

2017-18 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #18-3 (revised 9/24/19)

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 66 permits to fur buyers during 2016-17. Based on a 90% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 65,172, an increase of 26% from 2016-17 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers increased 107% to \$540,066.13. Raccoon and muskrat accounted for 77% of the total harvest and 34% of its value. Coyote pelts were less than 9.5% of the total harvest but comprised 48% of the total fur value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 2% for striped skunk to 48% for gray fox; they were intermediate for opossum (14%), red fox (15%) and coyote (17%). Hunters accounted for 41%

of the raccoon harvest in 2017-18 as 2016-17 (down 11%).

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 relatively poor during 2017-18 because of economic conditions in major markets and a glut of wild and ranch-raised goods from past seasons. Pelt values improved mainly for coyote, but were modestly better for bobcat and beaver. Overall, sales of most species remained at very low levels.

Sales of trapping licenses increased from 5,394 in 2016-17 to 6036 in 2017-18. During 2016-17, approximately 5,796 raccoon hunters spent 75,119 days afield and 25,115 coyote hunters spent 272,291 days afield (Williams et al. 2017).

Sales of pelts during 2017-18 fell short of historical averages (since 1975-76) for beaver (78%), river otter (average harvest since 2012, 89%), coyote (89%), badger (53%), striped skunk (30%), and raccoon (18%) Sales of other species were ≤10% of their long-term averages.

LITERATURE CITED

Miller, C.A., B.D. Williams, and L.K. Campbell. 2017. 2016-2017 Illinois trapper report: harvest, effort, and motivations. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, USA.

Williams, B.D. and C.A. Miller. 2017. 2016-2017 Illinois hunter harvest report. Illinois Natural History Survey Job Completion Report Study 101. Job No. 101.1. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, USA.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2017-18 vs. 2016-17.

Species	Number of pelts sold ^a		Change in sales from 2016-17 ^b	Average price per pelt (dollars)			Total value to fur-takers (dollars)		Change in value from 2017-18 - 2016-17
	2017-18	2016-17		2017-18	2016-17	2017-18	2016-17 (dollars)	2017-18 - 2016-17	
Muskrat	11,690	10,265	(+14)	3.04	3.05	35,537.60	31,308.25	4,229.35	(13)
Mink	1002	692	(+45)	6.62	5.25	6,633.24	3,633.00	+3000.24	(+83)
Raccoon	38,837	29,530	(+31)	3.99	3.80	154,959.63	112,214.00	+12,641.08	(+38)
Opossum	978	1,246	(-21)	0.63	0.95	616.14	1,183.70	-691.67	(-48)
Red fox	252	372	(-32)	10.05	8.60	2532.60	3,199.20	+1,142.40	(-21)
Gray fox	11	37	(-70)	9.27	6.45	101.97	238.65	-145.90	(-57)
Beaver	4,510	3,509	(+28)	9.78	7.00	44,107.80	24,563.00	+15,026.44	(+80)
River otter	1118 ^c	1,033 ^c	(+8)	21.70	21.80	24,260.60	22,519.40	+1,741.20	(+8)
Striped skunk	189	155	(+22)	2.79	3.75	527.31	581.25	-126.48	(-9)
Weasel	4	4	(-)	1.51	2.00	6.04	8.00	-1.96	(-)
Coyote	6,208	4,563	(+36)	41.48	13.00	257,507.84	59,319.00	+182,384.96	(+334)
Badger	15	9	(+67)	7.98	6.00	119.70	54.00	+65.70	(+122)
Bobcat	318 ^{c,d}	141 ^c	(+125)	41.37	15.70	13,155.66	2,213.70	+10,941.96	(- ^d)
Total/mean	65,172	51,556	(+26)	8.95	5.06	540,066.13	261,035.15	+279,030.98	(+107)

^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.

^dSecond bobcat season – data not comparable