). 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

Five coyotes were harvested by trappers for fur during the 2022-2023 season (Table 2). Pelts sold for an average price of \$7.00, an increase from the previous year's average price of \$5.00 (Table 2). Hunters reported during the LDWF annual hunter harvest survey an approximate take of 53,200 coyotes (Figure 3). When averaged over the 374,623 hunters in Louisiana, this comes to about 1 coyote harvested per every 7 hunters. The trapper harvest survey estimated approximately 5,800 coyotes harvested by trappers. When averaged over the 2,989 Louisiana trappers, this comes out to approximately 2 coyotes harvested per trapper.

Seven red foxes and 67 grey foxes were harvested for fur during the 2022-2023 trapping season. Red foxes and grey foxes commanded an average value of \$5.00 and \$6.39, 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 \$23.23 per pelt last year to \$31.53 (Table 2). The otter had the second highest average price of all pelts and the highest value. Harvest for fur increased from 856 to 1,106 this past season (Table 2) while the trapper harvest survey estimated that approximately 2,400 river otter were harvested. A total of 497 CITES tags were requested for river otter, which is a decrease from the previous season's total of 611.

Bobcat

The bobcat harvest by trappers for fur decreased from 208 in the 2021-2022 season to 192 in the 2022-2023 season (Table 2). The average price paid by dealers, buyers, and at auction increased from \$33.10 this past season to \$56.87. Bobcat had the highest average price of all pelts, which coincides with increasing demand for the pelts in Korea. A total of 113 bobcat CITES tags were requested which is a decrease from the previous season's request of 178.

In the 2022-23 season, approximately 4,900 bobcats were reported to have been harvested by big game hunters (Figure 3). This is a decrease from the previous season's total of 5,900. It is estimated that trappers took approximately 990 bobcats during the 2022-23 season.

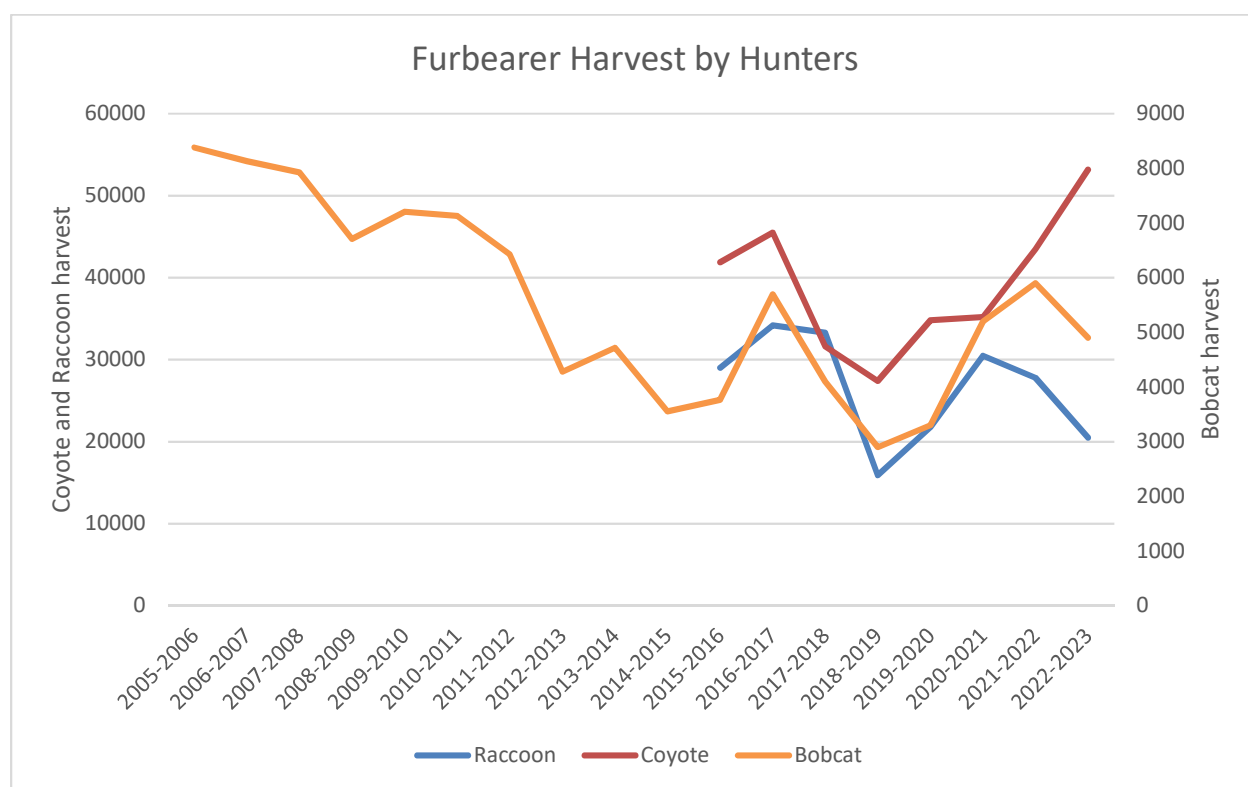


Figure 3. Estimated take of bobcats by big games hunters since 2005. Formerly, holders of a big game license could take one bobcat per calendar year. With the elimination of the big game license in 2021, any hunter with a basic license can legally take a bobcat. Both coyotes and raccoons can be harvested with a basic hunting license.

Beaver Harvest

The number of beaver sold increased from 1,577 to 2,039 pelts (Table 2). The beaver price increased an average of \$16.81 (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 7,800 beaver during the 2022-23 season.

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.

2022-23 Trapper Harvest Survey Reported Harvest

Species	Reported Harvest	Number reported sold for meat or fur	Number sold alive
Muskrat	300 ± 450	240 ± 440	0
Nutria	73,400 ± 43,700	31,000 ± 33,700	0
Opossum	7,200 ± 1,900	540 ± 760	0
Raccoon	22,100 ± 4,100	22,100± 3,200	0
Mink	1,700 ± 1,900	1,200 ± 1,900	0
Striped Skunk	440 ± 290	85 ± 150	0
River Otter	2,400 ± 980	1,300 ± 760	110 ± 220
Bobcat	990 ± 320	460 ± 220	0
Coyote	5,800 ± 1,500	470 ± 500	1,900 ± 1,100
Red Fox	330 ± 150	115 ± 85	120 ± 100
Gray Fox	1,300 ± 550	480 ± 440	250 ± 240
Beaver	7,800 ± 2,800	3,900 ± 2,200	0
Long-tailed Weasel	0	0	0
Spotted Skunk	10±10*	0	0
Ringtail	0	0	0
Hog	5,200 ± 4,100	0	0

Table 3. Extrapolated results from the 2022-2023 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.

**Comparative Take of Fur Animals in LA
10 Year Average (2013-14 - 2022-23)**

Species	No. of Pelts	Approx. price	Value
Muskrat	550	\$2.29	\$2,389.80
Nutria	1,300	\$2.02	\$2,677.75
Opossum	100	\$0.85	\$82.81
Raccoon	2,973	\$2.81	\$11,174.35
Mink	465	\$5.95	\$2,764.52
River Otter	1,100	\$25.35	\$33,248.20
Bobcat	303	\$34.50	\$11,872.91
Coyote	70	\$8.71	\$590.25
Red Fox	38	\$9.35	\$605.03
Gray Fox	203	\$8.28	\$2,345.35
Beaver	1,491	\$7.79	\$12,454.56
Avg. total pelts	8,592	Avg. total value	\$80,206.52

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