

# FURBEARER PROGRAM STATEWIDE HARVEST & MANAGEMENT REPORT

2022–2023



FURBEARER PROGRAM

2022–2023 STATEWIDE HARVEST AND MANAGEMENT REPORT

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## Welcome Letter

The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park's Furbearer Program works to monitor and manage the state furbearing species for the sustainable harvest by trappers and hunters, as well as for the enjoyment of outdoor recreationists from Montana and around the country. This is done with the help of the state's hunting and trapping community, volunteers who help with surveys and report species detections, and the financial support received from donations, permit sales, and income generated by fish and wildlife tourism. Montana is fortunate to have one of the most diverse ranges of furbearing species in the country. From the charismatic larger mammals like wolverine and lynx to the small and rare spotted skunk, our natural areas contain many furbearers for us all to enjoy.

We would like to thank everyone who has helped us in our efforts. We have many new developments in the furbearer program, many of which were fueled by your comments and passion for wildlife. We received reports of furbearer sightings such as lynx, wolverine, and swift fox in areas otherwise thought to be unoccupied by the species. Trappers help us with our annual furbearer survey, provide valuable insight regarding local population trends in their area, and supply harvest data by submitting teeth and/or genetic samples from harvested bobcats, otters, marten, swift fox, and fisher to help monitor the populations.

With everyone's help and cooperation, we can enjoy seeing and harvesting our furbearing species in Montana for generations to come.

Thank you

-Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Furbearer Program

## Annual Highlights

### Furbearer Program

- ❗ The Carnivore & Furbearer Program, previously led by Bob Inman, has been split into a Large Carnivore Program coordinated by Molly Parks ([Molly.Parks@mt.gov](mailto:Molly.Parks@mt.gov)) based in the Region 2 Missoula office and a Furbearer Program coordinated by Nathan Kluge ([Nathan.Kluge@mt.gov](mailto:Nathan.Kluge@mt.gov)) based in Helena.
- ❗ Over the winter of 2021–2022, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), in collaboration with the other western states, completed the second wolverine occupancy study to compare occupancy estimates to the results from the 2017–2018 study.
- ❗ This winter was the third year of the marten translocation project. After seeing great success in the Little Belt Mountains (73 individuals), we translocated 28 martens to the Castle Mountains in collaboration with local trappers.
- ❗ This winter, FWP established a Canada lynx monitoring protocol and started a lynx pilot project in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) and within core lynx habitat in northwestern Montana.
- ❗ This was the fourth winter of annually monitoring fisher nest boxes in the Cabinet Mountains which are seeing minimal use regarding nesting behavior. Revisits of the 53 boxes deployed will occur on a 5-year cycle to reassess any changes in use by female fishers.
- ❗ FWP started to age and sex muskrat pelts at this year's Western States Fur Auction in Livingston to start gathering trend data to inform our knowledge of changes in Montana's annual muskrat harvest.
- ❗ The Furbearer program began a swift fox occupancy pilot project in regions 4, 5, 6, and 7 as part of a 5-year monitoring plan to estimate the statewide distribution and occupancy of swift fox in Montana.
- ❗ Avian influenza was detected in 3 grizzly bears, 3 skunks, and 1 red fox over the winter.

### Harvest Regulations

- ❗ The wolf, furbearer, and trapping regulations were combined to eliminate the reiteration of information within the previously separated documents.
- ❗ Trapper education became a requirement for furbearer trappers that have not held a trapping license in 3-prior years.
- ❗ The bobcat quota in Trapping District 1 was reduced from 275 bobcats to 225 and the bobcat quota in Trapping District 5 was reduced from 200 to 100.
- ❗ Marten pelt tagging became mandatory again this license year to help ensure our knowledge of the number of martens being harvested throughout the state.

### Legislation

- ❗ SB 354: Reciprocity for out of state trappers - Passed
- ❗ SB 324: Revise FWP information disclosure laws - Passed
- ❗ HB 372: Establish right to hunt/trap in Constitution - Dropped

## Introduction

The fur trade in Montana was a major period in the area's economic history and discovery, stemming from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, tremendous fluctuations in the harvest of Montana's primary furbearing species have been observed as both market and social trends changed. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) monitors the fur market within the state using information gathered at fur auctions, mandatory pelt registration of marten (since 1955), bobcats and river otter (since 1978), fisher (since 1984), and swift fox (since 2010), and an annual furbearer harvest survey. The information in this report is based on the harvest by



both trappers and hunters.



The first trapping season was established in Montana in 1895 with records of trapping license sales back to 1946 (Figure 1). The number of issued Resident Trapping Licenses peaked during 2012–2013 season at 6,005 and reached an all-time low in 1946–1947 at 465 licenses issued.

The 2022–2023 trapping season marked the first year that required trappers targeting furbearers to take a mandatory trapper education certification course for any resident trapper targeting animals classified as

furbearers if they had not previously held a trapping license for 3 previous years. There was an online portion of the course and a mandatory field day to receive a certificate of completion. Courses were hosted in Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, and Missoula resulting in a total of 160 graduating students. During the 2022–2023 trapping season, FWP issued 3,106 Resident, 159 Landowner, 41 Non-resident, and 26 Youth trapping licenses showing an overall 26% decrease from last year. The average age of a trapper holding a license this season was 47-years-old with 95% of the trappers being males. In 2022, FWP also issued 66 Resident Fur Dealer licenses, 7 more than were issued in 2021, and 5 Non-resident Fur Dealer licenses, 5 less than were issued in 2021.

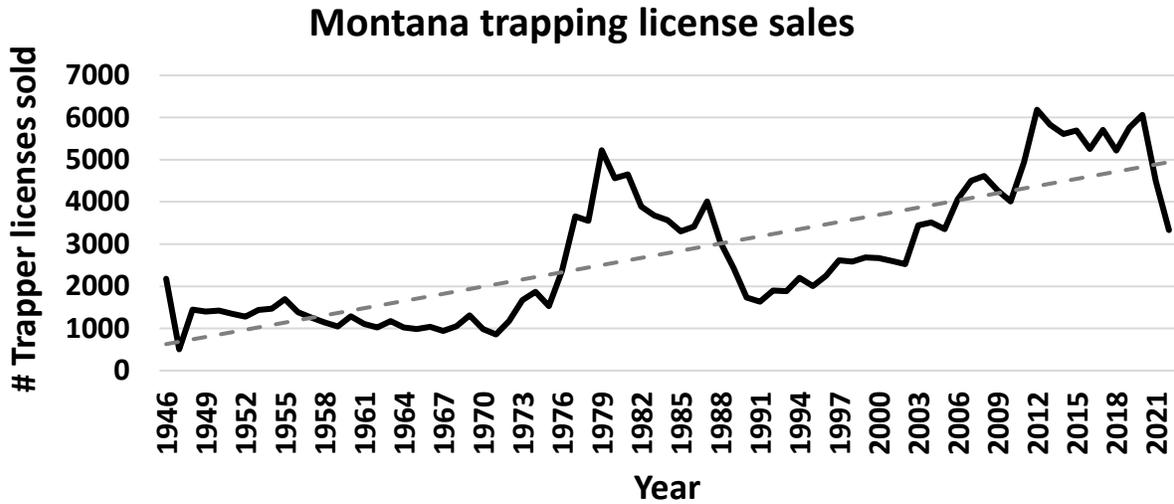


Figure 1. Long-term trapping license sales in Montana, 1949–2022 license years.

The highest recorded peak of total pelts harvested reached 157,179 in 1979–1980 (over 70% of which were muskrat and beaver pelts), bringing in over \$2.9 million to Montana trappers, equivalent to over \$10.4 million today. In 1980, the average muskrat pelt value was estimated at \$4.60 which is equivalent to an average estimated price of \$16.57 for a muskrat in today’s market compared to our current average of \$2.88. In 2013, Montana experienced a 30-year high in the fur market bringing in over \$2.7 million at the Montana Trappers Association fur auction from an estimated total of 73,033 pelts harvested (Figure 2). The national retail fur industry backed this trend with an estimated worth of \$15.5 billion. Since then, fur prices have been steadily declining, although Montana continues to see an overall upward trend in trapping license sales throughout history.

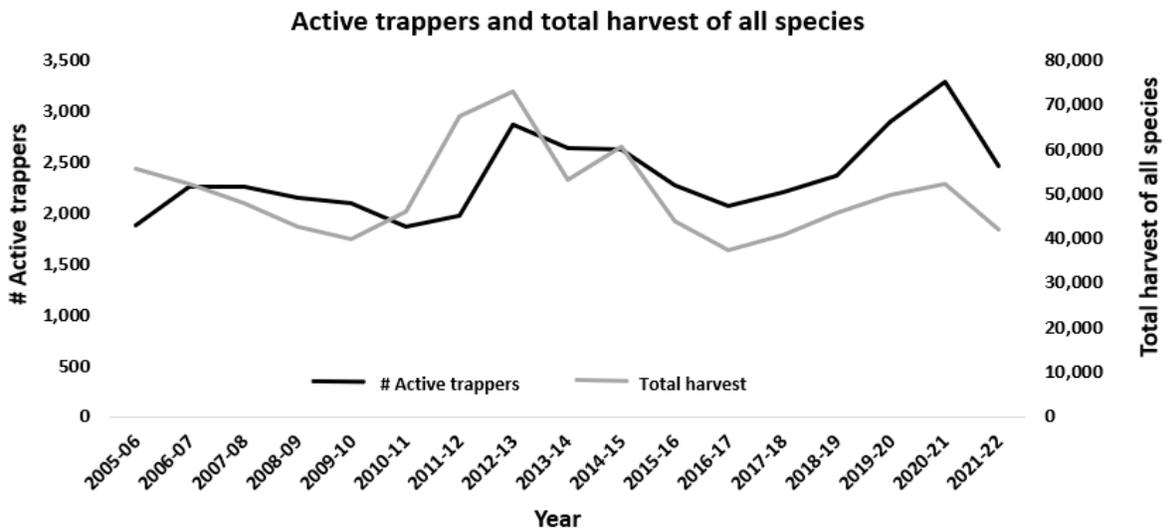


Figure 2. Total number of active trappers compared to total harvest of all species in Montana, annually estimated from the results of the mailed furbearer harvest survey.

The first section of this annual report presents the general methods used to annually monitor the status of fur-bearing species harvested and trapper effort through a mail survey. Monitoring methods also include tracking furs sold at auction and auction prices for common furbearing species. This section describes how this information is used to track changes in harvest and pelt prices over time.

In Section II, each species is broken down using metrics described in the methods section including additional updates on current monitoring and management efforts. The use of long-term data sets allows for the comparison from year to year and more importantly the long-term trend of each species.

For more information on any of these reports, please contact Nathan Kluge at [Nathan.Kluge@mt.gov](mailto:Nathan.Kluge@mt.gov) or visit <https://fwp.mt.gov/>.



**Section I: General Statewide Monitoring Methods and Summary**



## Harvest and Management Activities

- 1) The annual harvests of bobcat, fisher, marten, otter, and swift fox are monitored through a statewide pelt tagging and harvest registration system. Registration is initiated under 24-hour mandatory reporting through an automated telephone call-in system referred to as the Mandatory Reporting Response Entry (MRRE) system. All pelt tag sealing and completion of species harvest registration forms, which are generated in MRRE, are conducted by FWP personnel. Marten, fisher, and swift fox pelts are tagged under the authority of the state, while otter and bobcat are tagged under oversight of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to meet federal CITES pelt export requirements.
- 2) Harvest data on the three remaining furbearers (beaver, muskrat, mink) and six fur-bearing animals (weasel, skunk, coyote, fox, raccoon, badger) was collected through a trapper harvest survey questionnaire. In addition, the same harvest data are collected on the five tagged/registered furbearers through the same survey questionnaire to specifically measure trapper effort and catch rates. Trapper effort will be used in developing long-term species population trend indices. The trapping and fur harvest survey was mailed to all resident and nonresident license holders. No reminder was sent to non-respondents. Expanded estimates of furbearer trapping, hunting, and harvest activities were made from the returned sample. The survey requests information on the estimated number of species harvested by trapping district, harvest method, and harvest effort. Summary harvest statistics and calculated catch rates were generated by a software package through FWP's Research & Technical Services Unit.
- 3) Mandatory carcass collections are required for fisher, and lower jaws must be surrendered from harvested bobcat, otter, and swift fox. All carcasses are forwarded to FWP's Wildlife Laboratory in Bozeman for biological analysis to determine specimen age, sex, body condition, food habits, reproductive history, and to collect tissue samples for potential genetic analysis. All jaws are forwarded to Matson's Laboratory in Manhattan, Montana to determine specimen age through cementum annuli aging.
- 4) The Montana Trappers Association's Western States Fur Auction in Livingston, Montana is the primary source of pelt price information. The North American Fur Auction (NAFA) website has also been used to obtain historical average pelt values for each fur-producing species. This information can be used to calculate economic fur value of each species as a predictor of harvest pressure (i.e. higher prices = greater harvest pressure).
- 5) Furbearer research is an ongoing statewide activity that is used to inform wildlife management decision-making on a species-specific basis, when funding is available. Further developments in species monitoring and research are ongoing and are covered throughout this report. Additional research projects were conducted by external partner agencies, universities, and organizations over this last year and are outside of the scope of this document.

**Fur Harvest and Auction Price Comparisons**

Individuals interested in buying fur in Montana (i.e., fur dealers) must obtain a fur dealers license from FWP. License holders are required to maintain records of all fur transactions (e.g., buying, selling, inventory, etc.). These data have been used to provide FWP another metric to track species harvest trends. Additionally, bobcat, otter, swift fox, marten, and fisher harvest numbers are gathered from mandatory pelt registration, including tagging, as well as CITES tagging for bobcat and otter for export outside of the state harvested or United States.



**The Montana Trappers Association (MTA)** hosts a fur auction each year in the state of Montana, providing opportunity to buy or sell harvested pelts. In the 2022–2023 season, MTA hosted just one auction in February in Livingston, Montana. Pelt prices were averaged from all fur sold, including green, finished, and damaged furs (Table). This year’s overall MTA auction price increased slightly from last year’s 29.3% increase.

**Table 1.** Furbearer harvest and pelt prices in Montana over the last three harvest seasons.

Species	2022-2023		2021-2022		2020-2021	
	Pelts sold or registered <sup>1</sup>	Average Pelt prices from MTA auction <sup>2</sup>	Pelts sold or registered <sup>1</sup>	Average Pelt prices from MTA auction <sup>2</sup>	Pelts sold or registered <sup>1</sup>	Average Pelt prices from MTA auction <sup>2</sup>
Badger	7	\$33.89	22	\$49.29	21	\$44.54
Beaver	216	\$33.22	223	\$23.00	136	\$22.54
Bobcat	111	\$376.21	72	\$309.49	66	\$216.89
Coyote	423	\$25.76	664	\$37.13	684	\$56.23
Ermine	126	\$4.56	11	\$2.65	27	\$1.00
Red Fox	199	\$20.62	128	\$22.95	142	\$14.75
Marten	104	\$39.02	108	\$33.66	28	\$22.62
Mink	8	\$10.89	33	\$6.70	6	\$5.57
Muskrat	248	\$2.88	459	\$3.24	382	\$2.84
Otter	20	\$68.33	13	\$58.77	26	\$50.20
Raccoon	103	\$7.97	111	\$9.62	64	\$10.19
Skunk	97	\$22.43	77	\$13.07	23	\$8.29
Trapping licenses sold	3,332		4,495		6,059	

<sup>1</sup>Number of pelts sold at Montana Trappers Association fur auction.

<sup>2</sup>Pelt prices are averaged from all fur sold, including green, finished, and damaged furs.



Overall, average pelt prices increased by about 19% from last year (Table 2). Ermine showed the largest increase in pelt price from last year at +101.8% while coyotes showed the largest decline of 30.6%. Badger, Coyote, and Raccoon were the only pelts that have seen a decrease this year compared to the 5-year average. Skunk pelt prices have seen over a 400% increase from that was considered the last peak of overall pelt prices during the 2012–2013 trapping season. Bobcat pelt prices are on the rise which may draw more interest in trappers targeting bobcats next year. Beaver pelt prices saw a 44.4% increase from last year with prices increasing throughout the season likely due to the increased market for Stenson cowboy

hats made from beaver pelt felt. Overall, fur prices continue to remain low with trapping cost and fuel prices greatly outweighing end-of-season fur checks. The 2023–2024 season will likely be similar to the last few years unless the global fur market changes.

**Table 2.** Furbearer pelt prices in Montana from annual Montana Trappers Association fur auction, February 17–18, 2023, Livingston, Montana.

Species	Total sold	Average price	Change from 2021-2022	Change from Peak in 2012-2013	5-year average
Badger	7	\$33.89	-31.2%	33.2%	\$39.74
Beaver	216	\$33.22	44.4%	7.5%	\$23.13
Bobcat	111	\$376.21	21.6%	-36.1%	\$293.31
Coyote	423	\$25.76	-30.6%	-72.6%	\$57.85
Ermine	126	\$4.56	101.8%	45.7%	\$2.84
Red Fox	199	\$20.62	-10.2%	-68.7%	\$19.08
Marten	104	\$39.02	15.9%	-53.6%	\$28.36
Mink	8	\$10.89	62.5%	-45.7%	\$7.92
Muskrat	248	\$2.88	-11.1%	-75.0%	\$2.79
Otter	20	\$68.33	16.3%	-39.3%	\$59.79
Raccoon	103	\$7.97	-17.2%	-71.1%	\$8.51
Skunk	97	\$22.43	71.6%	426.5%	\$13.41

**Section II: Montana Furbearer Program Species Status Reports**  
**2022–2023**

**Forest Furbearers:**



## Canada Lynx Monitoring

Canada lynx have been harvested historically through trapping and hunting in Montana. In 1978, FWP implemented mandatory pelt tagging of both lynx and bobcat. Lynx harvest continued through the 1998 trapping season and have been federally listed as a threatened species since 2000.

In 2015, Montana established lynx protection zones (LPZ's; Figure 3) in northwest Montana and the Greater Yellowstone region as part of a lynx settlement agreement. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) plans to re-evaluate lynx critical habitat within the LPZ's in 2024–2025 and any additional information that can be gathered to further inform our knowledge of lynx distribution and occupancy in Montana may help guide the future decision-making process. Montana has a long history of positive, progressive efforts to conserve lynx in our state and we continued efforts to inform our knowledge of lynx occupancy and distribution throughout the state.

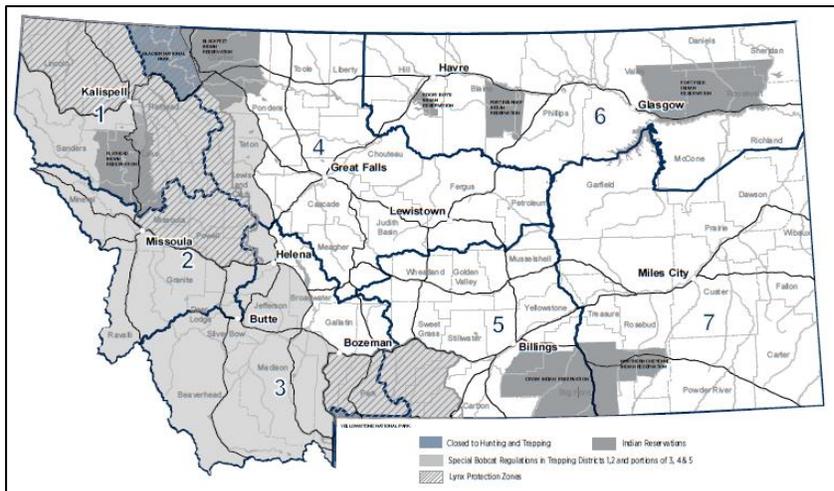


Figure 3. Furbearer trapping district boundaries, counties, and lynx protection zones.

In 2022, FWP staff developed a lynx monitoring protocol in efforts to start actively gathering more information regarding lynx occupancy throughout their range in Montana. This protocol was established using the most recently published lynx habitat quality model (Olson et al. 2020) with plans for long-term monitoring efforts.

Over the winter of 2022–2023, FWP staff deployed 20 lynx monitoring stations in core lynx habitat in northwest Montana and 20 stations in marginal habitat within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE; Figure 4). These efforts provided FWP with the probability of occupancy and detection within core and marginal lynx habitats. Preliminary results show that there were no lynx detections in the GYE while there were a total of 185 lynx detections at 10 of the locations in core lynx habitat.

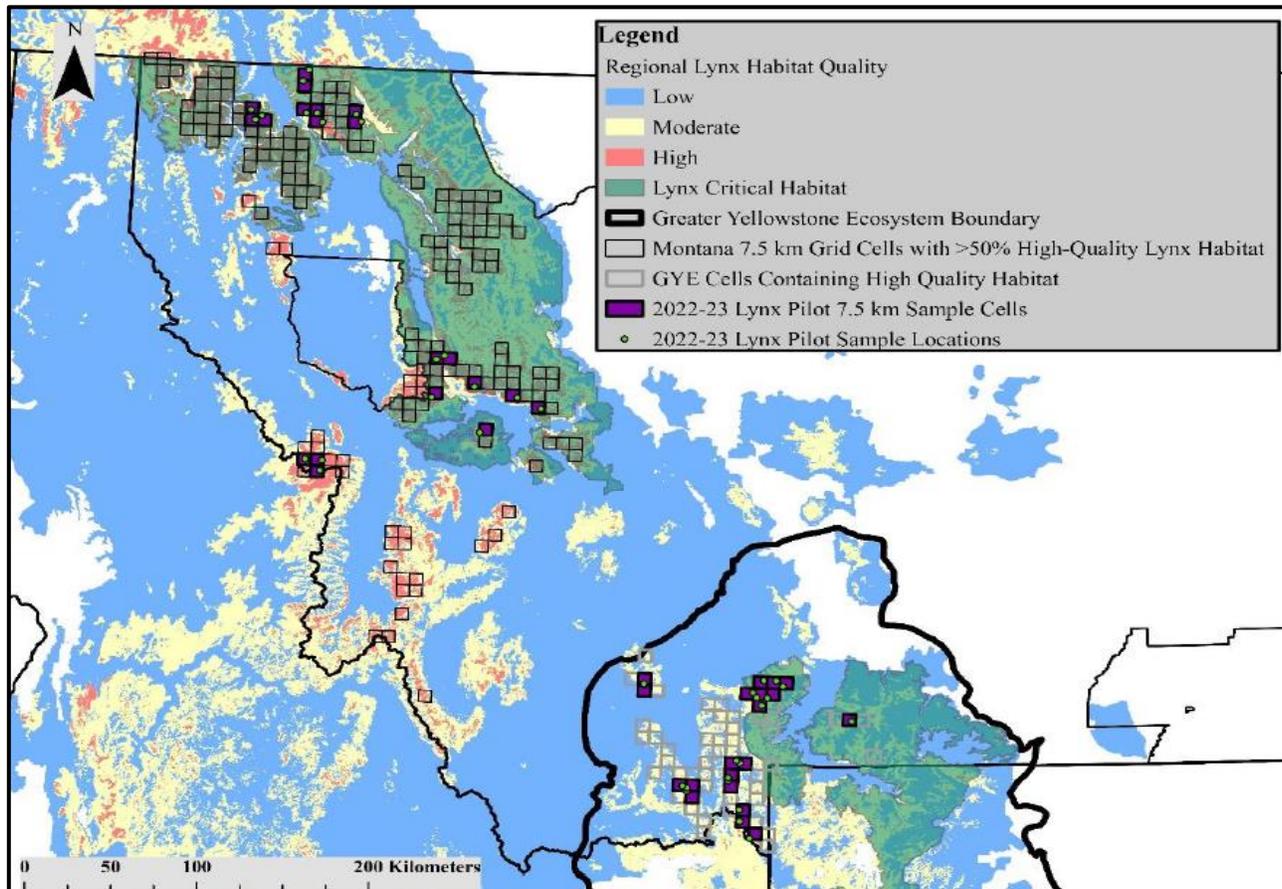


Figure 4. Montana cells and specific locations sampled for lynx pilot occupancy survey from December 1, 2022, through April 30, 2023, within core, high-quality lynx habitat ( $n = 20$ ) and within marginal, high-quality habitat within the GYE ( $n = 20$ ). Sample locations generated along a trail or road within high-quality lynx habitat.

In 2023–2024, Montana FWP plans to deploy 90 lynx monitoring stations in 7.5-km x 7.5-km cells that have > 50% high-quality modeled habitat which will estimate lynx occupancy throughout core lynx habitat in Montana (Figure 6). Idaho and Wyoming will also be deploying lynx monitoring stations in areas modeled as high-quality habitat in efforts to estimate lynx occupancy across a major part of the range in the western United States. The results from these efforts will help inform the US Fish and Wildlife Service in their assessment of the status of the lynx populations in the West and their designations of lynx critical habitat. This multi-state lynx occupancy survey will then occur every 5 years, so that we can gain occupancy trend information for lynx in the west.



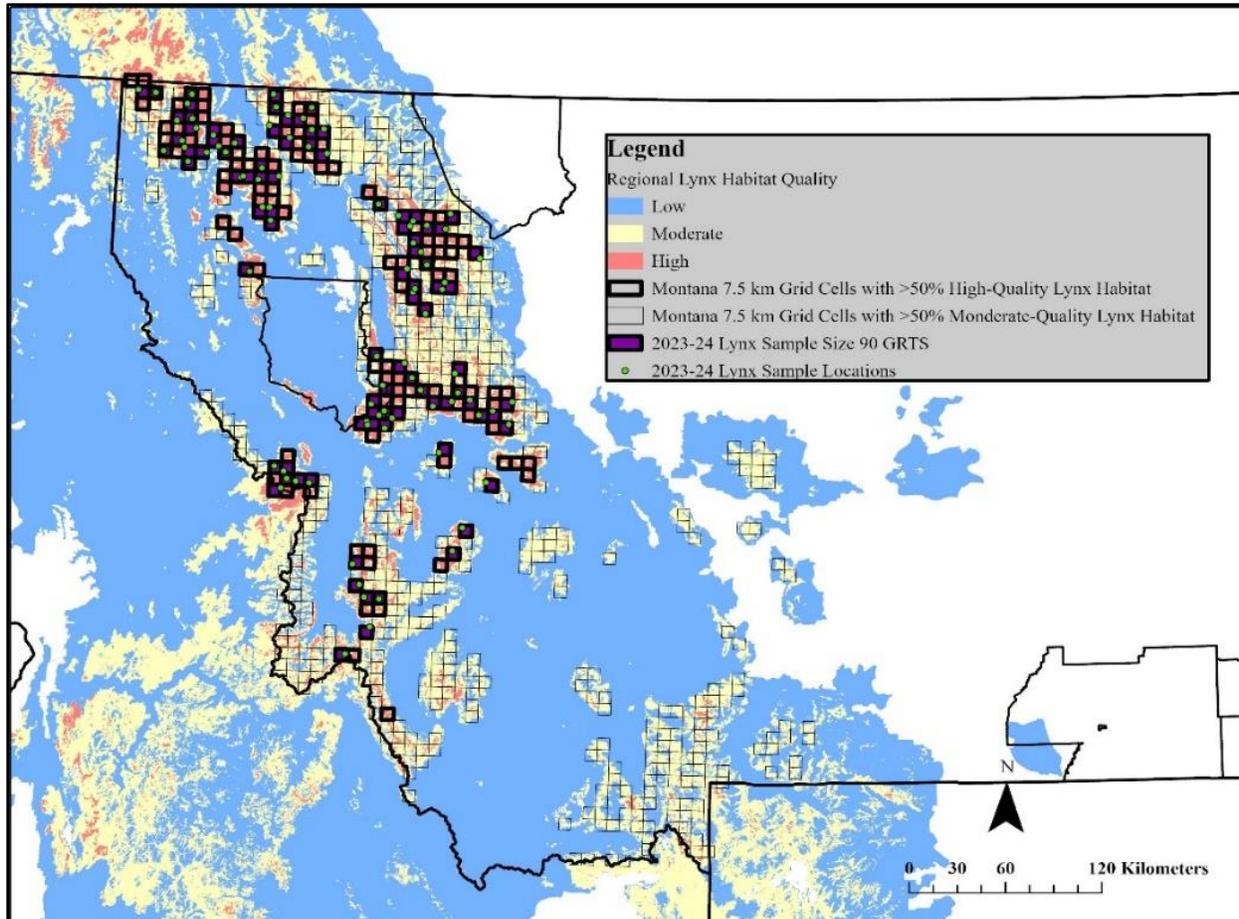


Figure 6. Montana cells and specific locations to be sampled for lynx occupancy survey from December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 through March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024 (n = 90). Sample locations are along a road or trail within high-quality lynx habitat.



## Bobcat Harvest and Population Trends

**Bobcat harvest** is determined through mandatory registration of each animal harvested, pelt tagging, and lower jaw collection within 10 days of the season end. Harvest is also regulated through a limited quota system. During the 2022–2023 season 728 bobcats were harvested resulting in a 23.61% decrease from the previous year (Figure 8). Region 3 was the only region to reach their quota, harvesting 154 out of the 150-bobcat quota. Weather conditions were poor for bobcat trapping this year with many trappers focused on other species, such as wolves and coyotes. Bobcat pelts did see a 21.56% increase in price from last year, bringing an average of \$376.21 (Figure 9). This is also a 23.28% increase from the 10-year average of \$305.16. The highest bobcat price this year at the Livingston auction was \$1,244.23. Bobcat prices are holding up well and our western bobcats with white, spotted bellies are at the top of the national market. Even many of the lower end bobcat pelts from other areas of the country are doing well. We also collect the lower jaw of every bobcat harvested to determine age. The oldest bobcat harvest during the 2022–2023 season was 16-year-old while the average age was 2.8 years old (Figure 10).



**Population trends** are derived from an integrated population model (IPM) that includes annual harvest, survival, and recruitment data for each region to provide an estimate of the bobcat population. From this model provides justification for the bobcat quotas and personal bag limits in each region to achieve the regional management objectives each year. Results from the IPM show a moderate decline in our statewide bobcat population over time (Figure 7).

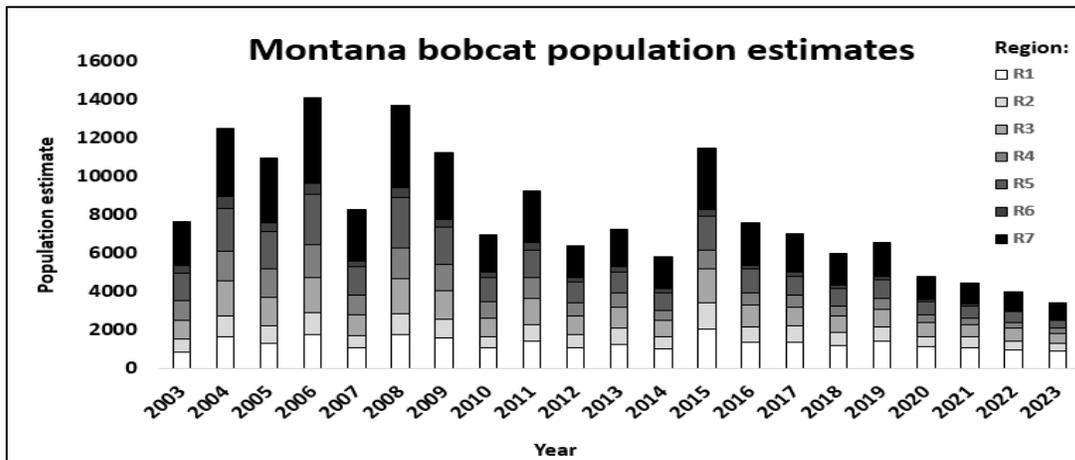


Figure 7. Annual estimates of Montana’s bobcat population derived from an integrated population model using annual harvest, survival, and recruitment data.

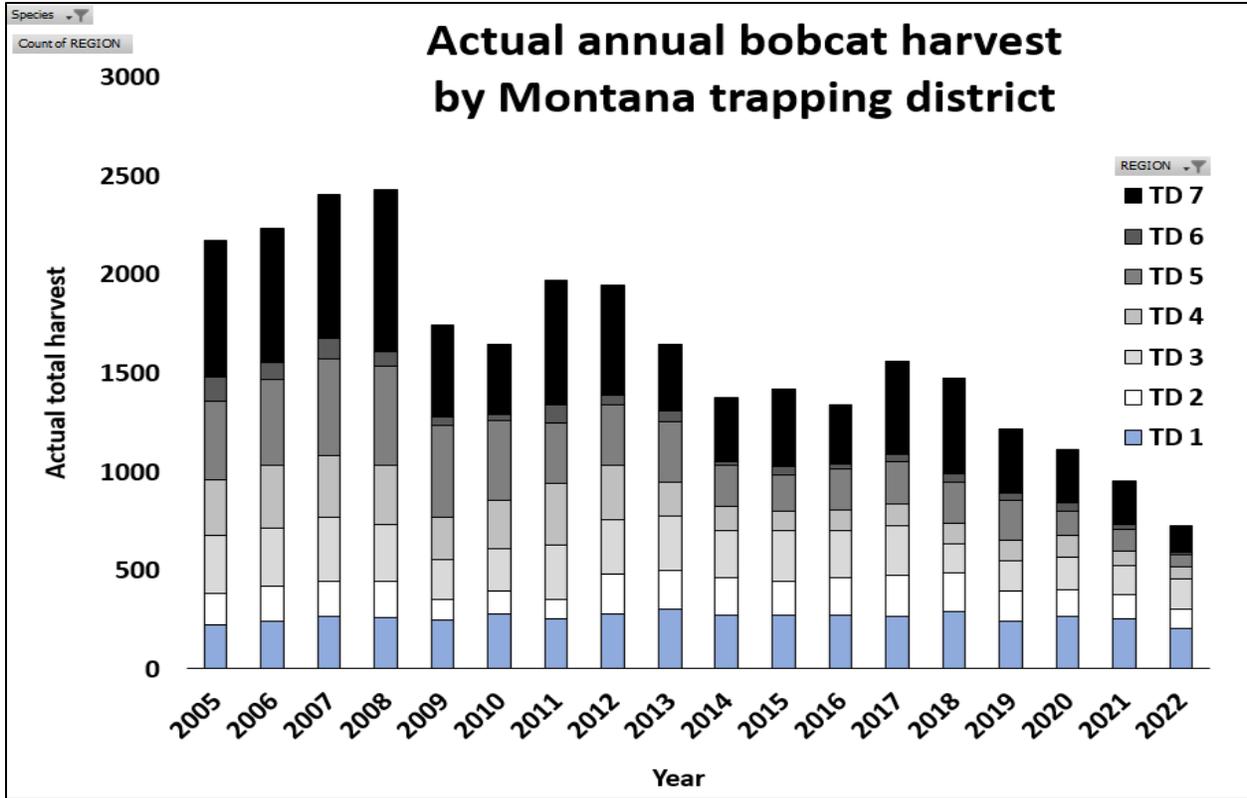


Figure 8. Actual annual bobcat harvest in Montana derived from mandatory registration.

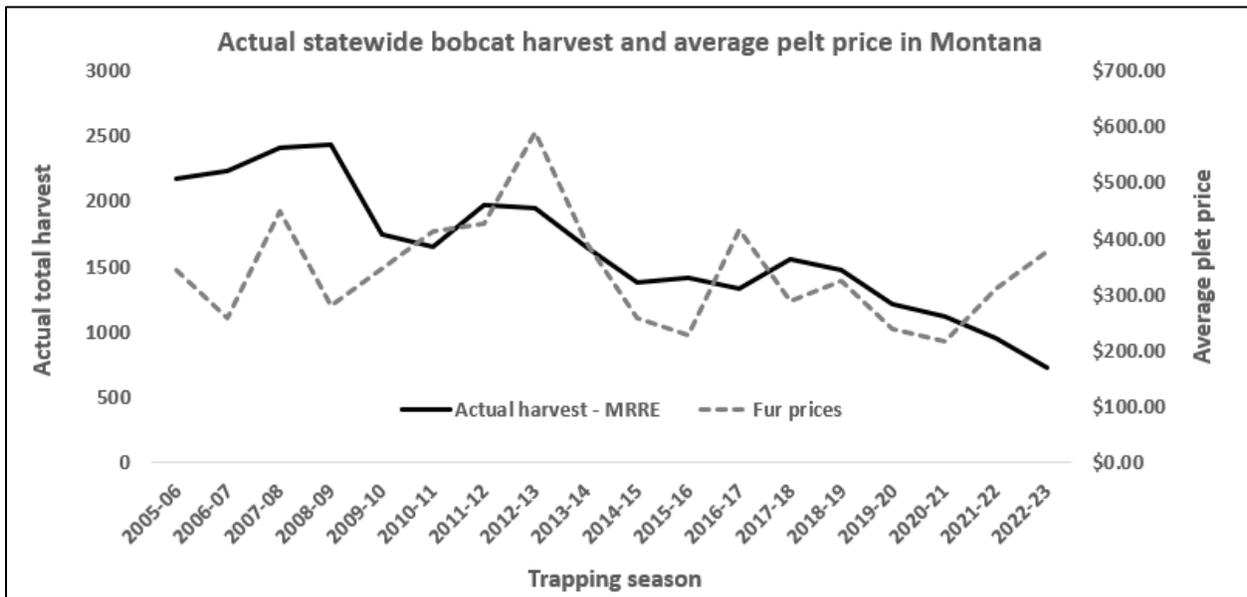


Figure 9. Comparison of Montana bobcat harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest numbers determined through mandatory registration. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

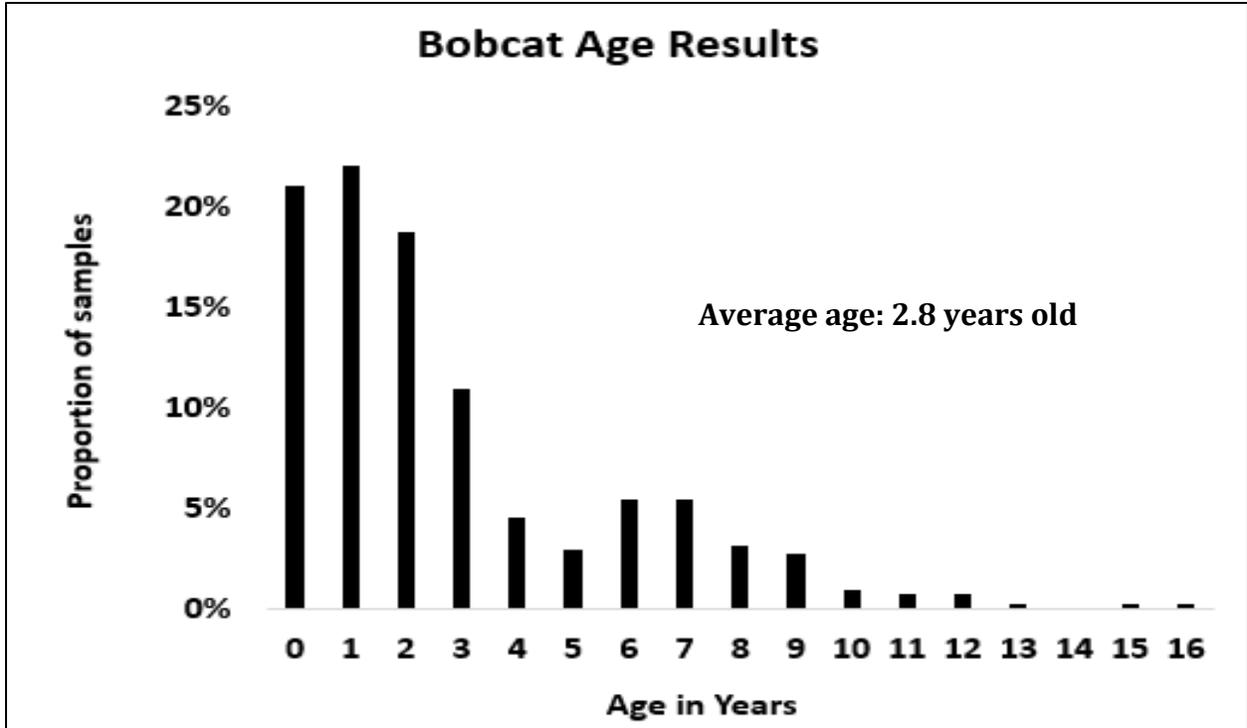


Figure 10. Proportion of the bobcats harvested at each age during the 2022–2023 bobcat season. Age information is determined through cementum annuli aging from mandatory tooth submission by hunters and trappers.



## Fisher Harvest Trends and Occupancy

The first trapping season for fisher started in 1983, while mandatory pelt tagging started for the 1984 trapping season. **Fisher harvest** is determined through mandatory registration, full carcass collection, and pelt tagging of each animal harvested within 10 days of the season close. Harvest is regulated through a limited quota system. Since 2019, the Bitterroot Fisher Management Unit (Figure 11) has had a total quota of 5 with a female subquota of 1. During the 2022–2023 season there were 4 fishers harvested including 1 female that closed the season. During the 2021–2022 trapping season, only 2 male fishers were harvest. The highest fisher harvest in Montana was in 1986 with a total harvest of 21 fishers, including 11 females, 8 males, and 2 unknowns.

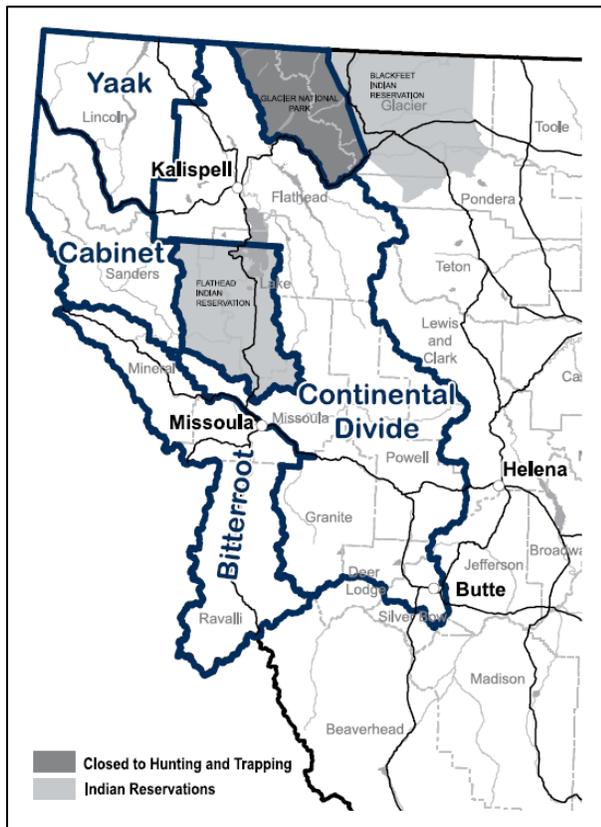


Figure 11. Montana Fisher Management Units.

In 2017, FWP developed a pilot project to estimate occupancy and detection probability of fisher in the Cabinet Mountain (Coltrane and Inman 2021). This monitoring effort was designed to provide initial estimates that would guide the study design for a larger multi-state monitoring effort the following winter. Forty-two camera stations were deployed in 21 cells (7.5-km x 7.5-km) from December 2017 – March 2018. Fishers were detected in 7 of the 21 cells suggesting that fishers were present in the Cabinets but at low densities.

In 2018, Montana FWP and Idaho Fish and Game developed a fisher occupancy study to determine the current distribution of fishers and to provide a baseline occupancy estimate and sampling framework that would allow biologists to monitor changes in fisher distribution and occupancy over time. From that survey, fishers were detected in 23 of the 343 cells sampled (Figure 12). These detections generated the highest fisher

occupancy estimates in a large area in the Idaho Nez-Perce-Clearwater National Forest and a small area in the Cabinet Mountain Range of Idaho and Montana.

In the summer of 2019, in conjunction with Montana Fur Harvesters, Montana Trapper’s Association, and the US Forest Service, FWP began a project to attempt to increase fisher denning habitat in the Cabinet Mountains. Using den boxes designed in British Columbia, 31 boxes were deployed in 2019 and an additional 20 in 2020. Den boxes were lured and monitored with trail cameras and gun brush genetic collars to detect use and determine the sex of those fisher using the boxes. To date, FWP has not observe any actual denning activity at any den boxes, but future monitoring efforts will be determined based on results from the 2022–2023 monitoring season.

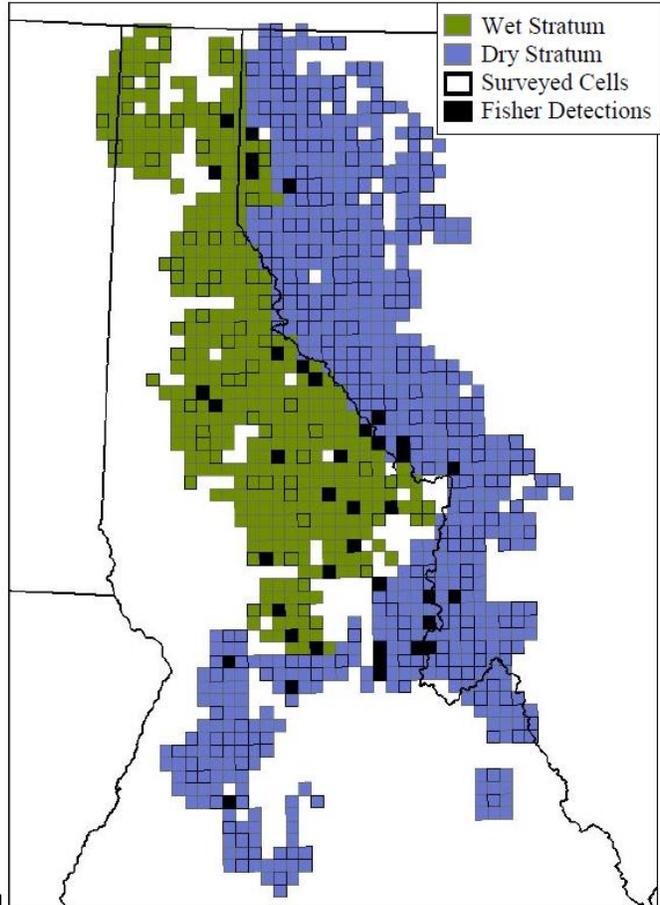


Figure 12. Fisher detections and cells sampled from mid-December 2018 to mid-March 2019.

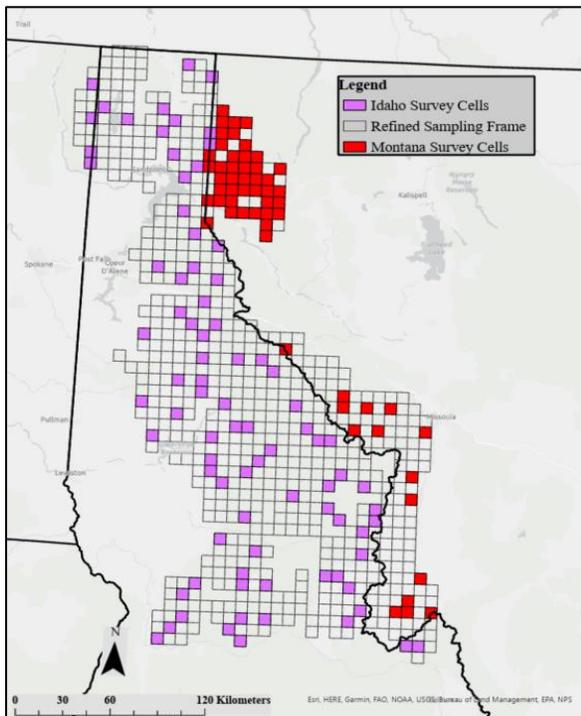


Figure 13. 2023–2024 fisher sampling frame and survey cells.

During the winter of 2023–2024, FWP will be using a modified sampling fame developed by Krohner et al. (2022) to re-evaluate occupancy of fishers in the Northern Rocky Mountain Range of Idaho and Montana (Figure 13). This effort will also include an intensive sampling effort in the Cabinet Mountains in Montana to generate a stand-alone occupancy estimate for that area. Results will be compared to those of the 2018–2019 survey to inform any change in occupancy and detection. The results will also inform future management decisions concerning fishers in northwest Montana including future quota recommendations and/or translocation efforts.

## Marten Harvest Trends and Monitoring

**Marten harvest** is determined through mandatory registration of each animal harvested, including pelt tagging within 10 days of the end of the season. The first trapping season and mandatory pelt tagging for marten started in 1955. During the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 trapping seasons, mandatory tagging of marten was discontinued due to COVID-19. FWP reinstated mandatory tagging of marten for the 2022–2023 trapping season after seeing



a decrease in reported harvest over the previous 2 years. During the 2022–2023 season there was a 35.01% increase in marten harvest with a total of 482 harvested, including 229 that were harvest in region 2 (Figure 14). Marten pelts also saw an increase of 15.92%, averaging \$39.02. The most recent high in marten pelt prices was during the 2013–2014 season when they were averaging \$85.92 (Figure 15). This year’s increase in wild marten fur prices may reflect the limited purchase of Russian sable due to the war in the Ukraine and their sanctions on Russia. Marten continue to sell well at both state and national auctions.

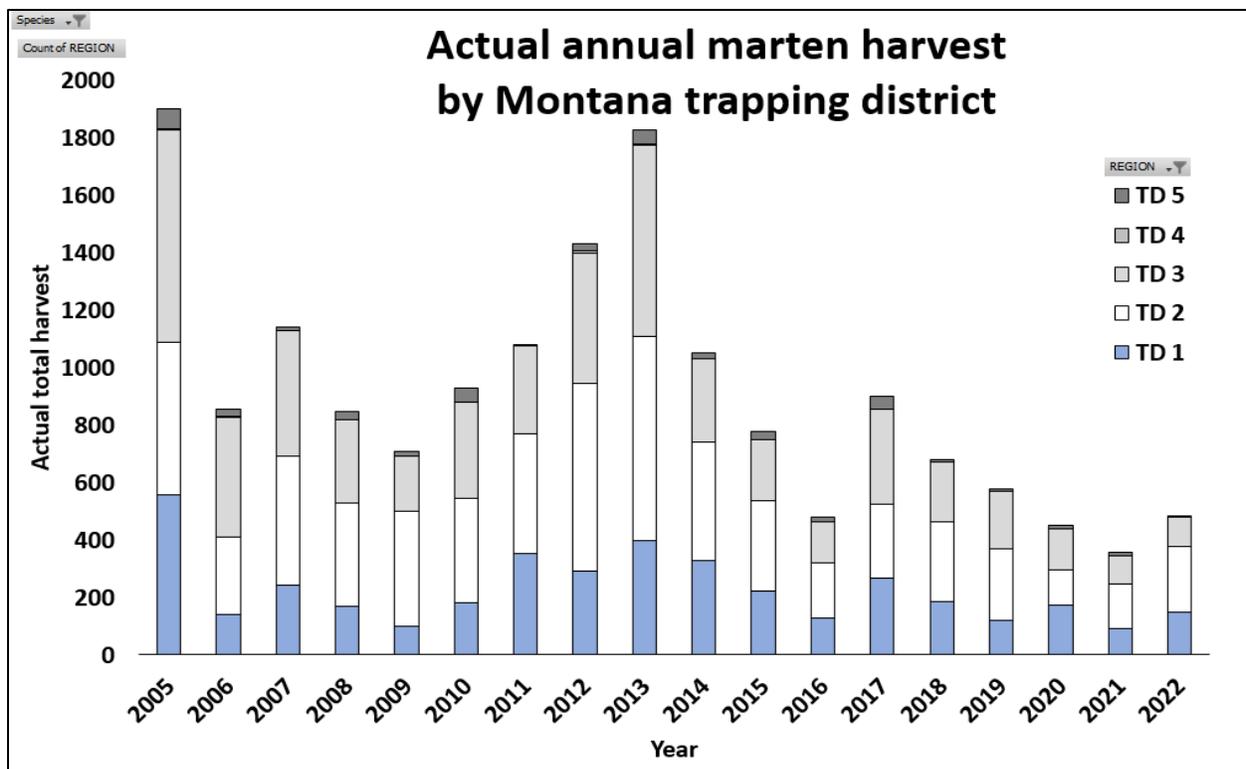


Figure 14. Actual annual marten harvest in Montana derived from mandatory registration.

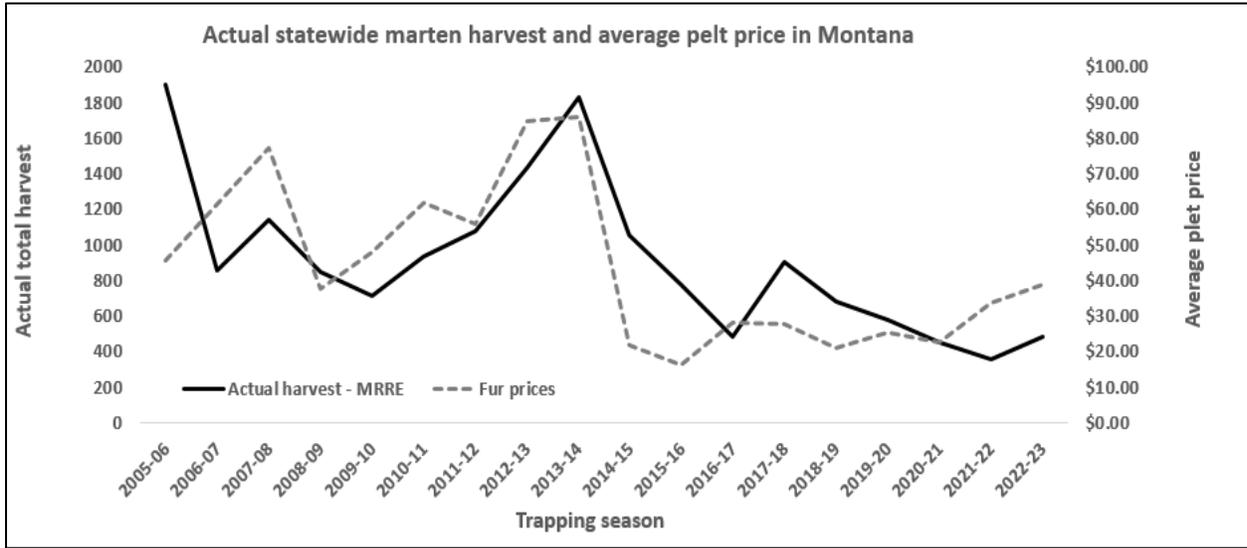


Figure 15. Comparison of Montana marten harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest numbers determined through mandatory registration. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

**Population trends** for marten have fluctuated over time (Jensen et al. 2012), however there are limited data for the population in Montana. Catch-per-unit-effort estimates from the Furbearer Harvest Survey show a relatively unchanged population at the state level (Figure 16). There have been some notable declines in Northwest Montana which was the backing for a 10 marten per person limit which started in region 1 in 2019. Although only 3 trappers reported a harvest of 10 marten in region 1 during the 2022–2023 season.

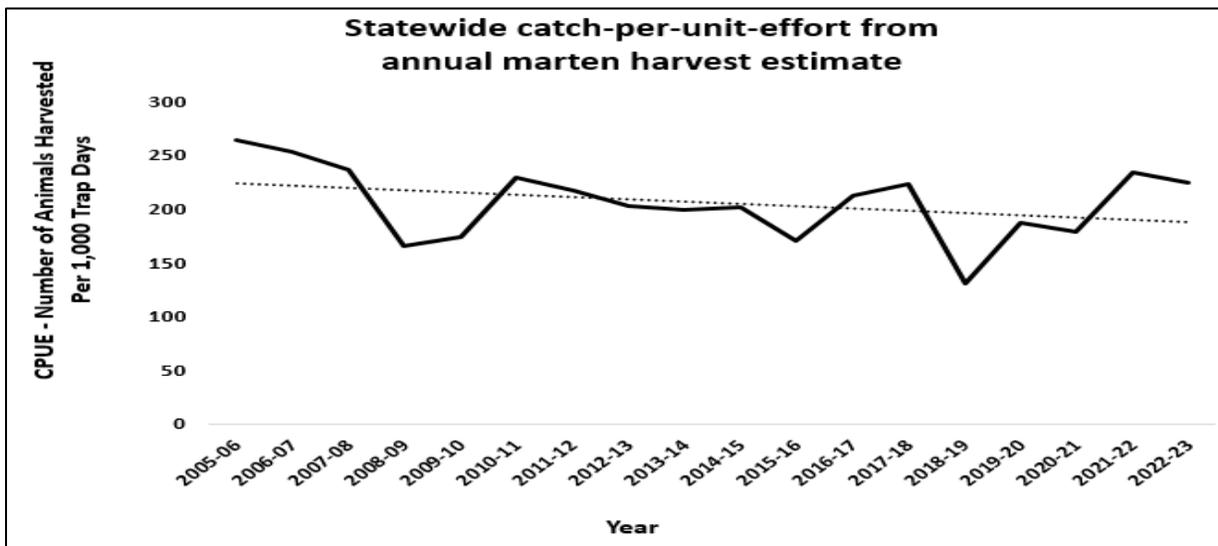


Figure 16. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for marten in Montana providing information regarding marten population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

In 2020, FWP in collaboration with several trappers, coordinated the translocation of marten from southwest Montana into the Little Belt Mountain Complex near White Sulphur Springs, Montana (Figure 16). Marten were live trapped, sampled, and moved to areas that are modeled as high-quality habitat but have no recent marten harvest locations (Figure 17). Over the first two winters of this project there were a total of 77 marten (50M, 27F) translocated in the Little Belts (Figure 18). Due to the success of these efforts, over the winter of 2022–2023, another 28 marten (18M, 10F) were translocated from southwest Montana into the Castle Mountains. Over the winter of 2023–2024, FWP proposes to continue these efforts into the North Bridger Mountains with further expansions proposed for the years to follow.



Figure 18. Marten being release from translocation den box into the Little Belt Mountains, 2021.

methodology for marten that can be applied within a statewide monitoring framework. This will enhance FWP’s ability to manage marten harvest, restore marten populations via translocation where needed, and evaluate the impact of other management activities, such as marten harvest or large-scale habitat changes, on marten populations.

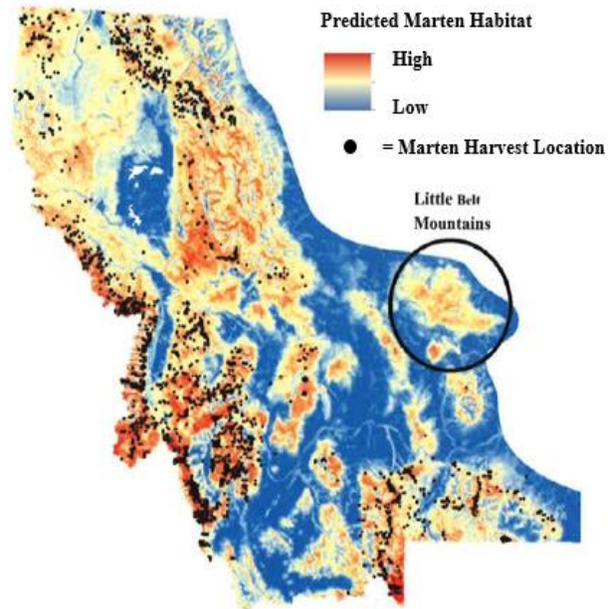


Figure 17. 2019 MNHP Maxent predictive marten habitat quality model and 2007–2018 marten harvest locations.

To continue to gain more information about marten, in 2022, FWP approved a research project to study martens across their range in Montana. This project will be a collaboration between Montana State University and FWP Regions 1–3. The specific objectives of this project include developing 1) a predictive habitat model for marten at the statewide scale, 2) assessing marten species identification and distribution statewide, and 3) developing and evaluating occupancy monitoring (in the field and via simulation) as a means of monitoring marten over space and time. This project plans to address information gaps and develop a monitoring

As part of the on-going monitoring efforts of the newly established populations of translocated marten, a masters project has been approved to start as early as the Fall of 2024. The goal of this project is to develop a systematic post-release monitoring program that can be used to assess the efficacy of ongoing marten reintroduction efforts in central Montana (Figure 19). The proposed research includes 1) an evaluation of the population dynamics and behavior of newly reintroduced marten populations including post-release survival, reproduction, and spatial use and 2) developing a recommendation of criteria to be met before reintroduced marten populations are open to legal, regulated harvest.



Figure 19. Marten detection at camera trap station in 2023, Little Belt Mountains, Montana.

The products from these two projects will provide a wholistic picture into the two marten species (*Martes americana*, *M. caurina*) we have in Montana, their delineation and hybridization zones, an updated habitat quality model, an occupancy modeling approach for statewide monitoring, a measure of efficacy for marten translocations including vital rates and cause-specific-mortality, and criteria for deeming the translocation efforts successful and complete. In preparation for the genetic side of these studies, FWP biologists are gathering voluntary muscle tissue samples from successful marten trappers. Please reach out to your regional furbearer biologist for more details ([Jessy Coltrane](#), R1; [Tyler Parks](#), R2; [Claire Gower](#), R3).



## Wolverine Occupancy and Monitoring

Wolverine have historically been trapped and hunted in Montana and were originally classified as a non-game species until their reclassified as a furbearer in 1984. In 1975, mandatory wolverine pelt tagging, and an annual wolverine harvest continued through the 2012 trapping season ending with a quota of 5. Since 2013, only 3 wolverines have been killed incidentally from legal trapping activities.



Over the winter of 2016–2017, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) participated in the first western United States wolverine occupancy survey which spanned across Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming (Lukacs et al. 2020). The objectives of these efforts were to 1) determine wolverine distribution, 2) identify distribution gaps where restoration efforts could be directed, 3) develop a monitoring framework that could be used to evaluate changes in distribution, occupancy and genetics, and 4) provide baseline data that can be used to evaluate the impacts of landscape,

climatic, or anthropogenic changes on wolverine occupancy and genetics over time. Monitoring stations were deployed within 15-km x 15-km cells that have >50% modeled high-quality habitat. A total of 185 monitoring stations were deployed across this 4-state area for the 2016–2017 survey. Wolverines were detected in 59 of the cells, including 23 cells in Montana. This survey was then followed-up over the winter of 2021–2022 adding Colorado, Utah, and Oregon to detect any changes in overall distribution and occupancy compared to the results from the previous study and to get a baseline for other areas predicted to be occupied by wolverines (Figure 20).

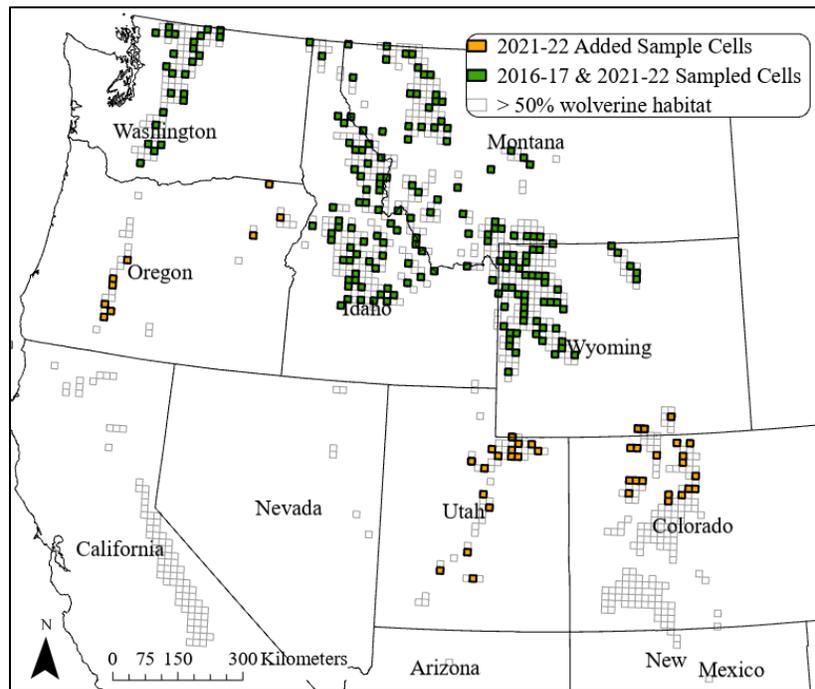


Figure 20. Sampling frame and selected cells for the wolverine survey across Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, USA, 2016–2017 (green) and selected cells added in Colorado, Utah, and Oregon, USA, for the survey in 2021–2022 (green & orange).

During the 2021–2022 survey, wolverines were detected in 60 of the 239 cells surveyed across the 7-state area although, this only added one wolverine detection in Oregon (Table 3; Figure 21). Wolverine detections were again detected in 59 of 185 cells sampled. There was a shift in wolverine detections between the two studies from Montana to Idaho, although the preliminary results only show a small decrease in overall wolverine occupancy across the 4-state area.

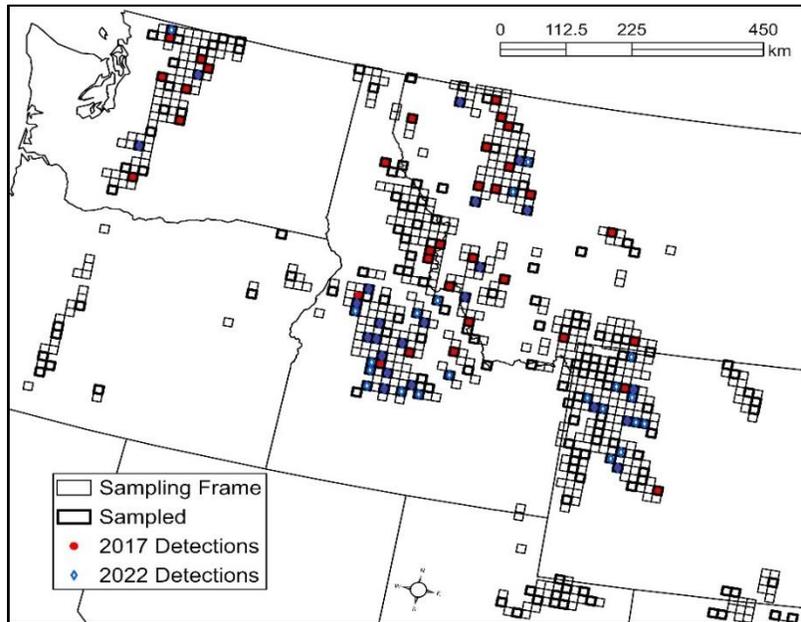


Figure 21. Wolverine detections across a 7-state area, USA, in winters of 2016–2017 and 2021–2022.

Wolverines are up for federal listing in 2023 due to the threat of climate change. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) plans to publish their final rule in December. Wolverine detections continue to be detected throughout the extent of their known range and have also been recently detected in areas previously thought to be outside of their normal distribution. The continued collaboration among these states will provide valuable, long-term information regarding any spatial and temporal changes in wolverine occupancy and distribution in the western United States. Through these efforts, managers can ensure the perpetuation of wolverine populations

**Table 3.** Wolverine detections during 1 December to 31 March during 2021–2022 wolverine survey across the 4-state area and all participating states, USA.

State	Sites	Wolverine photos	Sites with wolverine detections	Total photos (all species)
Colorado	16	0	0	118,566
Idaho	58	12,752	25	108,679
Montana	48	6,291	16	60,331
Oregon	19	333	1	30,955
Utah	16	0	0	26,051
Washington	25	286	3	9,665*
Wyoming	55	5,026	15	127,554
<b>Total</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>24,688</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>472,136</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>24,355</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>296,564</b>

throughout the extent of their range. Occupancy surveys occur every 5 years with the next survey scheduled for the winter of 2026–2027. There are plans to expand these collaborative efforts into Alberta and British Columbia, Canada so that this next survey can continue to provide advancing information about wolverines throughout much of their range in North America.

## Grassland Furbearers: **Swift Fox Harvest Trends and Occupancy**

Swift fox are native to the Northern Great Plains and while once abundant, they were eradicated from much of their historical range due largely to federal eradication campaigns focused on coyotes and wolves in the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. Swift fox were officially designated as extirpated from Montana in 1969. In 1992, the USFWS received a petition to list the swift fox as an endangered species but was found to be “warranted but precluded by listing actions of higher priority” (Federal Register 1995). In 1997, an extensive reintroduction effort was concluding in southern Canada, adjacent to North-Central Montana. Soon afterward, swift fox established populations in suitable habitats in Northern Montana resulting in much of the population that presently exists. Since that time subsequent translocations to two tribal nations within MT have occurred in attempts to increase distribution of swift fox.



Swift fox trapping season and mandatory pelt tagging started in 2010 with a quota of 20. **Swift fox harvest** is determined through mandatory registration of each animal harvested, including pelt tagging and lower jaw collection within 10 days of the end of the season. Since 2016, the quota for the portion of region 6 where swift fox trapping is allowed has been 10 with a personal limit of 3. During the 2022–2023 season, 4 swift fox were harvested, down from a harvest of 10 the previous season. Most swift fox are taken as a specialty species or are incidentally captured by coyote trappers. Due to the limited amount of harvest, trappers normally keep the pelt as a tanned wall-hanger. There were no swift fox pelts sold at the MTA fur auction this year or previously.

Over the winter of 2022–2023, a total of 120 swift fox monitoring stations were deployed in regions 4 – 7 as part of a pilot occupancy study. The objective of the study was to 1) identify and map swift fox habitat, 2) conserve habitat and movement corridors, 3) monitor distribution and status over time, and 4) increase distribution of swift fox into suitable, connected habitat. Swift fox were detected at the highest levels in region 6, followed by region 7, region 4, while there were no detections in region 5. These detections provided FWP with the detection and occupancy estimates to determine the level of sampling effort needed for a much more extensive survey starting over the winter of 2023–2024 in region 7. Monitoring stations will be placed in 7.5-km x 7.5-km cells that contain >50% modeled high-quality swift fox habitat (Figure 22). The efforts will then continue in region 6 over the winter of 2024–2025 and regions 4 and 5 in 2025–2026.

Opportunities to continue improving swift fox distribution and status appear to exist, especially in the northern portion of the species historical range where the largest gaps in population connectivity across the species range appear to occur within Montana. Swift fox distribution and population viability is currently not well understood in much of central and eastern Montana; however, populations are currently believed to be more fragmented than in adjacent parts of their range, making these parts of Montana a priority for range-wide conservation efforts. A critical step for local management is reliably determining the current distribution of swift fox with scientific survey methods. By the end of these survey efforts in 2026, FWP will have a much more detailed understanding of the swift fox population in Montana with the potential of expanding recreational harvest opportunities.

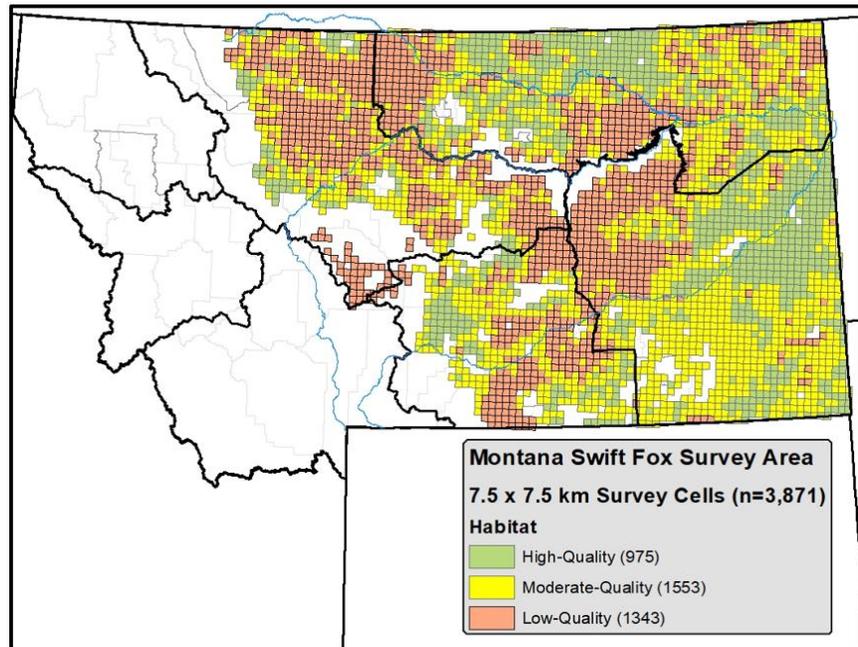


Figure 22. Swift fox modeled habitat quality across Montana FWP regions 4–7. Model represents input from 3 models that predict swift fox habitat in Montana (Burkholder 2019, Butler et al. 2020, Olimb et al. 2021). High quality = >50% grassland; Moderate = >25% grassland; low = <25% grassland.



**Riparian Furbearers:**

**Beaver Harvest Trends**

**Beaver harvest**, based on the furbearer harvest survey, during the 2022–2023 season was down 30.26% from the 2021–2022 season with an estimated 3,438 individuals harvest (Figure 23). Since 2019, region 3 has harvested the greatest number of beavers annually, with an estimated 829 beaver this year. Beaver pelt prices saw a 44.43% increase this year with prices increasing throughout the season and averaging \$33.22 this year (Figure 24). The market for Stetson cowboy hats made from beaver pelt felt drove the market primarily due to the popularity of the television series Yellowstone. Beaver pelt prices have been on a steady rise since the 2015–2016 season with projections of another increase for the 2023–2024 trapping season.



**Population trends** are derived from the Furbearer Harvest Survey and the Catch-Per-Unit-Effort (CPUE) estimate. As it takes more effort to catch an animal, we presume there are fewer individuals in the population. From this estimate, beaver populations have been in a slight decline over the last 18 years but are overall stable (Figure 25).

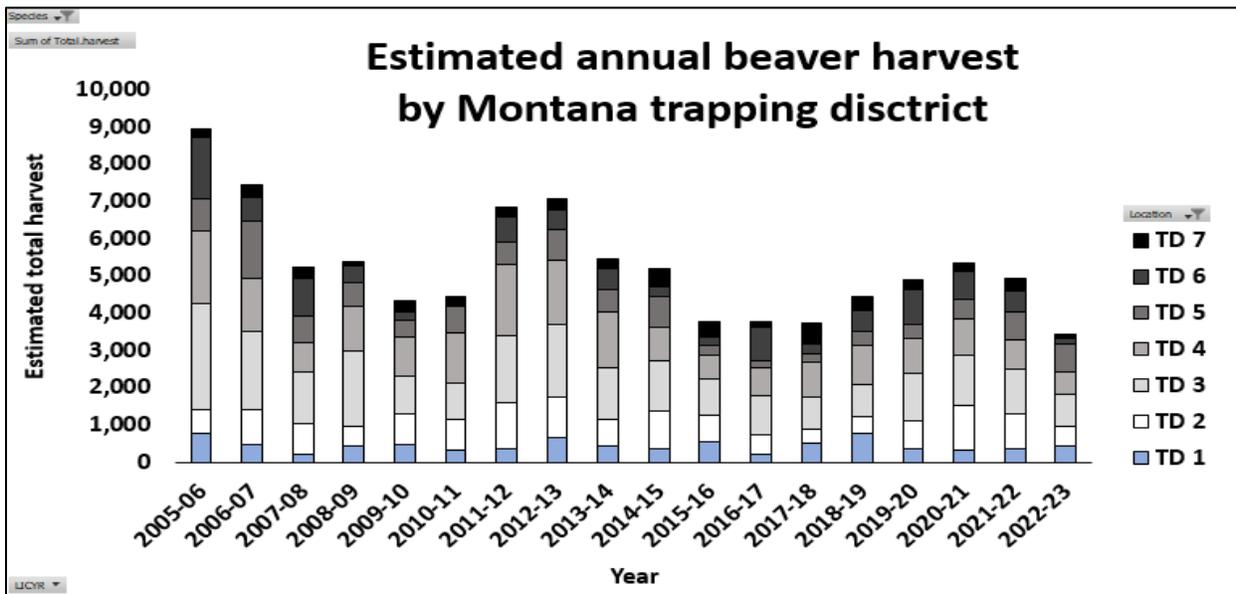


Figure 23. Estimated annual beaver harvest in Montana by trapping district, derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

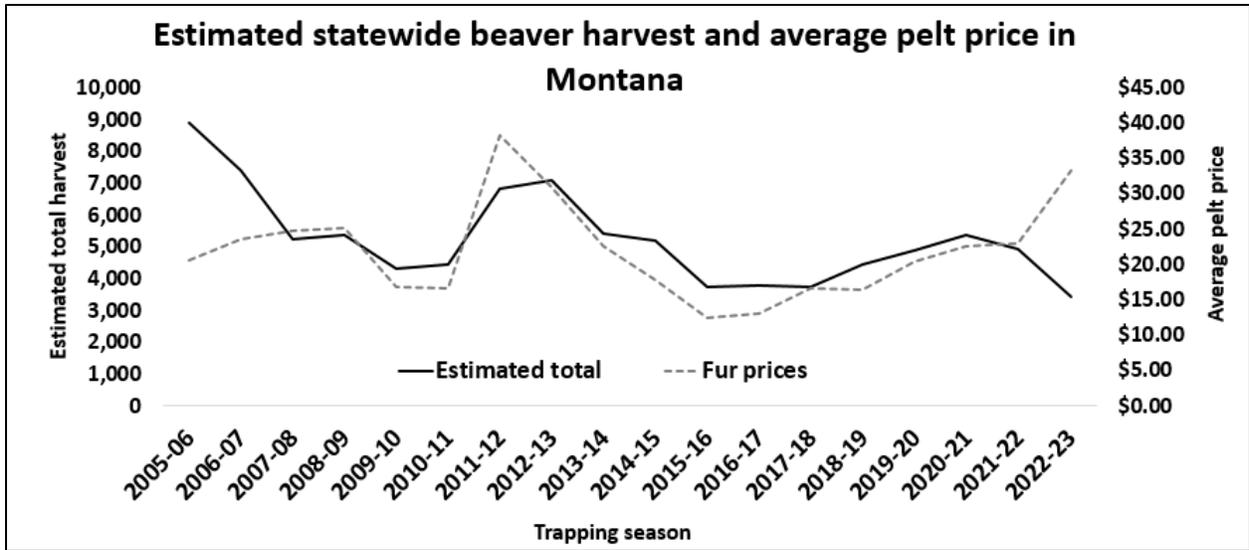


Figure 24. Comparison of Montana estimated beaver harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest estimated are derived from Furbearer Harvest Survey results. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

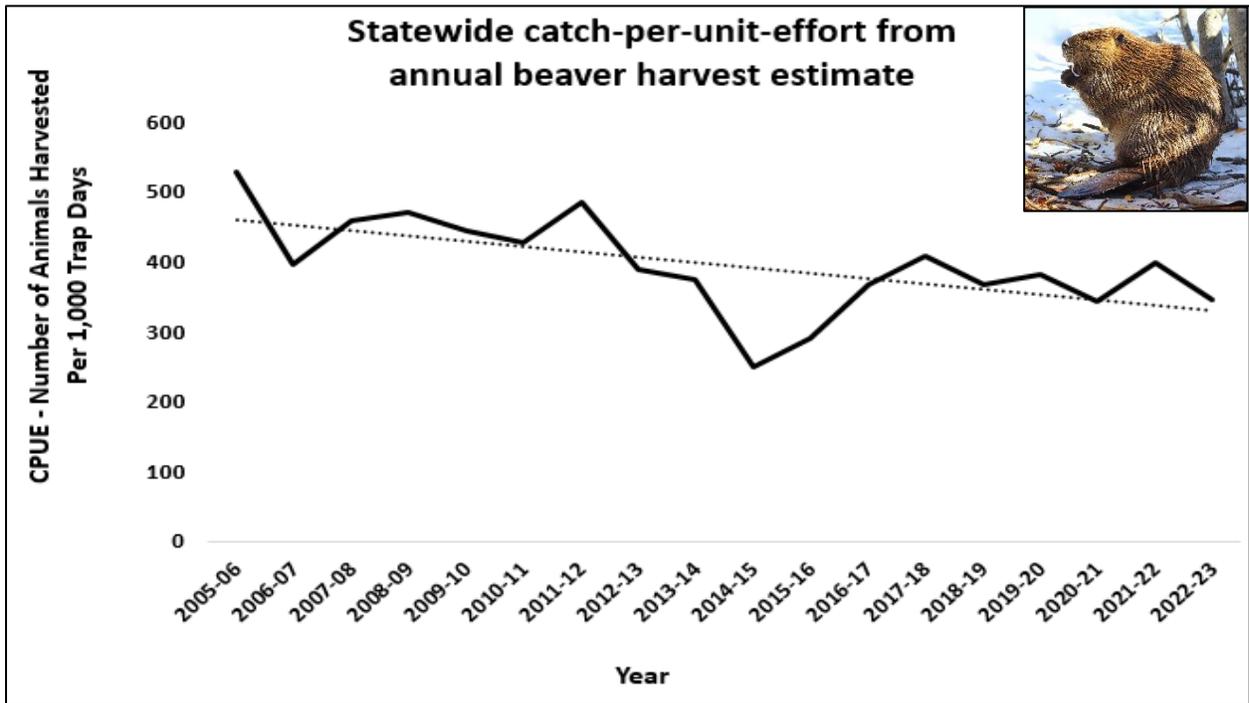


Figure 25. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for beaver in Montana providing information regarding beaver population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

## Mink Harvest Trends

**Mink harvest** during the 2022–2023 harvest season saw a significant drop of 79.84% from the 2021–2022 season with an estimated total of only 103 mink harvested statewide (Figure 26), only 8 of which were sold at the Livingston fur auction. Historical mink harvest has shown high annual fluctuations but with fewer mink being harvested, pelt prices for those available saw a 62.54% increase, averaging \$10.89 (Figure 27).



This is a 16.95% increase from the 10-year average of \$9.31 for mink. Many mink fur farms are going out of business which may be providing some additional demand for wild mink although it remains overall difficult to move mink fur through the market.

**Population trends**, interpreted through CPUE estimates, for mink have shown a steady decrease since over time with the most recent spike in 2016–2017. Although, little is known about what may be causing these decreases in Montana (Figure 28).

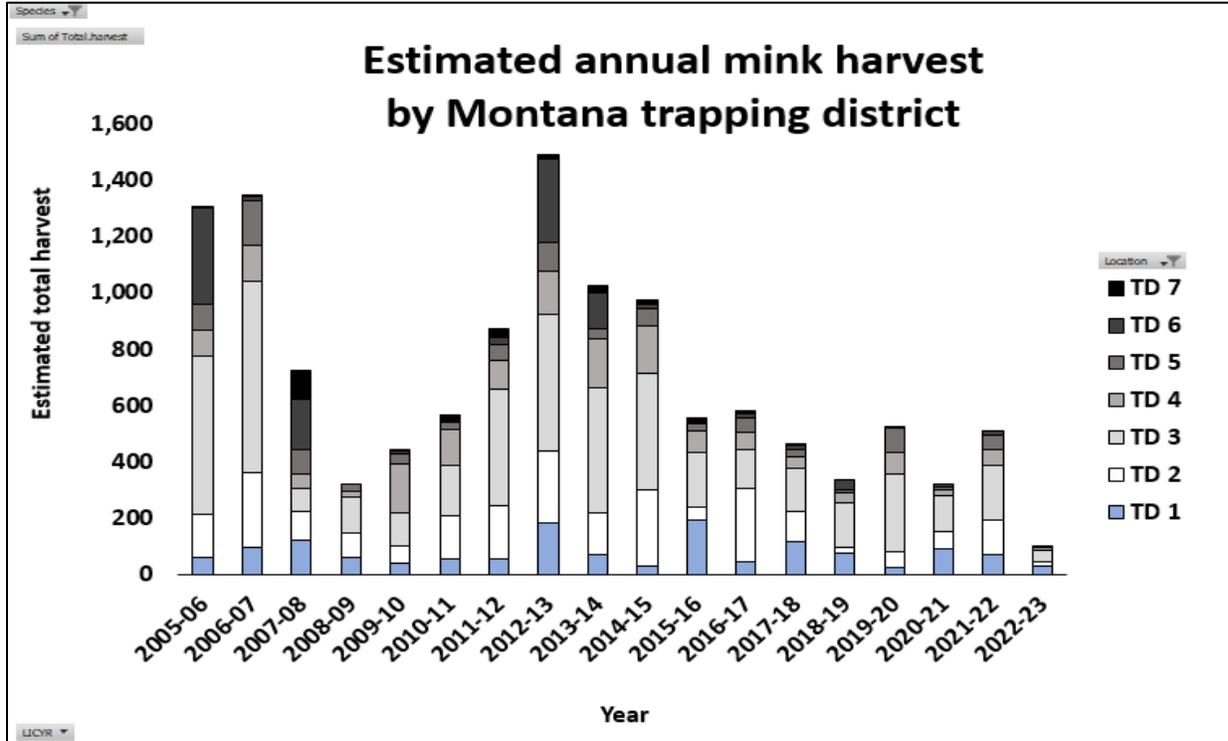


Figure 26. Estimated annual mink harvest in Montana by trapping district, derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

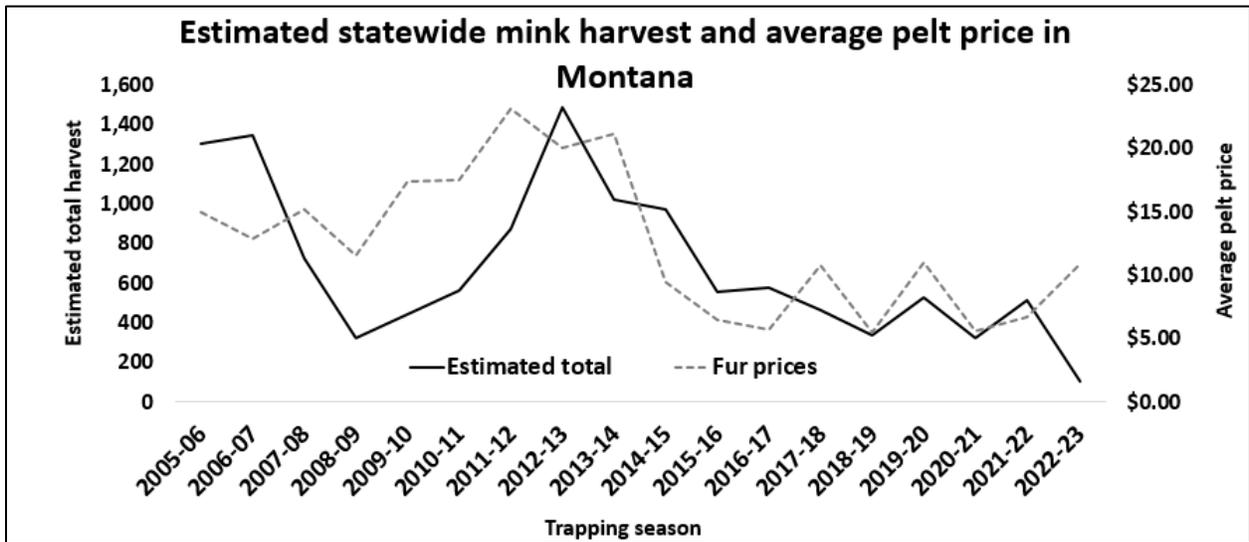


Figure 27. Comparison of Montana estimated mink harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest estimated are derived from Furbearer Harvest Survey results. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

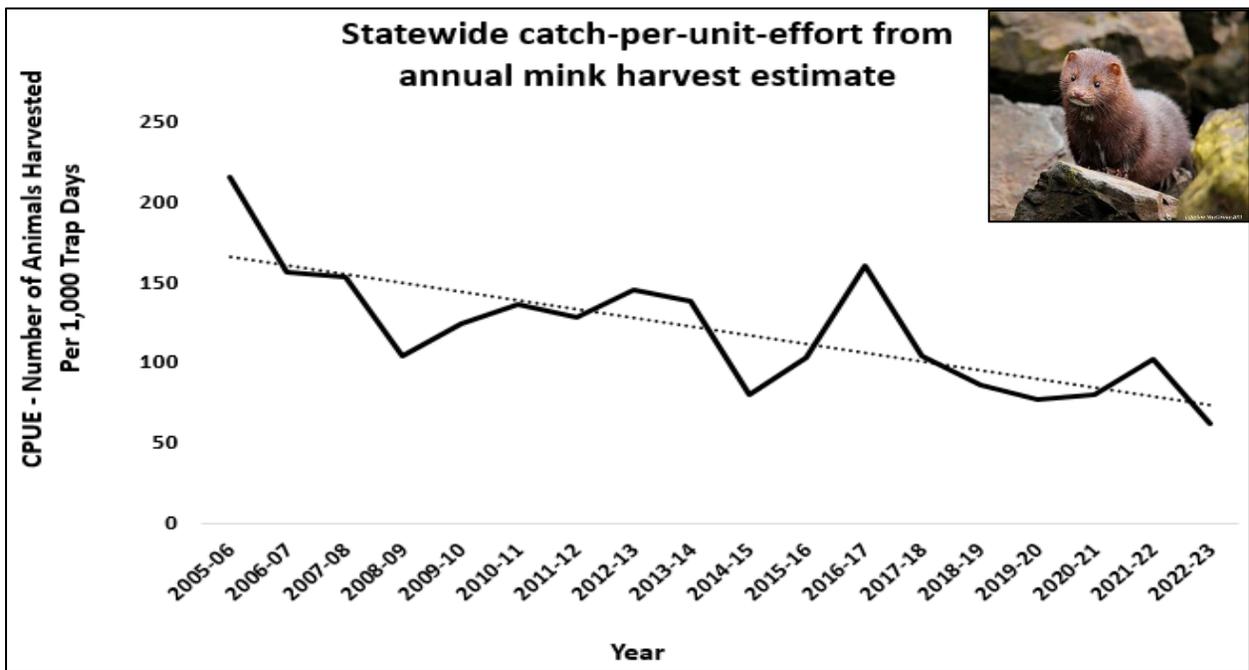


Figure 28. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for mink in Montana providing information regarding mink population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

## Muskrat Harvest Trends and Monitoring

**Muskrat harvest** during the 2022–2023 furbearer season was down by 32.54% from the 2021–2022 season with an estimated 2,822 muskrats harvested statewide (Figure 29). This is the lowest estimated muskrat harvest over the 18 years of data FWP has. Muskrat pelt prices also experienced an 11.11% decrease from last year, averaging \$2.88. This very closely follows annual harvest trends which peaked in 2012–2013



(Figure 30). The continued low price of mink and lots of held over muskrat pelts from last year's international fur sales, reflected the low price we experienced here in Montana.



Nathan Kluge conducting pelt-primeness method on muskrat pelts at the Livingston, MT fur auction, 2023.

**Muskrat population trends** continue to experience declines on a national level with little information known about the cause of these widespread declines. CPUE estimates show that Montana has been experiencing these decreases most significantly since the fur boom in 2012 (Figure 31). In efforts to start gathering some more finite information on muskrats in Montana, FWP staff conducted the Pelt-Primeness method (Applegate and Predmore 1947) to estimate the harvested sex and age class ratios of the muskrat pelts brought to the auction. All 248 muskrat pelts that were at the auction were aged and sexed resulting in a ratio of 0.43 juveniles to adults, 0.99 juveniles to adult females, 2.52 juvenile males to females, and 1.32 adult males to females. These results show a very low level of recruitment in the population of muskrats that were harvested and sold at the auction. Research will continue to inform our understanding of Montana's muskrat population and the trends of the annual muskrat harvest.



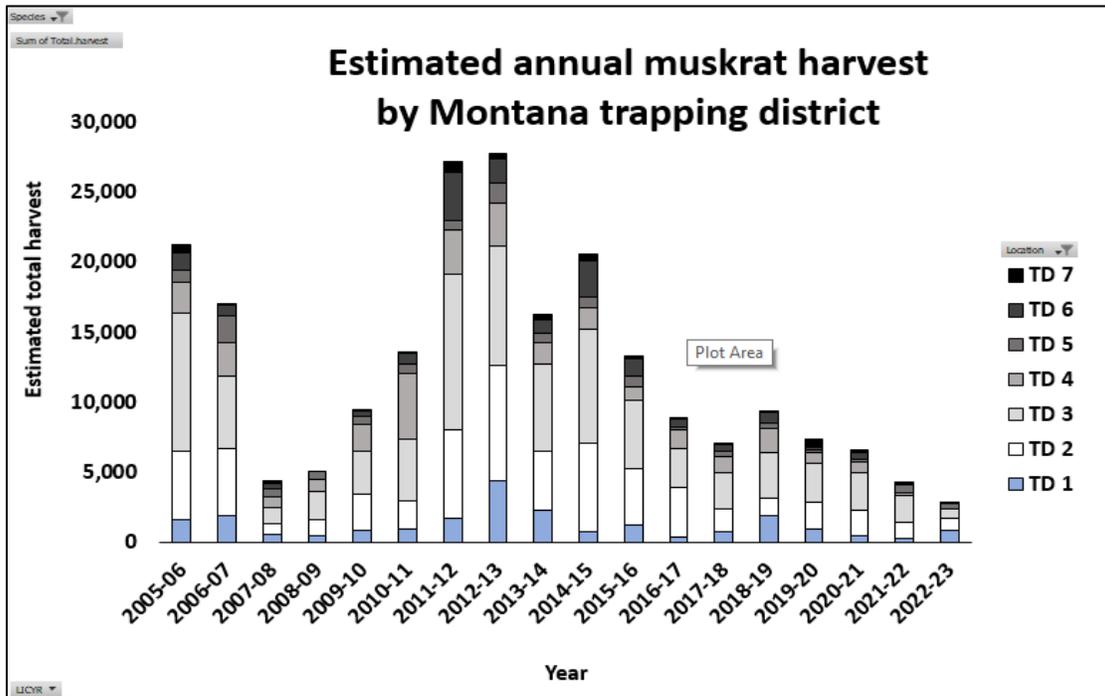


Figure 29. Estimated annual muskrat harvest in Montana by trapping district, derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

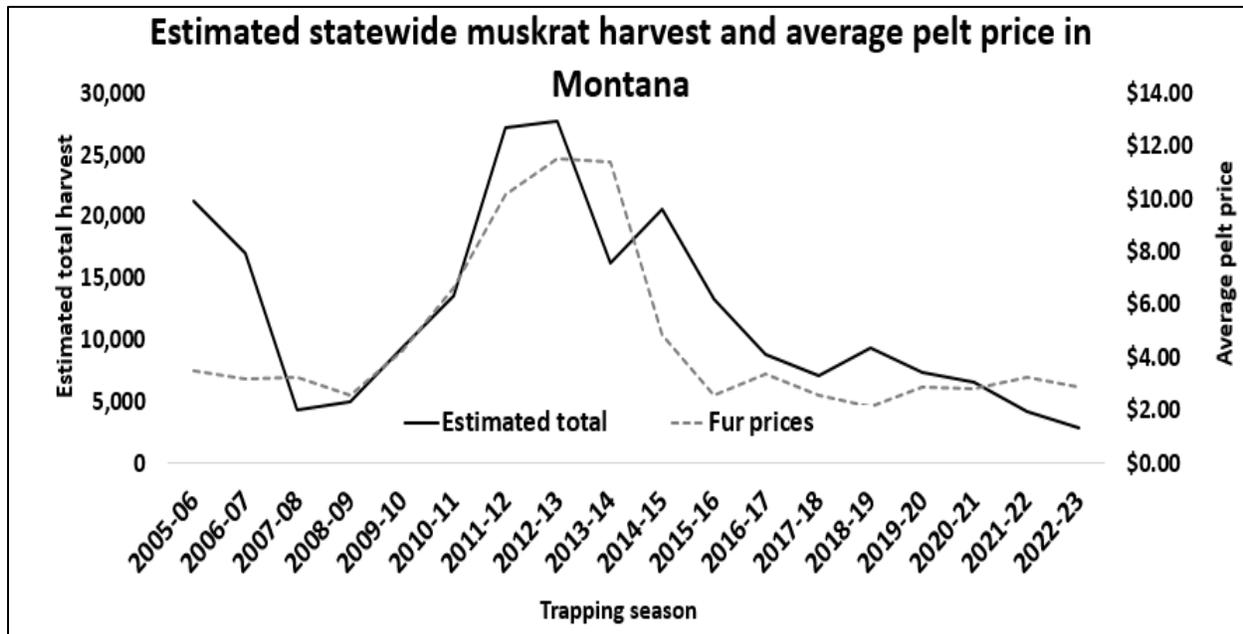


Figure 30. Comparison of Montana estimated muskrat harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest estimated are derived from Furbearer Harvest Survey results. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

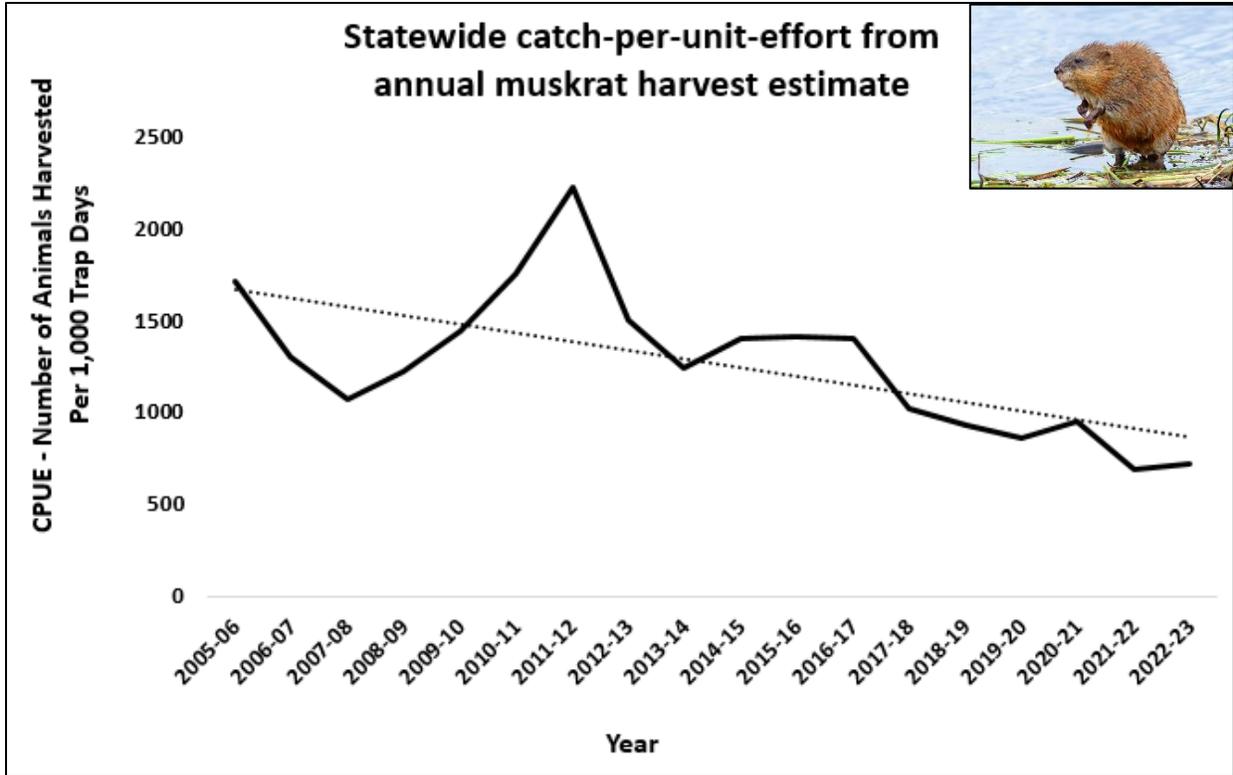


Figure 31. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for muskrat in Montana providing information regarding muskrat population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.



## River Otter Harvest Trends

**River otter harvest** is determined through mandatory registration of each animal harvested, including pelt tagging and lower jaw collection within 10 days of the end of the season. Harvest of otters is regulated through a limited quota system in each region. Over the 2022–2023 harvest season, there were a total of 108 otter harvested which was a 22.73% increase from last year (Figure 32). Region 1 harvests the most with 41, 1 over the regional quota that closed the season in region 1 on March 24<sup>th</sup>. Otter pelt prices also saw an increase of 16.27% with an average of \$68.33. The highest otter sold for \$90.21 this year compared to one of the highest averages during the 2012–2013 season of \$112.58. There is a good demand for otter pelts, with size and color being a major factor driving the price.

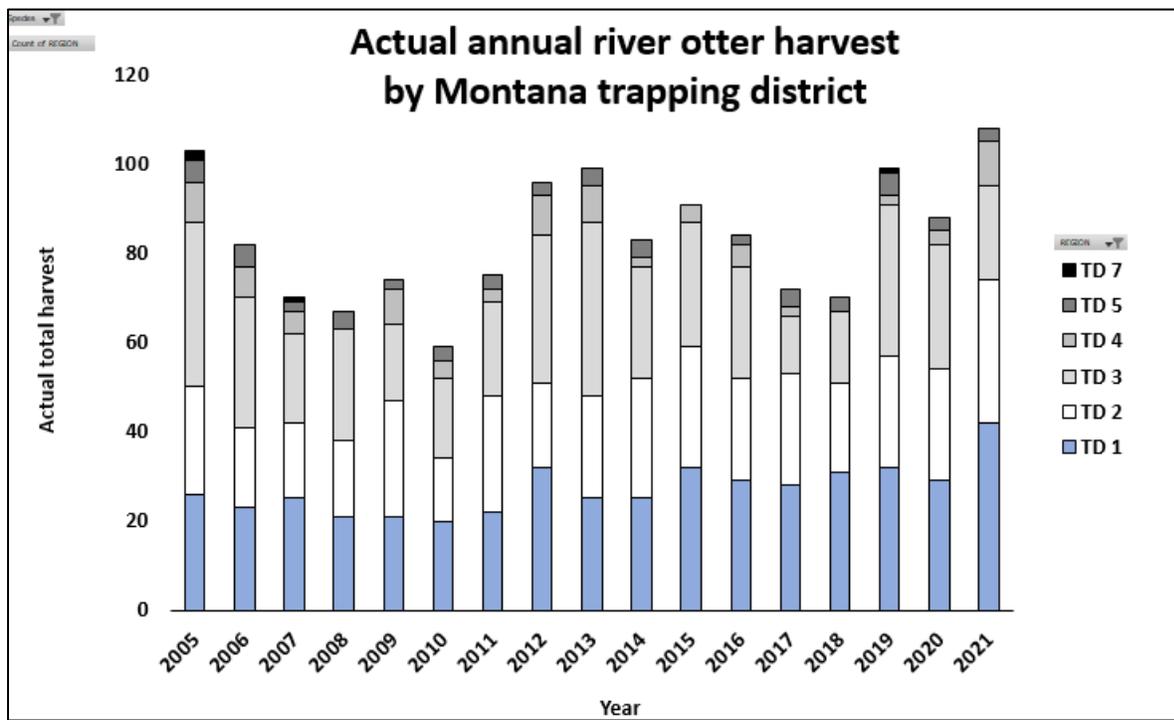


Figure 32. Actual annual river otter harvest in Montana derived from mandatory registration.

**Population trends**, interpreted through CPUE estimates, for otters have shown little to no change over time with the most recent spike last season, 2021–2022 (Figure 33). FWP is currently looking to develop an otter survey to gather more information that will provide justification for any future changes to harvest quotas and our adaptive harvest management strategies for otters.

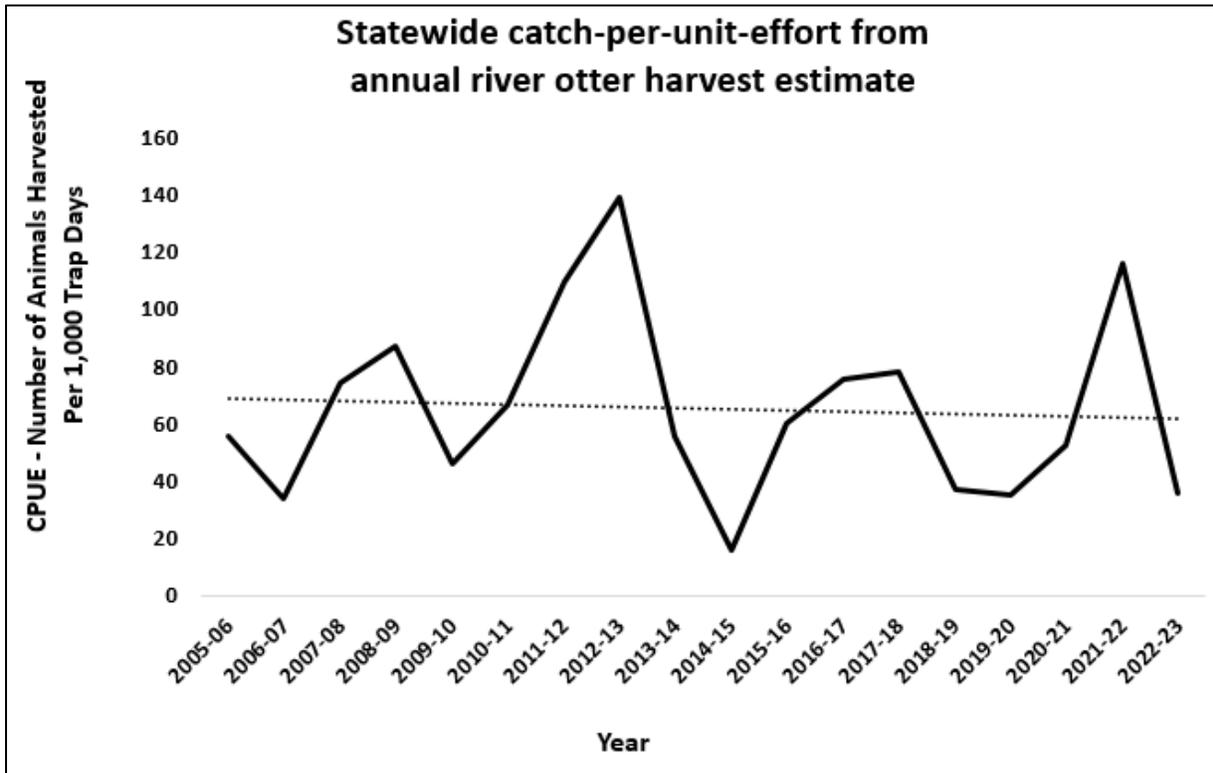


Figure 33. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for river otters in Montana providing information regarding muskrat population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.



**Furbearing Predators and Non-game species:**

**Badger Harvest Trends**

**Badger harvest** during the 2022–2023 season experienced an estimated 62.74% drop from last year with a total of 324 badgers harvested (Figure 34). Region 4 and 7 have consistently harvested the greatest numbers of badgers in the state with region 4 harvesting the most this year at an estimated 114 compared to region 7 harvesting 318 during the 2021–2022 season. A large part of the badger harvest is a result of nuisance animal removal especially for those digging holes in land used for grazing. Pelt prices saw a decrease of 31.24% from last year averaging \$33.89, although this was a 10.11% increase from the 10-year average of \$30.78 (Figure 35). Harvest does not seem to follow pelt prices for badger nearly as close as other species. Badger prices topped out at an average of \$72.56 in 2010 while total harvest peaked with many other species in 2012 with an estimated harvest of 1,474.



**Population trends** for badger are highly variable but show a slight decrease over the last 18 years of furbearer harvest survey data (Figure 36). The level of harvest and population trend is widely unknown since a license is not required to harvest which can occur year-around.

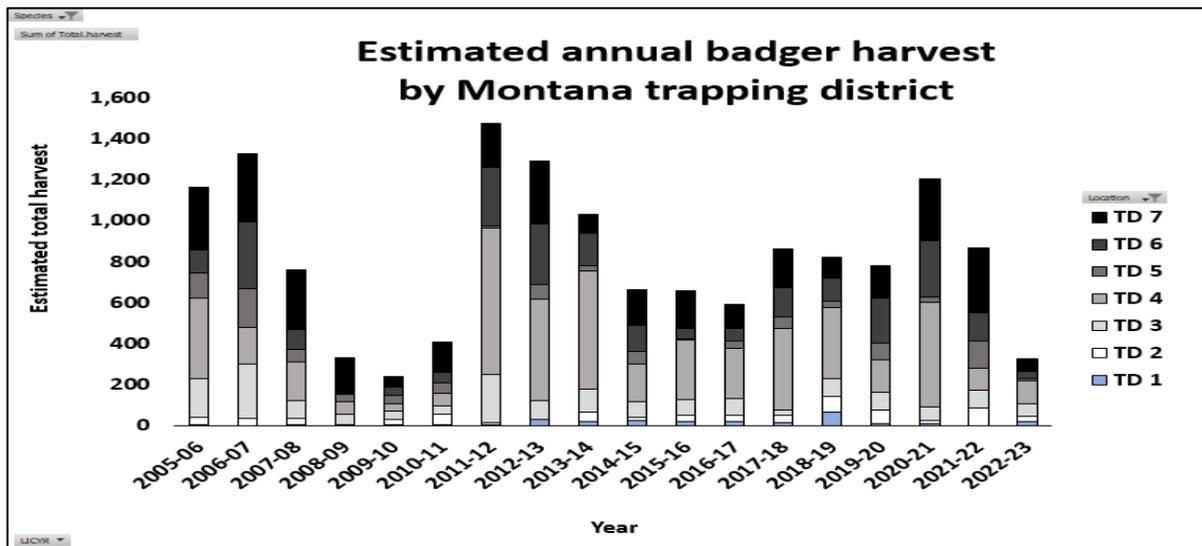


Figure 34. Estimated annual badger harvest in Montana by trapping district, derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

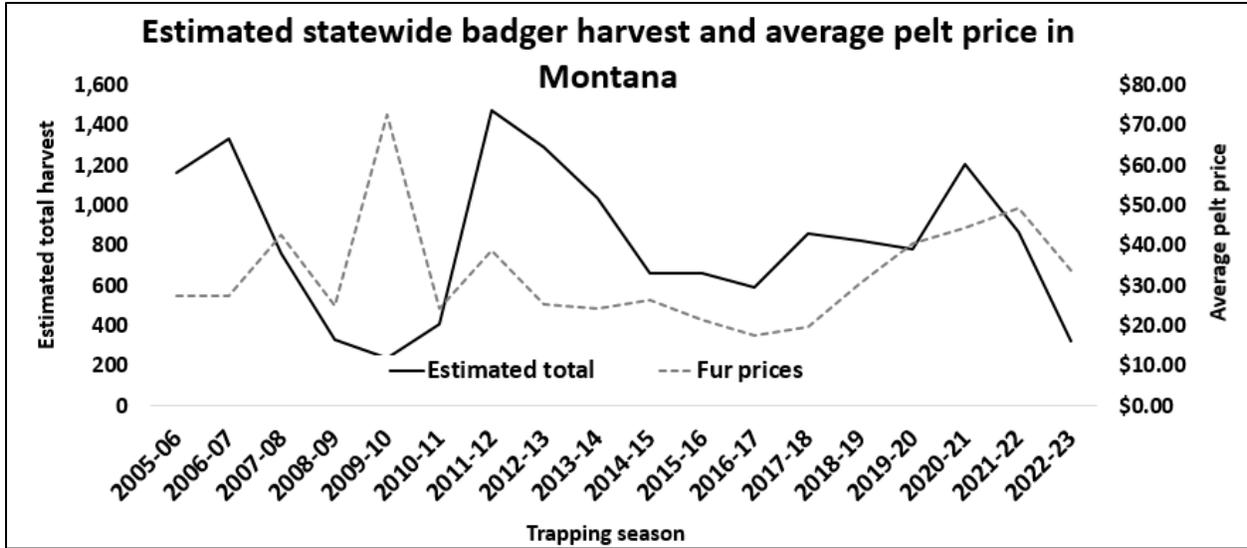


Figure 35. Comparison of Montana estimated badger harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest estimated are derived from Furbearer Harvest Survey results. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

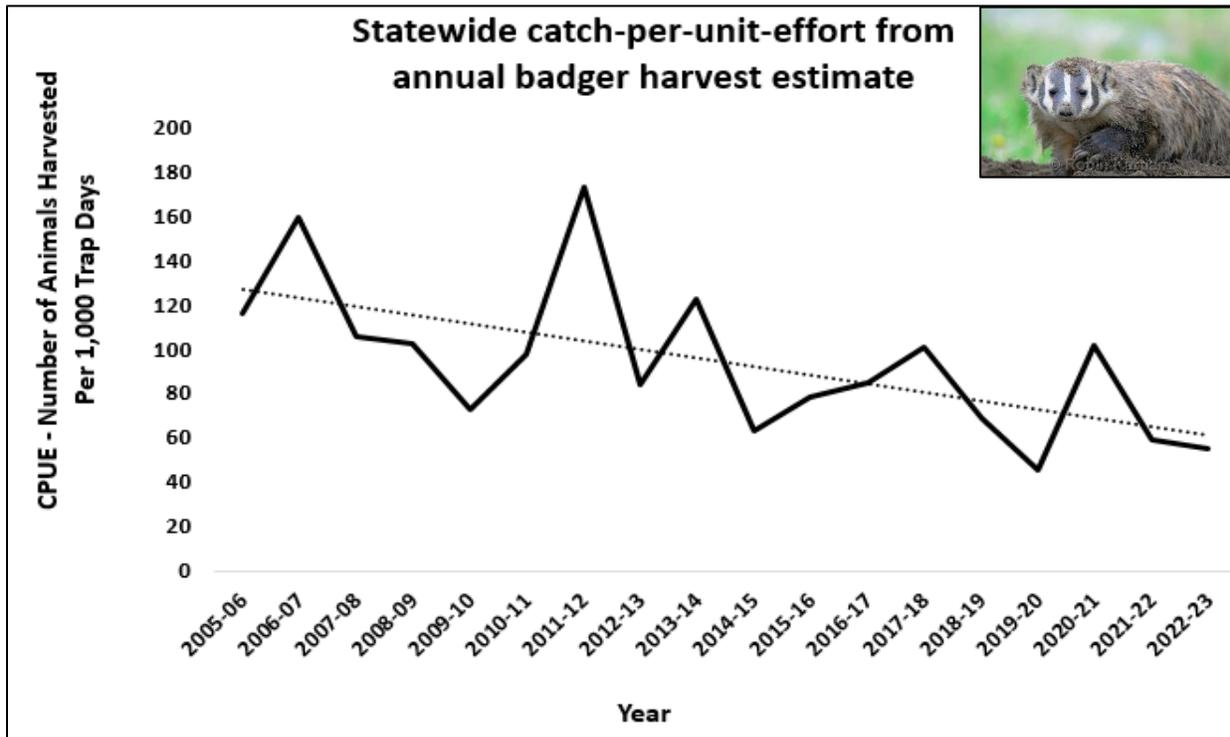


Figure 36. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for badger in Montana providing information regarding badger population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

## Coyote Harvest Trends

**Coyote harvest** during the 2022–2023 season experienced a 35.45% decrease from last year with a total estimate of 10,769 coyotes harvested (Figure 37). Region 7 has consistently seen the highest level of harvest with 3,338 estimated to be harvested this season by licensed trappers. This doesn't account for the number of coyotes harvested for nuisance or recreation by hunters and trappers without a license or outside of the regular furbearer trapping season. Fur prices decreased by 30.62% with the average only bringing \$25.76 (Figure 38). This is also a 57.85% drop from the 10-year average of \$61.12. The best prices seen over the last 18 years were during the 2013 auction when they averaged \$93.98. This big drop in coyote prices could reflect the loss of trend to use coyote fur for the lining of parka hoods by the coat company Canada Goose. Although, heavy western coyotes continued to bring the best prices in the international market.



**Population trends** for coyote have shown little to no change over the last 18 years in Montana despite year-around harvest using a multitude of methods (Figure 39). Coyotes are a prolific and resilient species that are well adapted to high levels of harvest.

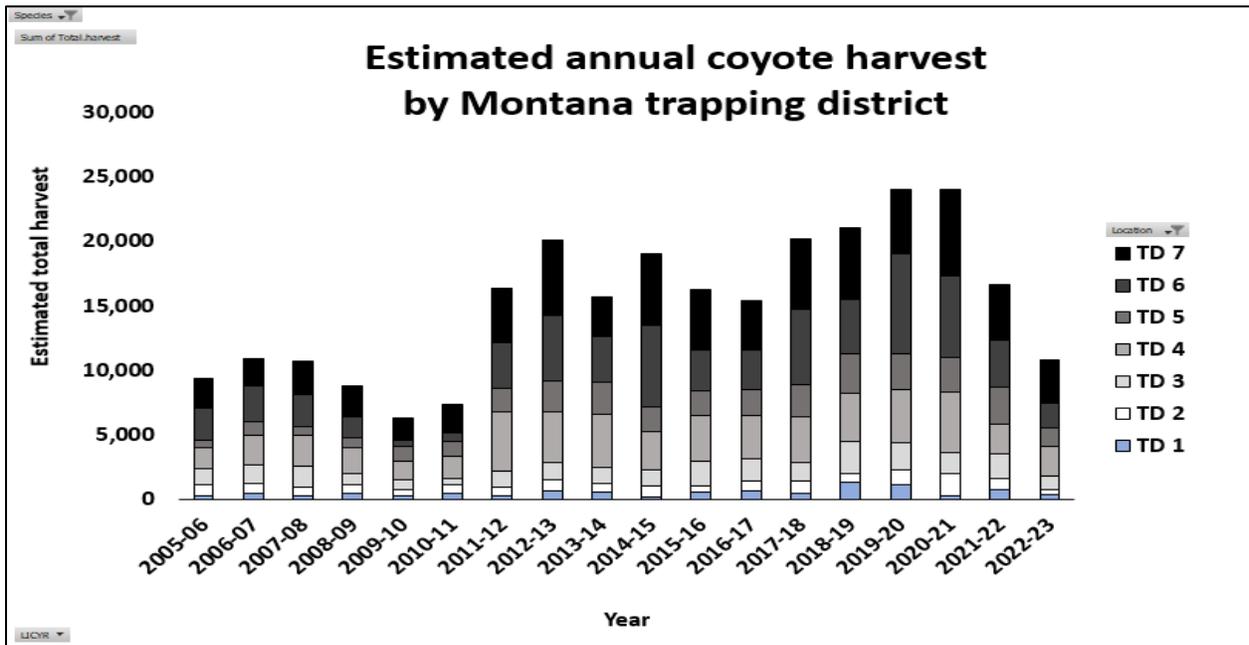


Figure 37. Estimated annual coyote harvest in Montana by trapping district, derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

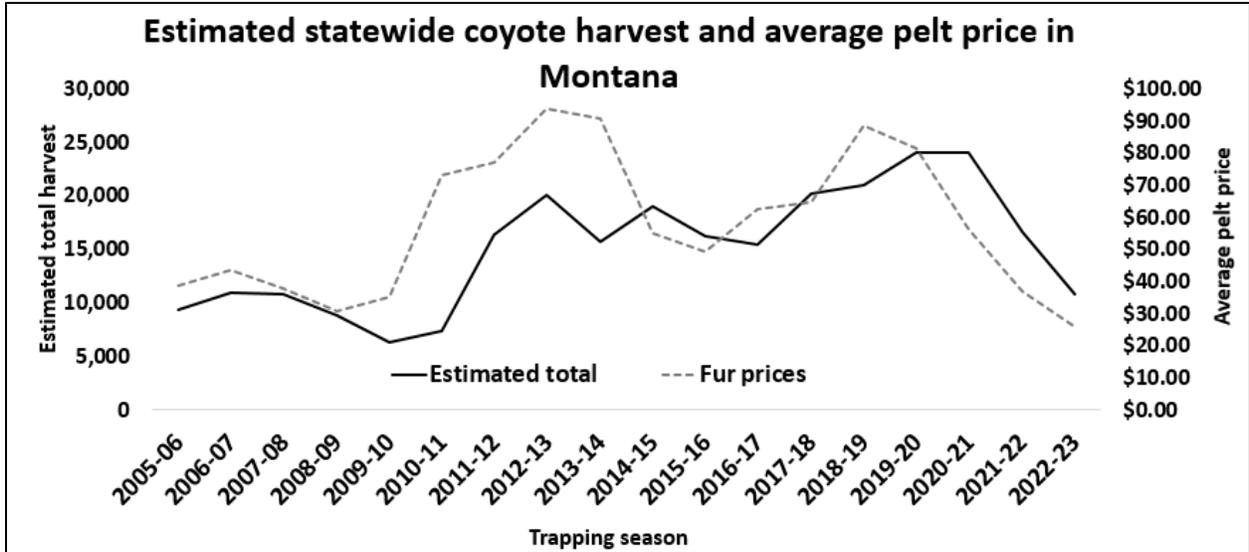


Figure 38. Comparison of Montana estimated coyote harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest estimated are derived from Furbearer Harvest Survey results. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

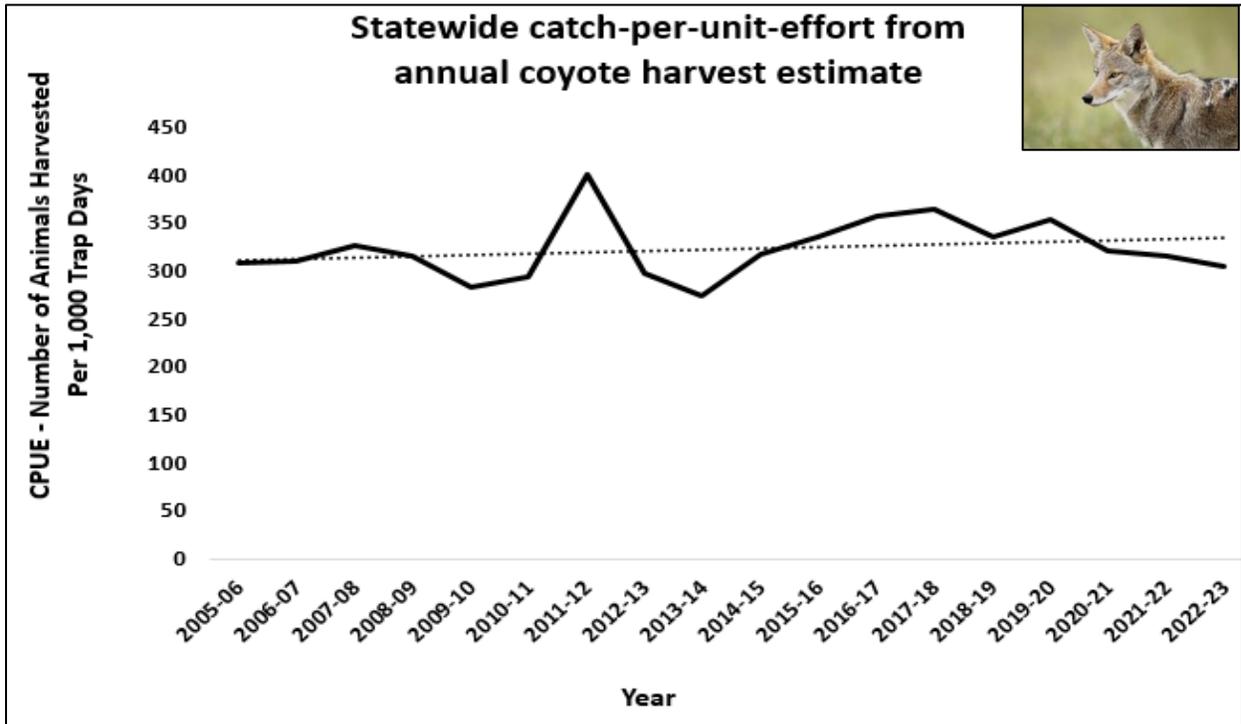


Figure 39. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for coyote in Montana providing information regarding coyote population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

### Raccoon Harvest Trends

**Raccoon harvest** over the 2022–2023 season saw a 52.57% drop from the previous season with a total estimated harvest of 2,765 raccoons (Figure 40). The lowest estimate harvest occurred in 2017–2018 with only 2,386 harvested. Pelts continue to sell very poorly due to the high processing costs. Pelt prices averaged \$7.97 which was a 17.15% drop from last year, although the top raccoon sold for \$51.03 at this year’s auction (Figure 41). This average was seen across the nation with only fully prime and undamaged large pelts seeing prices north of the single digits.



**Population trends** for raccoons in Montana, informed by CPUE estimates, show a slightly decreasing population over the last 18 years, although the difference is trivial (Figure 42). Raccoons can be found throughout Montana and are highly adaptive to a changing environment. There are no concerns about the sustainability of our raccoon population in Montana.

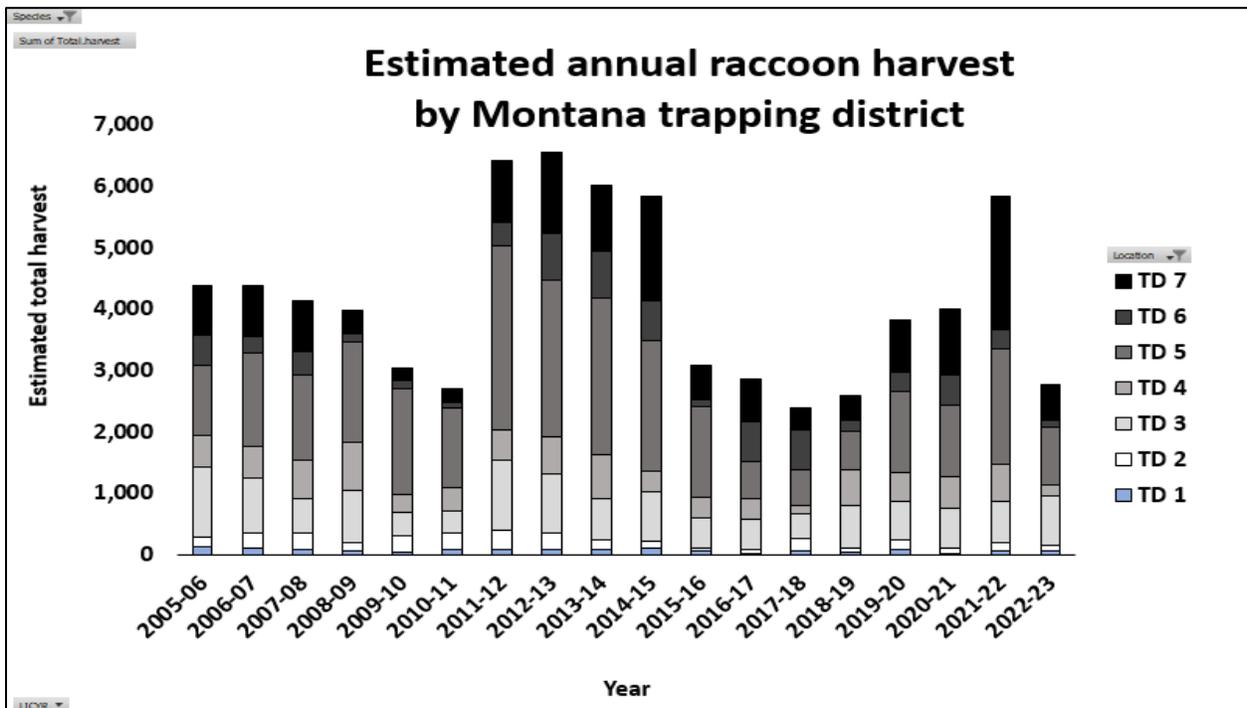


Figure 40. Estimated annual raccoon harvest in Montana by trapping district, derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

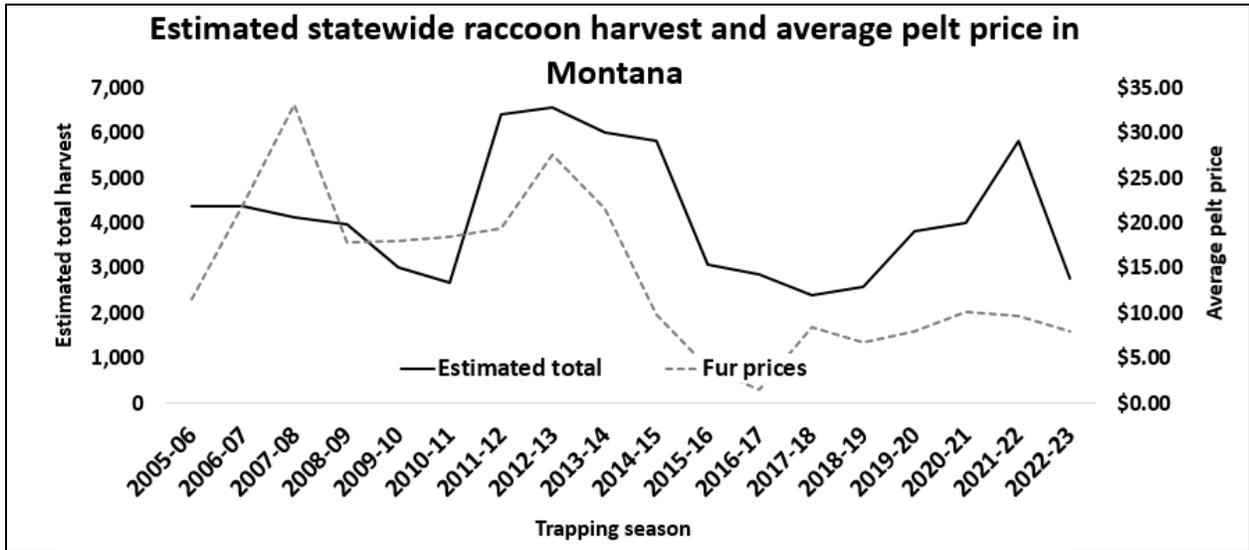


Figure 41. Comparison of Montana estimated raccoon harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest estimated are derived from Furbearer Harvest Survey results. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

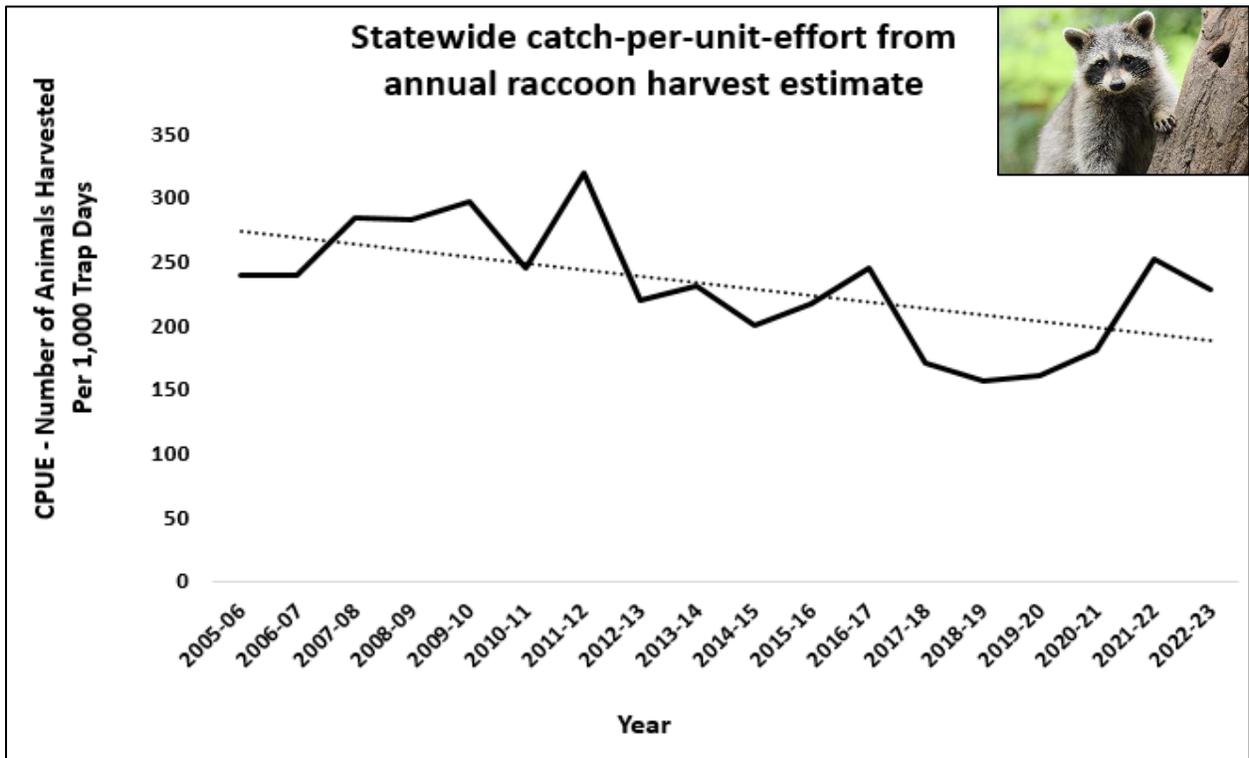


Figure 42. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for raccoon in Montana providing information regarding raccoon population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

## Red Fox Harvest Trends

**Red fox harvest** over the 2022–2023 season decreased 57.92% from the previous season with a total estimated harvest of 954 red fox (Figure 43). Region 2 has consistently harvested the greatest estimated number of red fox annually, harvesting 285 this last season. Red fox pelt prices also decreased by 10.15% with the average coming out to \$20.62 (Figure 44). The highest average pelt price for red fox occurred in 2013, topping out at \$65.78. The use for fox pelts in fashion and in the commercial trade has greatly decreased, resulting in a general disinterest in fox pelts at the national level.



**Population trends** for red fox in Montana have seen a steady decrease over the last 18 years although red fox are a prolific species that can be found throughout all of Montana (Figure 45). There are no concerns about the sustainability of our red fox population in Montana.

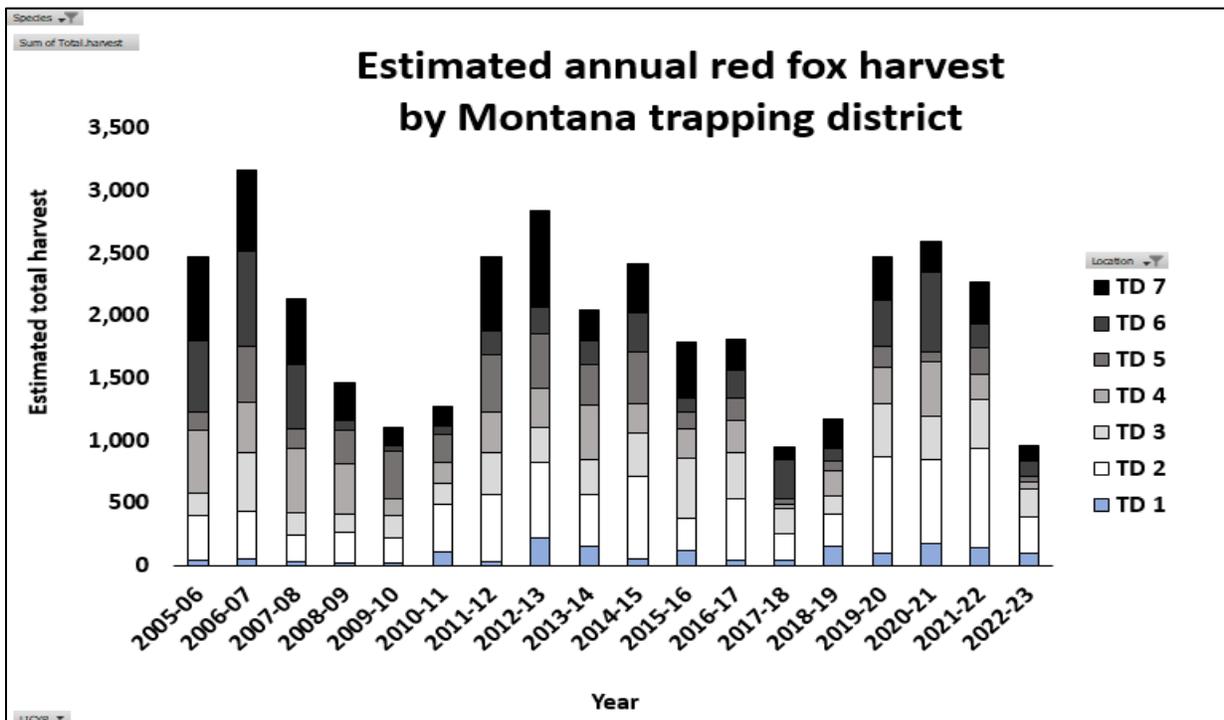


Figure 43. Estimated annual red fox harvest in Montana by trapping district, derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

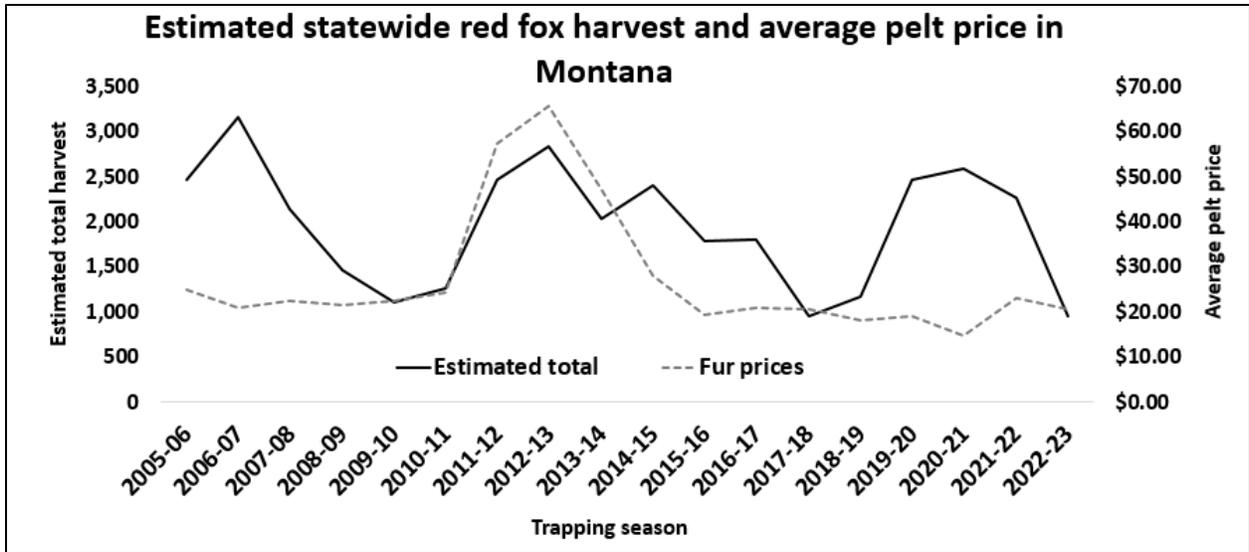


Figure 44. Comparison of Montana estimated red fox harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest estimated are derived from Furbearer Harvest Survey results. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

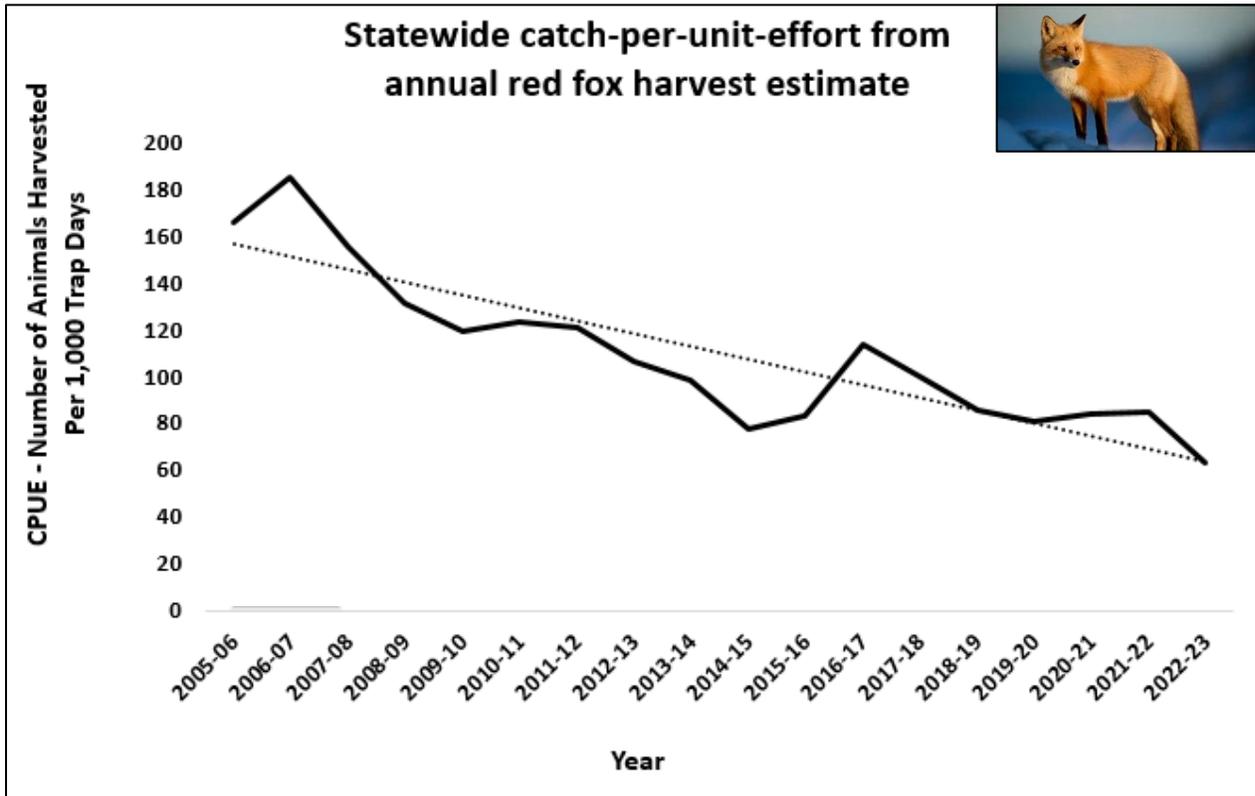


Figure 45. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for red fox in Montana providing information regarding red fox population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

## Striped Skunk Harvest Trends

**Striped skunk harvest** over the 2022–2023 season decreased by 51.81% from the previous season with a total estimated harvest of 918 skunks (Figure 46). This was the lowest estimated skunk harvest over the last 18 years even though harvest has been very consistent through time. Over the 2010–2011 season there was a large spike in harvest amounting to an estimated 3,805 skunks harvested even though their pelt prices were only averaging \$2.34. Pelts over this last season saw a big increase of 71.61%, averaging \$22.43 with the top pelt selling for \$125.15 (Figure 47). Skunk pelts are used in the specialty market as wall hangers, in craft items, or other unique uses outside of the fur clothing market. With the downturn in the raccoon market and lower trapper effort targeting raccoons, fewer skunks were being caught resulting in higher prices for those that were caught.



**Population trends** for striped skunks in Montana have seen very little change throughout time (Figure 48). Skunks are a very common species across Montana and there are no concerns regarding the sustainability of their population in the state.

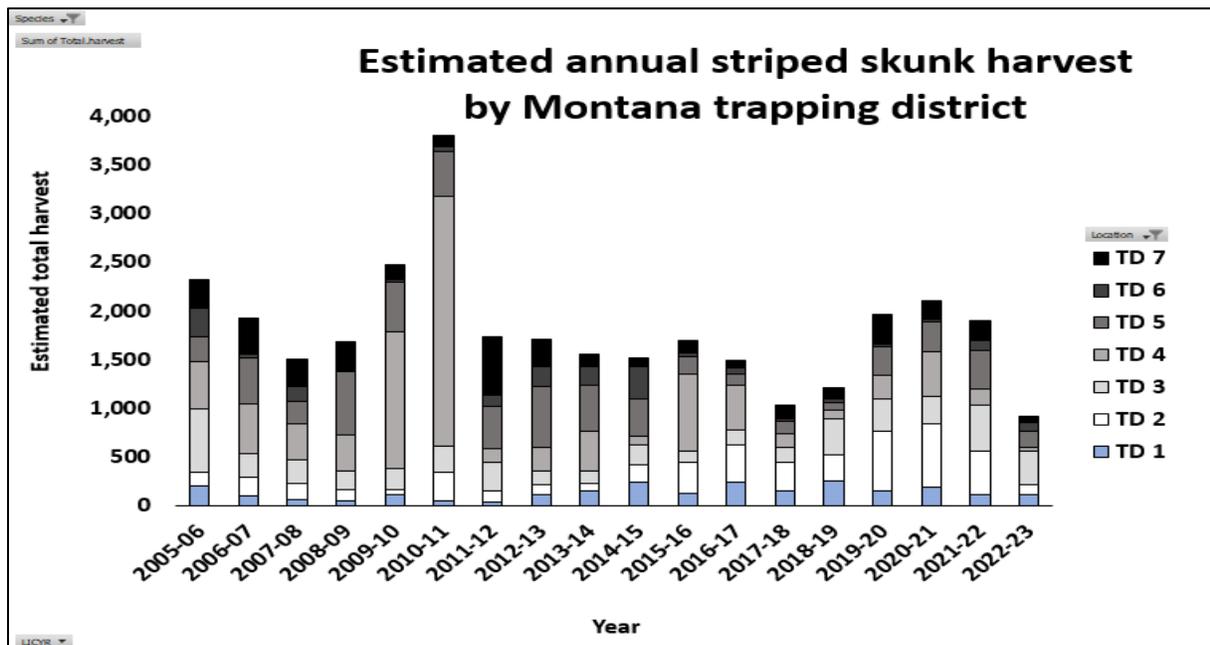


Figure 46. Estimated annual striped skunk harvest in Montana by trapping district, derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

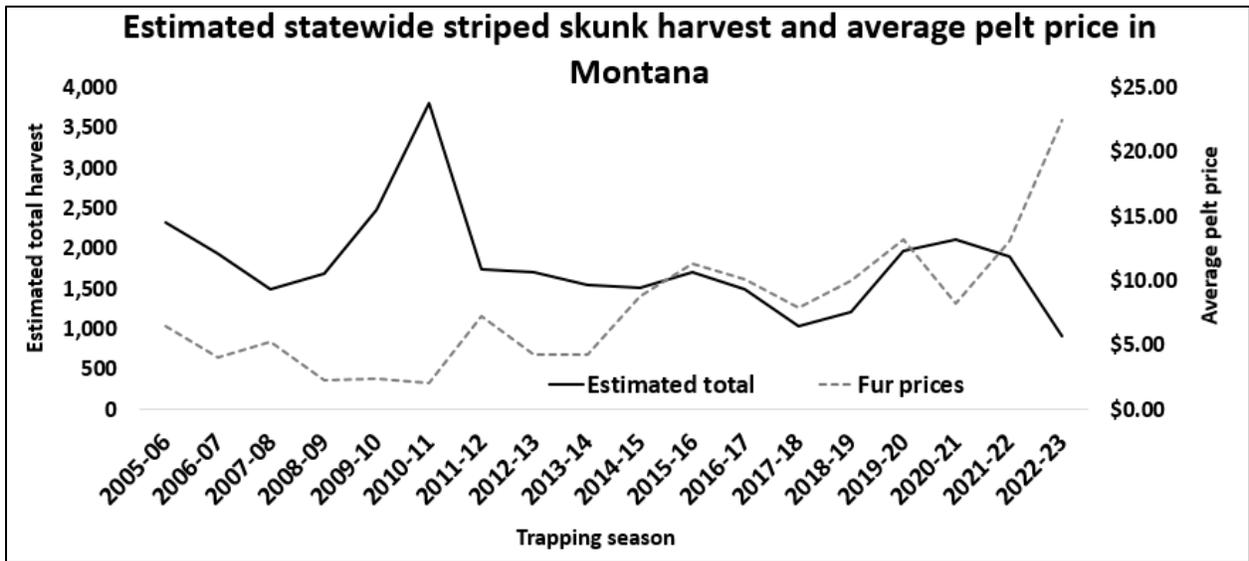


Figure 47. Comparison of Montana estimated striped skunk harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest estimated are derived from Furbearer Harvest Survey results. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

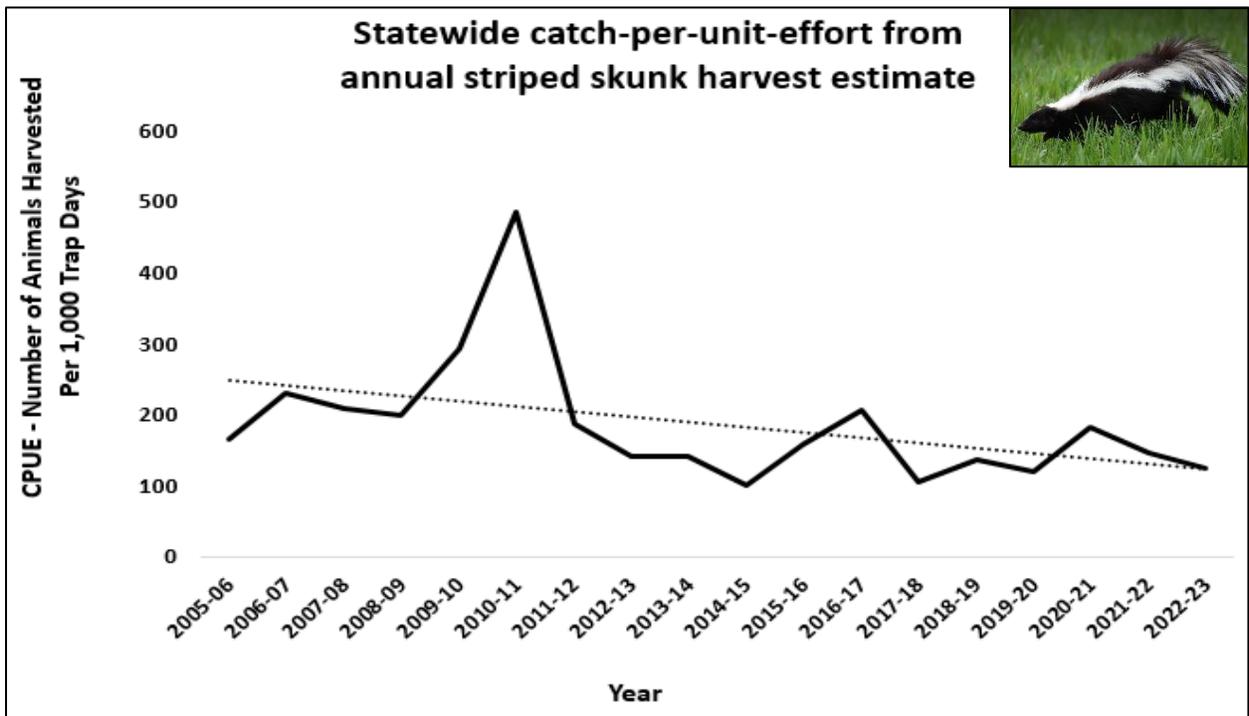


Figure 48. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for striped skunk in Montana providing information regarding striped skunk population trend over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

## Weasel Harvest Trends

We have three weasel species here in Montana, the short-tailed, long-tailed, and least weasel. **Weasel harvest** across species was down by 30.88% from the previous year with an estimated total harvest of 132 (Figure 49). Region 1 has consistently harvested the greatest proportion of weasels in the state with an estimated 117 over the 2022–2023 season. Once used to decorate the crowns and robes of royal and noble persons, weasel pelts continue to sell well with slightly varying prices over time. This year we saw a 101.77% increase in weasel pelt prices that averaged \$4.56, also a 67.51% increase from the 10-year average of \$2.72 (Figure 50).



**Population trends** for weasels in Montana have been on a general decrease since the 2010–2011 season (Figure 51). Although, weasels are found over most of Montana and there are no concerns regarding the sustainability of their populations in the state.

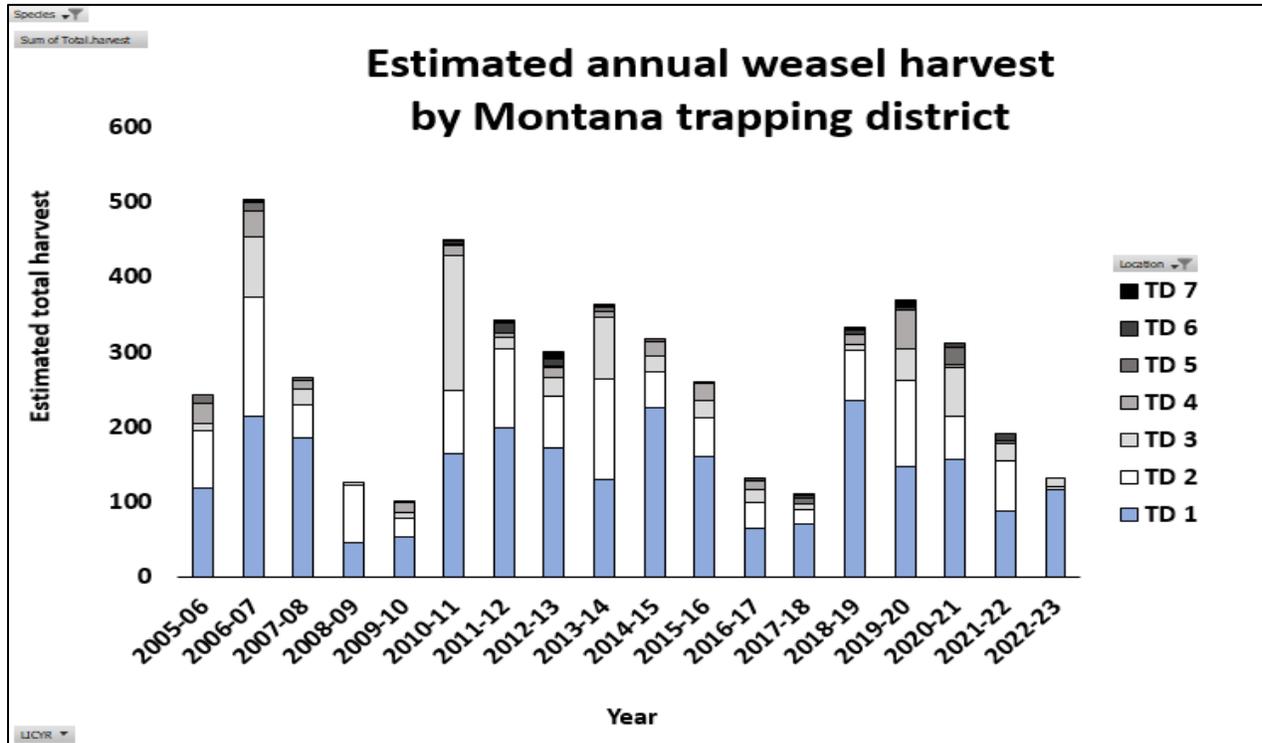


Figure 49. Estimated annual weasel harvest in Montana by trapping district, derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

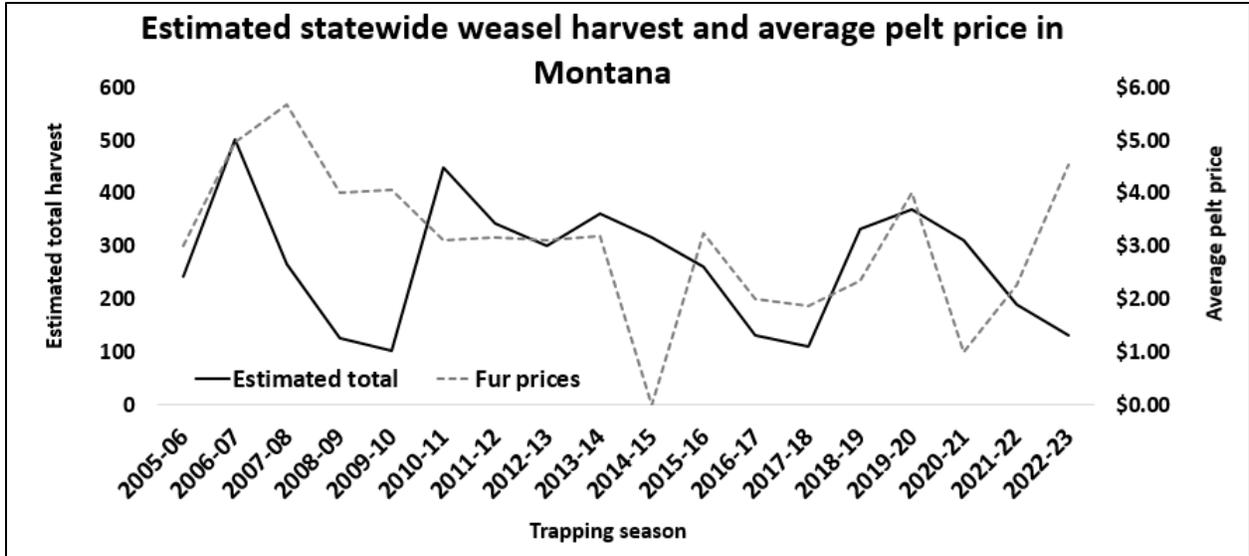


Figure 50. Comparison of Montana estimated weasel harvest and pelt prices over the last 18 years. Harvest estimated are derived from Furbearer Harvest Survey results. Annual pelt price estimated are the average price from the Montana Trappers Association Fur Auction.

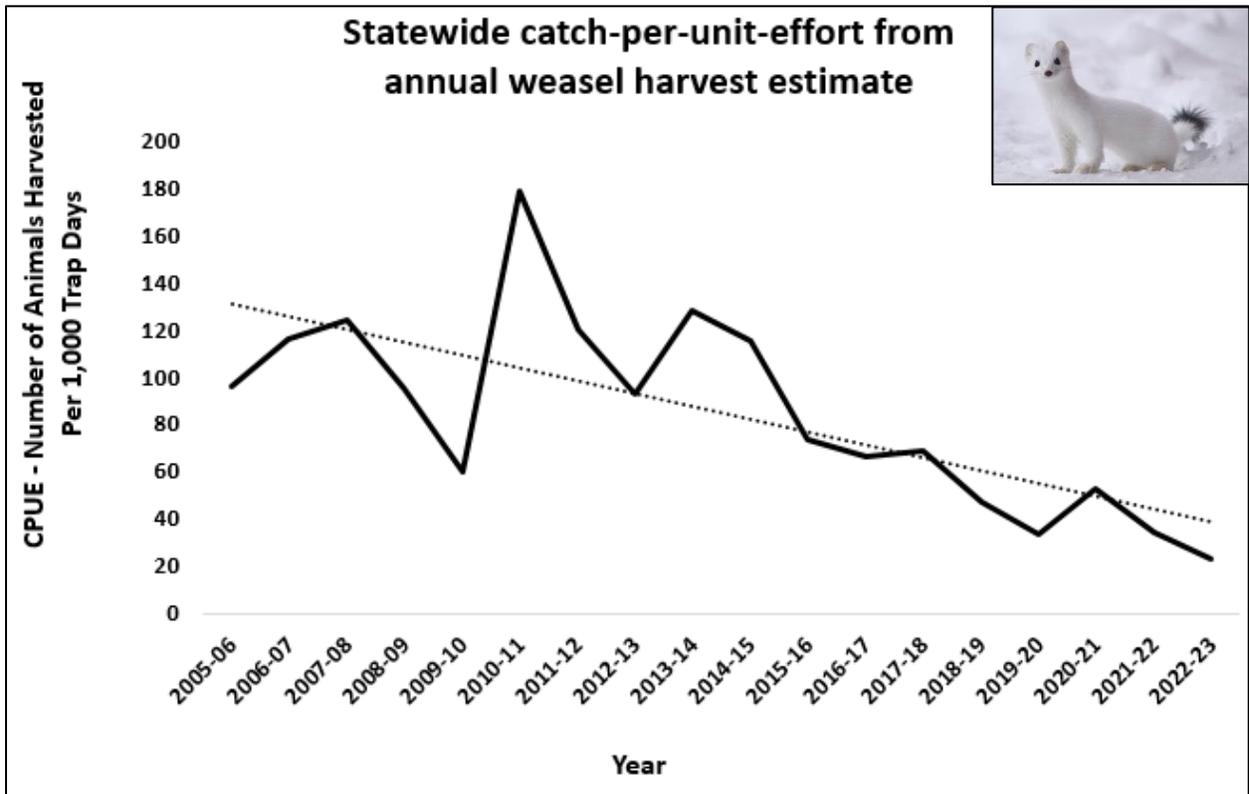


Figure 51. Estimate of catch-per-unit-effort for weasels in Montana providing information regarding weasel population trends over the last 18 years. Estimated derived from FWP Furbearer Harvest Survey.

## **Conclusion and Thanks**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has a long history of positive, progressive efforts to connect, conserve, monitor, and manage the wildlife in our state. We continue to develop new research and monitoring programs, gather survey data from the public, and advance our knowledge of the furbearing animals we have in Montana. It would not be possible without the help and collaboration from countless FWP staff, volunteers, survey respondents, a multitude of various state and federal agencies, trappers, trapping and hunting organizations, tribes, and external research partners. The cooperation among these people and groups assures that trapping and the fur industry in Montana is maintained and managed for the benefit of ALL those who recreate in Montana. We want to thank all of you for your contribution to science and for providing the data and information needed to inform the management and research we do across the furbearing species in Montana.

Trapping in Montana is a highly regulated, scientifically based activity that is a vital tool in modern wildlife management. The information gathered from trappers provides FWP the means to make adaptive wildlife management decisions and drives the progressive research efforts conducted now and into the future. This report would not have been possible without the responses from the trappers that participated in the annual furbearer harvest survey. The goal of this report was to provide easily digestible information, updates, and results to the public about all the furbearing species we have in Montana. We welcome your feedback and appreciate taking the time to read this report! For any questions or feedback, please contact Montana FWP Furbearer Coordinator, Nathan Kluge ([Nathan.Kluge@mt.gov](mailto:Nathan.Kluge@mt.gov); 406-594-9762).



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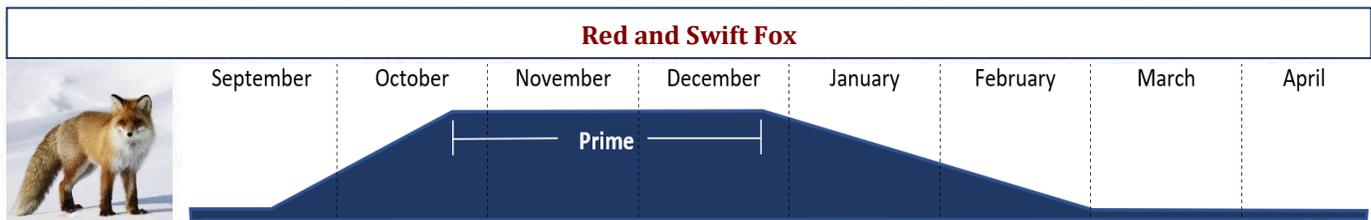
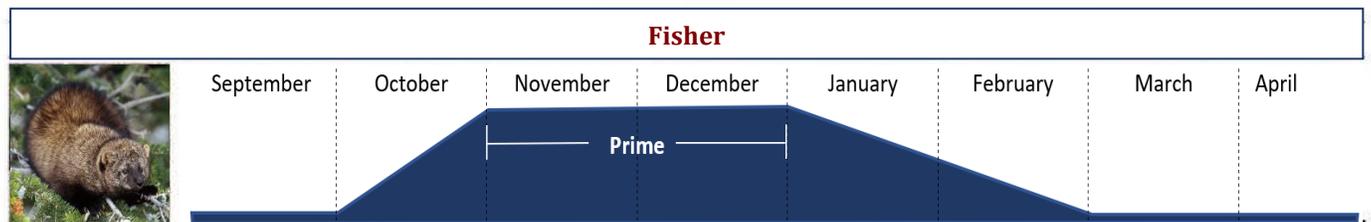
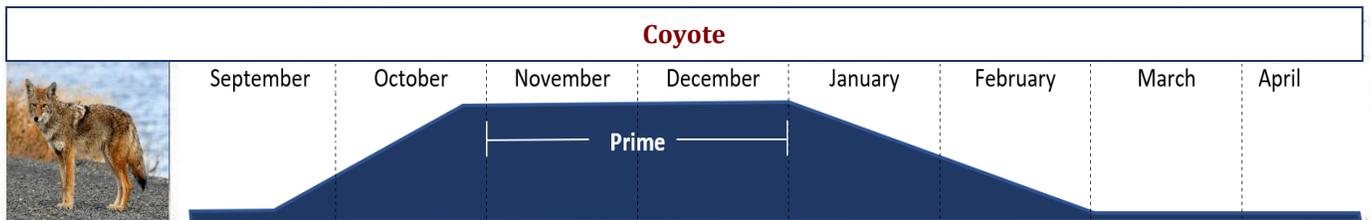
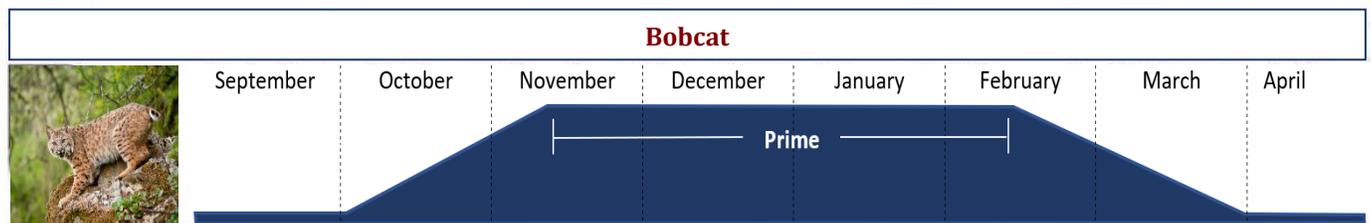
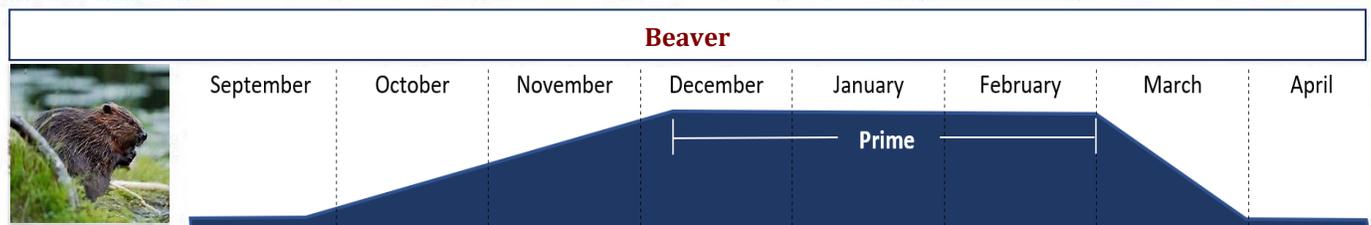
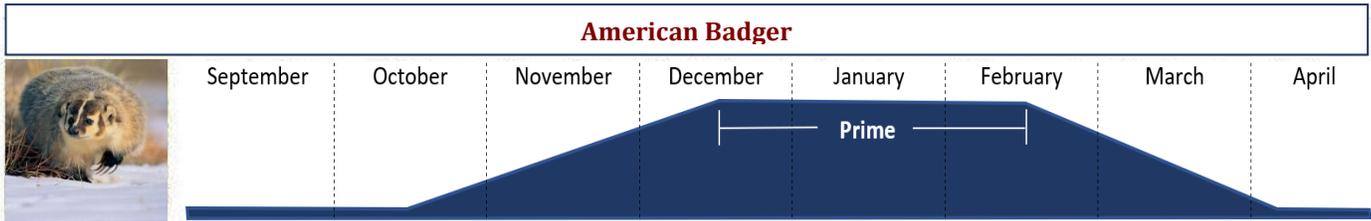
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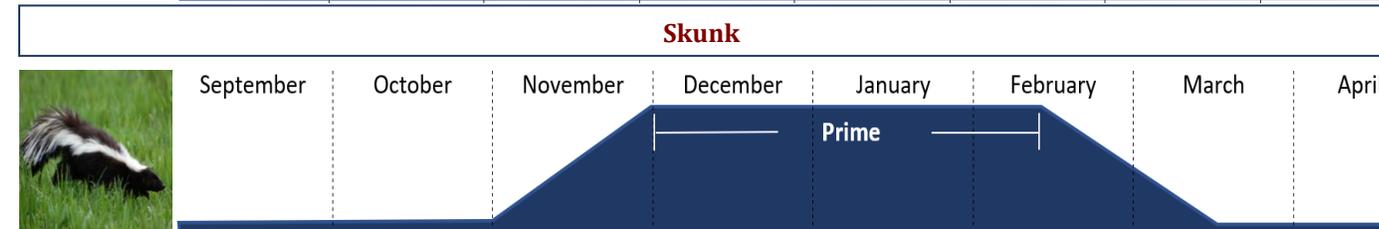
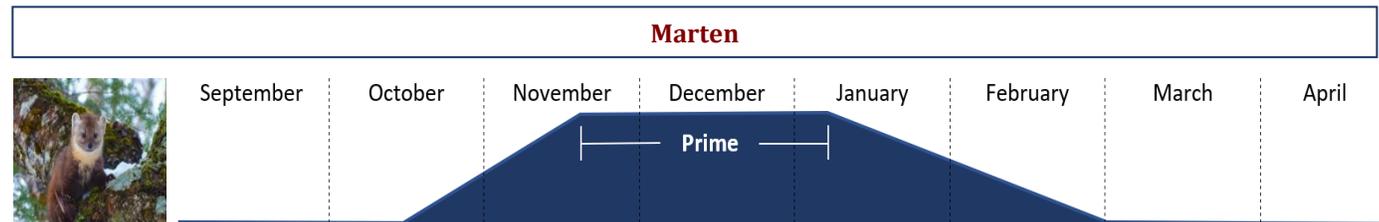
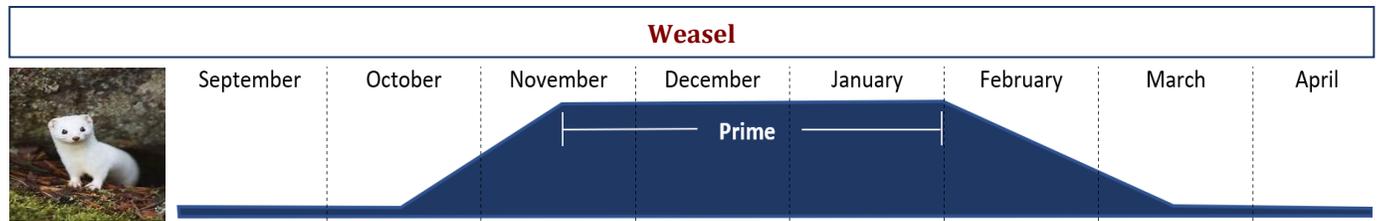
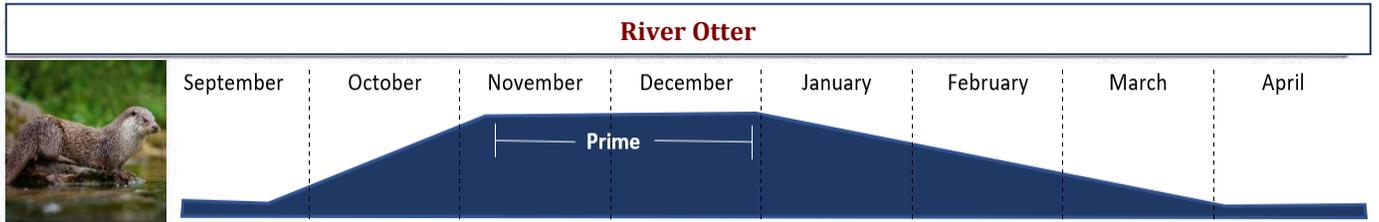
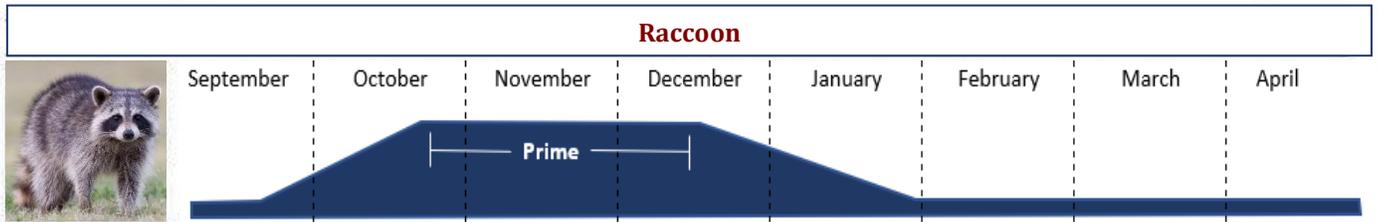
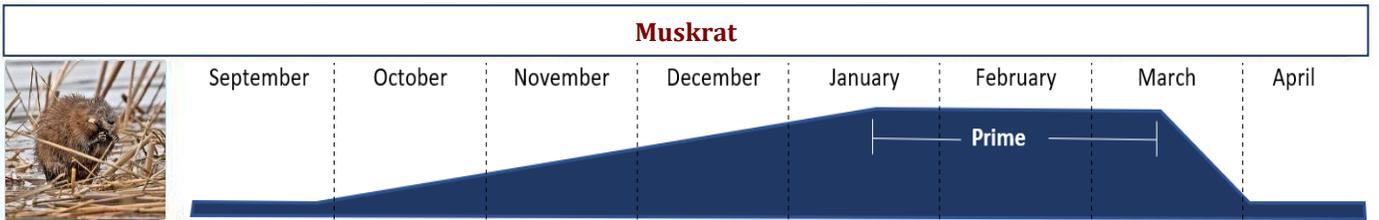
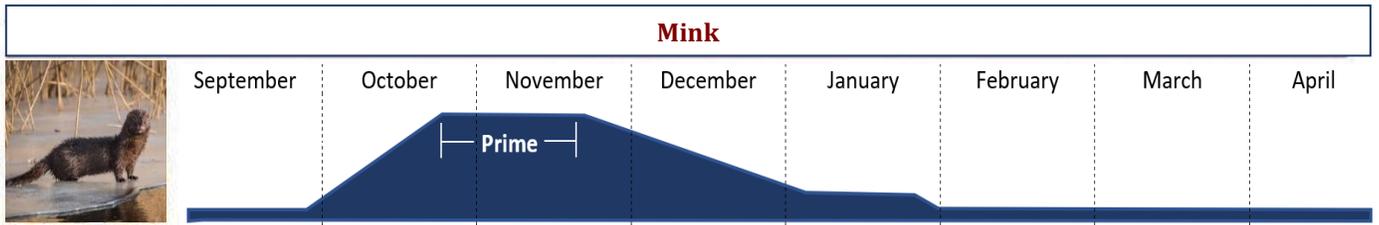
## Appendix A: Prime Fur Periods in Montana

The following chart shows the approximate periods of prime fur in Montana.

- Most species are acceptably prime before full primeness is attained.
- The color and hair quality are actually best before the skin is fully prime.
- Age, health, and habitat directly influence fur quality.
- Quality declines rapidly after full primeness.



# Prime Fur Periods in Montana



**Appendix B:** 2022 Furbearer Harvest Survey

April/May 2023

«FIRST» «LAST»  
«ADDRESS»  
«CITY», «STATE» «ZIP»

Dear Montana Fur Harvester,

Please help us help you.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) collects data on furbearer trapping/hunting effort each year so that we can use Catch-per-Unit-Effort data to track population trends of furbearers. Because things like pelt prices and weather can influence effort, effort needs to be factored in. Your harvest and effort data are important for the management of Montana's furbearers.

Please complete the enclosed survey and **return it as soon as possible using the pre-paid, self-addressed envelope provided**. Your participation is very important even if you did not trap/snare or hunt this past season (2022-23), and it should take no more than 5-10 minutes to complete the enclosed questionnaire. The main difference from previous surveys is a focus on the furbearer district where you trapped/snared or hunted MOST instead of all districts.

Of course, this questionnaire is *voluntary* and *your responses will remain confidential*.

If you have any questions about this survey, please feel free to contact me by phone at (406) 444-0042 or email [nathan.kluge@mt.gov](mailto:nathan.kluge@mt.gov).

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Nathan Kluge

Furbearer Coordinator

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks



Many of the questions in the following survey ask about the furbearer district where you spent the MOST TIME trapping/snaring or hunting certain species in Montana. Please use the map above as a reference for Montana's furbearer districts.

1. **TRAPPING.** Did you **TRAP** or **SNARE** this past season (2022-23)?

- NO..... Skip to Question 4
- YES

2. Please provide the requested information for each species that you targeted with **TRAPS** or **SNARES** you set this past season. Traps or Snares that could have captured more than one species should be counted for all, for example sets that could capture bobcat or coyote should be counted for both.

Species:	This past season, did you set traps/snares that could capture this species?	In what <u>furbearer district</u> did you spend the MOST TIME setting traps/snares that could capture this species? (Circle only <u>ONE</u> district and answer the following questions for that specific furbearer district)	Approximate total number of NIGHTS you had traps/snares set that could capture this species in this district:	Approximate number of TRAPS/SNARES you had set EACH NIGHT that could capture this species in this district:	Total number of this species you HARVESTED while trapping (and/or snaring) in this district:
Bobcat	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Beaver	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Marten	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Fisher	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Mink	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Muskrat	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Otter	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Swift Fox	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Wolf	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Lynx	Closed Season				
Wolverine	Closed Season				
Coyote	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Badger	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Raccoon	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Red Fox	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Striped Skunk	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Spotted Skunk	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Least Weasel	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Short-Tailed Weasel	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Long-Tailed Weasel	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			
Porcupine	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7			

3. Did you release any bobcats in the furbearer district where you spent the MOST TIME setting **TRAPS** or **SNARES** that could potentially capture this species?

- NO
- YES.....If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_ (kittens) \_\_\_\_\_ (adult females) \_\_\_\_\_ (adult males) \_\_\_\_\_ (unknown)

(OVER)

4. **HUNTING WITHOUT HOUNDS.** Did you attempt to **HUNT** bobcats, raccoons, badgers, coyotes, or red fox this past season (without the use of hounds)?

- NO.....Skip to Question 6
- YES

5. Please provide the requested information for each species you attempted to **HUNT** this past season (without the use of hounds).

Species:	This past season, did you attempt to hunt this species ( <u>without</u> the use of hounds)?	In what <u>furbearer district</u> did you spend the MOST TIME hunting this species ( <u>without</u> the use of hounds)? (Circle only <b>ONE</b> district and answer the following questions for that specific furbearer district)	Approximate number of <b>DAYS</b> you hunted this species in this district ( <u>without</u> the use of hounds)	Total number of this species you <b>HARVESTED</b> in this district while hunting ( <u>without</u> the use of hounds)
Bobcat	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7		
Coyote	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7		
Badger	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7		
Raccoon	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7		
Red Fox	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7		

6. **HUNTING WITH HOUNDS.** Did you attempt to **HUNT** bobcats or raccoons this past season (with the use of hounds)?

- NO.....You're done with the survey
- YES

7. Please provide the requested information for each species you attempted to hunt this past season (with the use of hounds).

Species:	This past season, did you attempt to hunt this species ( <u>with</u> the use of hounds)?	In what <u>furbearer district</u> did you spend the MOST TIME hunting this species ( <u>with</u> the use of hounds)? (Circle only <b>ONE</b> district and answer the following questions for that specific furbearer district)	Approximate number of <b>DAYS</b> you hunted this species in this district ( <u>with</u> the use of hounds)	Total number of this species you <b>HARVESTED</b> in this district while hunting ( <u>with</u> the use of hounds)
Bobcat	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7		
Raccoon	<input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> YES	1 2 3 4 5 6 7		

8. Did you release any bobcats while hunting with hounds, if so how many?

- NO
- YES.....If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_ (kittens) \_\_\_\_\_ (adult females) \_\_\_\_\_ (adult males) \_\_\_\_\_ (unknown)

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!**

Please return your completed survey using the enclosed postage paid envelope.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Wildlife Division  
1420 East Sixth Avenue, P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, Montana 59620-0701

