

2014-15 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #15-3

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 up to 2 reminders by first class mail and another by certified letter.

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. Trappers who captured a river otter were required to purchase an Otter Registration Permit within 48 hours; sales of pelts were based on sales of permits to trappers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Department issued 128 permits to fur buyers during 2014-15. Based on a 93% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 163,159, a decrease of 29% from 2013-14 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers decreased 59% to \$1,122,349.50. Raccoon and muskrat accounted for 85% of the total harvest and 71% of its value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 2% for striped skunk to 67% for coyote; they were intermediate for opossum (19%), red fox (17%) and gray fox (33%). Hunters accounted for a similar proportion of the raccoon harvest in 2014-15 (47%) as 2013-14 (49%).

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. Weak demand was apparent by the end of the 2013-14 season and carried into 2014-15 because of economic downturns in major markets and a glut of wild and ranch-raised goods from past seasons. Coyote, used mostly for trim, was a bright spot compared to other species.

Sales of trapping licenses increased from 7,870 in 2013-14 to 8,369 in 2014-15. This was the greatest number of licenses sold since 1988-89. During 2013-14, approximately 9,100 raccoon hunters spent 126,000 days afield and 31,600 coyote hunters spent 289,000 days afield (Stephenson et al. 2014).

Pelt sales during 2014-15 were greater than long-term averages (since 1975-76) for coyote (168%), striped skunk (152%), beaver (126%) and badger (107%). Sales fell short of historic averages for raccoon (62%), opossum (12%), muskrat (21%), mink (18%), weasel (19%), red fox (27%) and gray fox (1%).

LITERATURE CITED

Campbell, L.K., B.D. Williams, and C.A. Miller. 2015. 2014-2015 Illinois trapper report: harvest, effort, and marketing practices. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, Illinois, USA.

Stephenson, A.L., L.A. Schweizer, B.D. Williams, L.K. Campbell, and C.A. Miller. 2014. 2013-2014 Illinois hunter harvest report. Illinois Natural History Survey Technical Report 2014 (42). Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, Illinois, USA.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2014-15 vs. 2013-14.

Species	Number of pelts sold ^a		Change in sales from 2013-14 ^b		Average price per pelt (dollars)		Total value to fur-takers (dollars)		Change in value from 2013-14 (dollars)	
	2014-15	2013-14			2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14		
Muskrat	28,453	25,122	+3,331	(+13.2)	4.95	8.90	140,842.35	223,585.80	-82,743.45	(-37.0)
Mink	1,349	1,389	-40	(-2.9)	7.75	15.05	10,454.75	20,904.45	-10,449.70	(-50.0)
Raccoon	111,011	169,543	-58,532	(-34.5)	5.95	11.55	660,515.45	1,958,221.65	-1,297,706.20	(-66.3)
Opossum	1,963	7,550	-5,587	(-74.0)	1.20	1.25	2,355.60	9,437.50	-7,081.90	(-75.0)
Red fox	1,136	1,134	+2	(<1)	17.35	33.70	19,709.60	38,215.80	-18,506.20	(-48.4)
Gray fox	29	59	-30	(-50.8)	14.55	21.90	421.95	1,292.10	-870.15	(-67.3)
Beaver	6,137	6,690	-553	(-8.3)	8.95	13.45	54,926.15	89,980.50	-35,054.35	(-39.0)
River otter	1,136 ^c	1,303 ^c	-167	(-12.8)	29.00	57.10	32,944.00	74,401.30	-41,457.30	(-55.7)
Striped skunk	843	573	+270	(+47.1)	2.85	2.95	2,402.55	1,690.35	+712.20	(+42.1)
Weasel	8	6	+2	(+33.3)	0.25	0.65	2.00	3.90	-1.90	(-48.7)
Coyote	11,062	16,607	-5,545	(-33.4)	17.85	20.80	197,456.70	345,425.60	-147,968.90	(-42.8)
Badger	32	44	-12	(-27.3)	9.95	10.70	318.40	470.80	-152.40	(-32.4)
Total/mean	163,159	230,020	-66,861	(-29.1)	6.90	12.00	1,122,349.50	2,763,629.75	-1,641,280.25	(-59.4)

^aIncludes correction for non-response and allowances for out-of-state pelt sales as estimated by Campbell et al. (2015).

^bNumbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.

^cBased on sales of Otter Registration Permits.