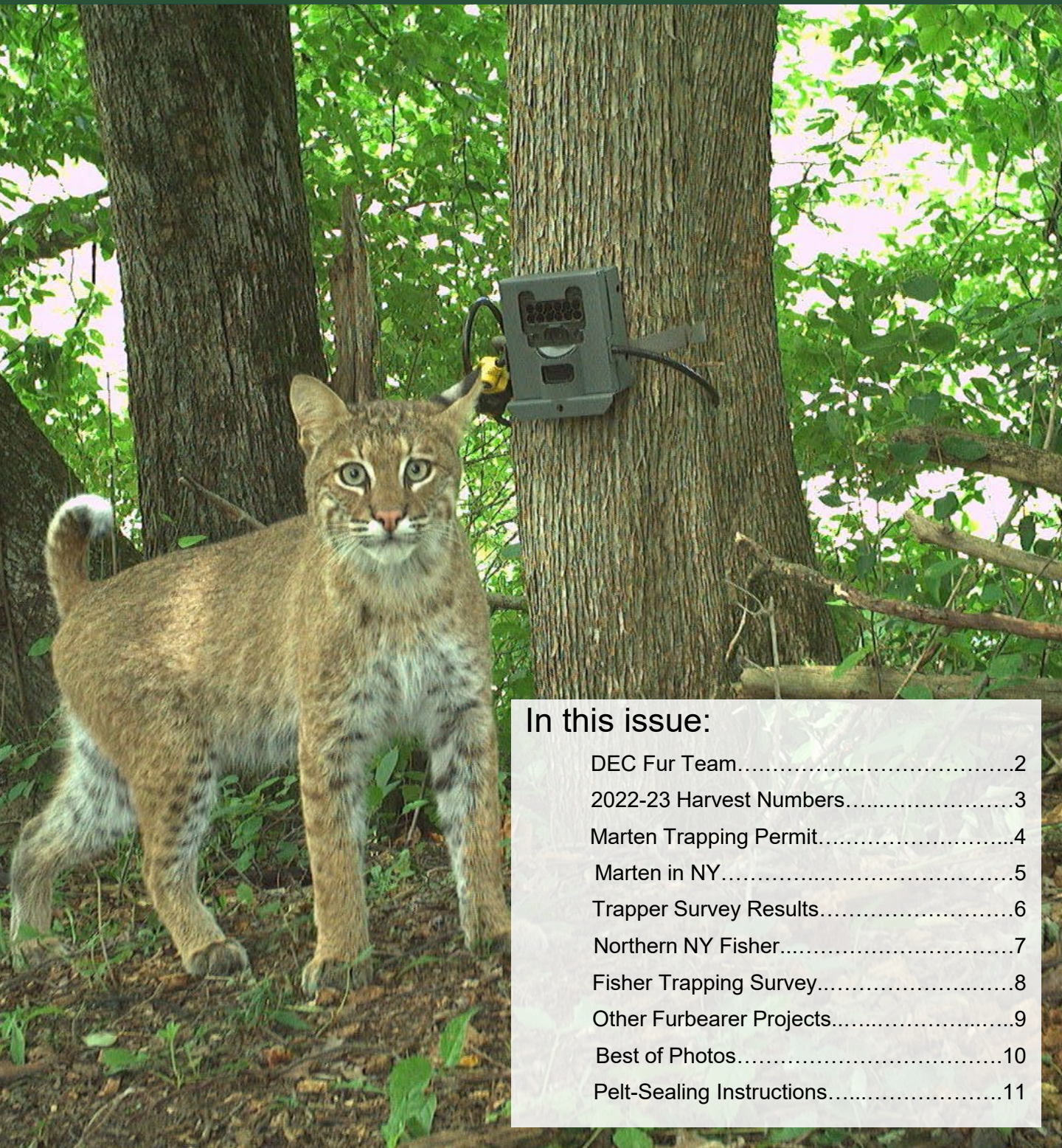


New York Furbearer Newsletter

Fall 2023



Department of
Environmental
Conservation



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DEC Furbearer Management Team

TRAPPING BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES



<https://furbearermanagement.com/>



<https://www.fishwildlife.org/afwa-inspires/furbearer-management>

Want to know the best trap for the critters you target? Check out the traps that are BMP approved! You can even sort them by animal, specific trap, or trap type. There is lots of other great trapping-related information at these sites too.



Take It * Tag It * Report It



1-866-426-3778

or the

HuntFishNY Mobile App



www.dec.ny.gov

CONTACT YOUR REGIONAL DEC OFFICE

Region	Furbearer Contact	Phone
1	Leslie Lupo	(633) 444-0311
3	Kevin Clarke	(845) 256-3098
4	Joe Nelson	(607) 652-2426
5	Tim Watson	(518) 623-1242
6	Tim Pyszcynski	(315) 785-2534
7	Bill Schara	(607) 753-3095
8	Robin Phenes	(607) 622-8271
9	Jen Pettit	(716) 379-6378
Central Office	Mandy Watson	(518) 402-8859

Report Your Furbearer Sightings!

DEC wants to learn more about the occurrence of various furbearers throughout New York such as bobcat, otter, fisher, marten, gray fox, weasel, and snowshoe hare. Your observations help biologists understand the distribution and abundance of these elusive or inconspicuous mammals.

You can report your observations online, and can even include photos! Go to www.dec.ny.gov/animals/30770.html or e-mail us at wildlife@dec.ny.gov.

Thanks for your help!



On cover: A bobcat captured by a trail camera survey station, Allegany County, NY.

2022-23 Trapping Harvest Data

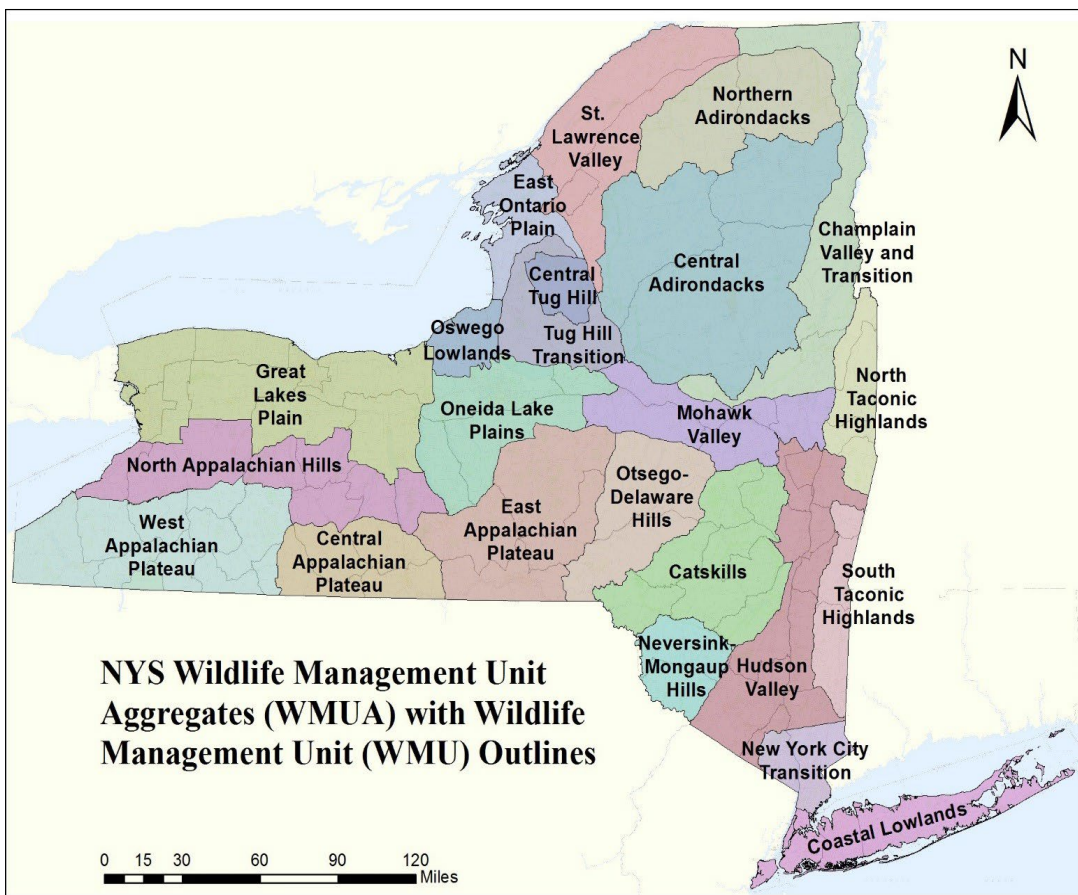
Wildlife Management Unit Aggregate	Fisher	Otter	Bobcat	Marten
Catskills	167	5	62	
Central Adirondacks	192	117	20	192
Central Appalachian Plateau	82		25	
Central Tug Hill	53	28	16	
Champlain Valley & Transition	171	73	21	1
East Appalachian Plateau	170		5	
East Ontario Plain	33	53	11	
Hudson Valley	31	50	75	
Mohawk Valley	222		6	
Neversink - Mongaup Hills	42	35	25	
North Taconic Highlands	6	13	45	
Northern Adirondacks	100	101	20	4
Oneida Lake Plains	1			
Oswego Lowlands	11			
Otsego - Delaware Hills	52		23	
South Taconic Highlands	2	16	61	
St. Lawrence Valley	94	188	42	
Tug Hill Transition	194	35		
West Appalachian Plateau	219		20	
Statewide Total:	1842	714	477	197

Check out the results from last year's harvest!

Here are the reported harvest numbers for fisher, otter, bobcat, and marten from the 2022-23 mandatory pelt sealing program.

To learn more about harvest results in your specific county or town, visit our website here:

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/355.html#Harvest>



Marten Trapping Permit

Last Year's Stats:

-  238 permits issued
-  107 trappers set traps specifically for marten/ fisher
-  14,324 trap nights
-  59 successful trappers
-  197 marten harvested (3.39 marten/successful trapper)
-  Harvest ratio of 3.97 males per 1 female
-  On average, it took 73 trap-nights to harvest 1 marten

The 2022 harvest was 418% higher than in 2021. See page 5 for more information on why there is so much year-to-year variation in the marten harvest.



Like previous years, a free permit is still required to trap American (pine) marten during the marten trapping season (Nov. 1st – 30th) in the Adirondacks (WMUs 5C, 5F, 5G, 5H, 5J, 6F, 6J). The permit includes an activity log which is to be returned to the Warrensburg DEC office no later than December 10th. There is no longer a requirement to turn in your marten carcasses or fisher jaws at the time of pelt sealing. In addition to the marten permit, a valid NYS trapping license is required to trap marten.

To request a marten trapping permit, please contact regional biologist Tim Watson by:



518-623-1240



R5.WarrensburgWildlife@dec.ny.gov



232 Golf Course Rd
Warrensburg, NY 12885

Next Step Trapping Courses

Are you a new trapper who wants to learn more about traps and techniques from an experienced and skilled trapper? Do you want more experience setting and packing traps? Then a Next Step Land Trapping or Water Trapping course is what you need. There are a few Next Step trapping courses already on the schedule for this fall. If you don't see one offered in your area, check back as courses are always being added.

All Next Step courses are free, you will need your trapper education certificate number, and registration is required: https://register-ed.com/programs/new_york

If you are interested in a Next Step course but don't see a course topic you are interested in or you don't see one in your area, email us at hunter@dec.ny.gov.



TRAPPING IS OUR HISTORY.
WILL TRAPPING BE IN OUR FUTURE?



BECOME A TRAPPER EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR!

QUALIFICATIONS

- AT LEAST 18 YEARS OF AGE
- GOOD MORAL CHARACTER
- GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS
- TRAPPING EXPERIENCE PREFERRED

APPLY TODAY!

- 1-888-HUNT-ED2 (1-888-486-8332)
- www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9189.html

PURCHASE A \$5 HABITAT & ACCESS STAMP TODAY!



Doc# 23-29-00000001

This year's Habitat & Access Stamp features the popular opossum! All funds from stamp purchases are used for projects aimed at conserving fish and wildlife habitat and increasing access to public and private lands for outdoor recreational activities.

To make your donation today, go to www.dec.ny.gov/permits/47452.html, visit your local license issuing agent or call 1-866-933-2257.

2023-24 Habitat and Access Stamp

Marten in New York

Harvest of marten tends to fluctuate widely between years, and many trappers and members of the public wonder, why the boom and bust?

Most experienced marten trappers know that the secret lies with the American beech tree and the small, nutrient-rich beech nut that the tree produces in the fall. Core marten range in New York corresponds with the densest concentrations of beech trees anywhere in the country, and beech nut production impacts species from mice and voles to deer and black bear. American beech generally follow a cycle of boom and bust when it comes to nut production. A year of abundant beech nuts across the Adirondacks and beyond is almost always followed by what we call a mast failure, or virtually no beech nuts produced. The following fall, the cycle starts again with an abundance of beech nuts. The one main thing that can cause changes to somewhat predictable cycle is an early spring and a late frost that kills the blossoms that will go on to produce beech nuts.

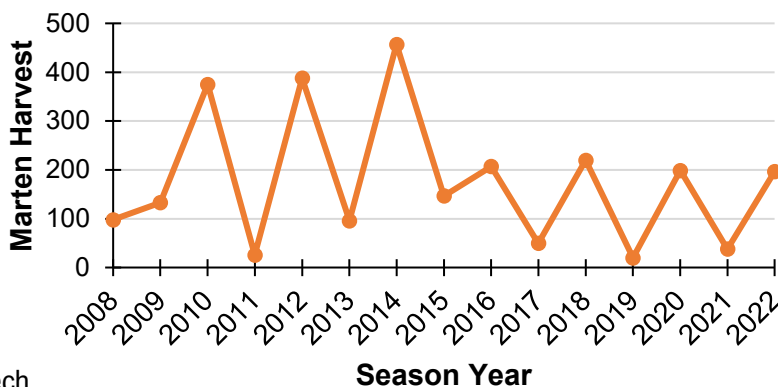
What does this have to do with marten? As it turns out, a lot. Marten will readily consume beech nuts when they are present and will generally restrict their ranges to areas of high beech nut densities to take advantage of small mammal populations also feeding on beech nuts. During years with large beech nut crops, marten are less susceptible to trapping because they have an abundance of natural food and are not moving as much.

In the spring and summer following a year of beech nut abundance, marten prey species like mice and voles increase rapidly in number and provide a valuable food source for the large number of young marten that are born during the same spring. As fall approaches, small mammal populations have reached their peaks and drastically decrease in numbers due to a lack of food. Marten have to travel farther to find food; data from radio-collared marten in the Adirondacks showed that home ranges in years with beech nut failures are twice as large as years with large beech nut crops. These factors make marten, especially inexperienced juveniles, more susceptible to trapping.

Another plant species that produces mast that can impact marten and small mammal populations in the Adirondacks, albeit to a lesser extent than beech, is American mountain-ash. Mountain-ash trees are generally found at higher elevations, and produce bunches of orange berries, called drupes. Beech nut and mountain-ash berry production











actually account for 90% of the predicted harvest in a given year! Years of abundant beech nut and mountain-ash berries can cause up to a 10-fold decrease in the harvest, even with the same amount of effort from trappers. A great example of this is a harvest of 244 marten in 2018 followed by a harvest of just 20 in 2019, despite trapper effort remaining similar between the two years. In years with high harvest, it's not surprising that a large number of the marten harvested are juveniles (roughly 50-60%).

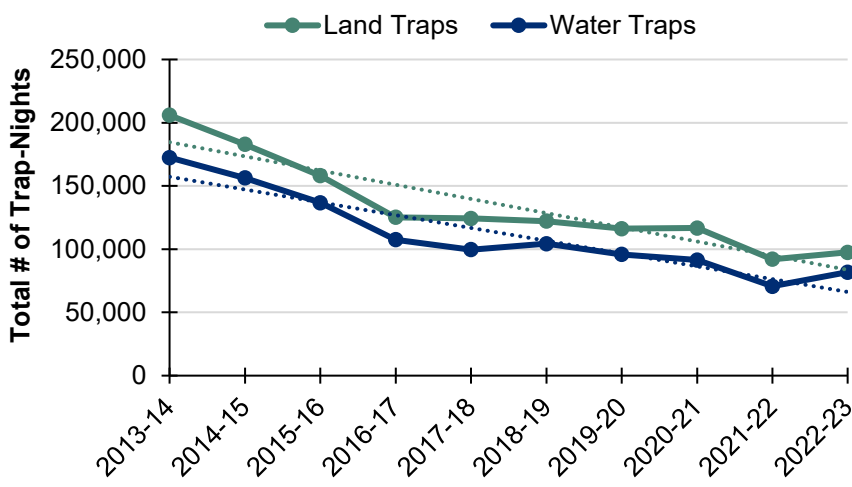
All that being said, don't let the whispers of good beech nut years deter you from getting out there and catching a marten or two!



2022-23 Trapper Survey Results

Every spring, DEC sends out a survey to 4,500 licensed trappers. This survey asks participants what species they attempted to trap, how many of each species they trapped, and how much effort they put into trapping. The results from this survey help us estimate total harvest for species that are not pelt-sealed. See below for harvest estimates from the past 10 years. We thank participating trappers for providing us with this important data!

Species	Estimated Trapping Harvest by Season Year										5-Year Avg
	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
Beaver 	28,313	22,470	29,518	18,072	18,465	20,143	21,821	22,409	16,817	19,672	20,172
Coyote 	12,767	14,817	11,631	10,317	8,415	8,758	7,874	8,596	4,693	7,178	7,420
Gray Fox 	5,308	7,391	4,446	2,673	2,739	2,723	2,452	2,232	1,196	1,974	2,115
Mink 	14,512	17,434	13,307	9,340	6,110	5,741	6,651	5,965	2,792	4,410	5,122
Muskrat 	113,361	155,498	133,678	60,569	86,643	67,264	57,834	48,479	30,881	32,696	47,431
Opossum 	16,047	11,557	5,644	7,368	6,308	8,618	5,428	5,417	2,096	3,090	4,930
Raccoon 	52,873	41,537	25,121	18,944	17,929	21,434	19,308	19,407	10,233	15,659	17,208
Red Fox 	19,292	21,211	17,367	11,829	8,728	11,121	9,832	9,792	6,489	8,376	9,122
Skunk 	4,450	5,446	4,262	4,037	2,503	3,789	3,064	2,515	1,372	2,640	2,676
Weasel 	1,014	1,535	1,345	553	281	832	467	986	353	450	618



Estimated trapping effort has been steadily declining since 2012/2013, when fur prices were high and estimated harvests peaked. The 2021-22 trapping season had the lowest estimated trapping effort since the current version of the survey started in 2006 (surveys done before this time used different methods and are not directly comparable). Trapping effort increased slightly last season, but still remained below the 5-year average.

On the 2022-23 survey, we asked participants their thoughts on DEC surveys and what influences the likelihood they will respond to surveys. One thing that was consistently mentioned was not getting enough feedback on what the surveys were being used for. For more information on this, see page 8.

RESULTS ARE IN!: Northern NY Fisher Study



SUNY College of Environmental School of Science and Forestry's PhD candidate Stephanie Cunningham has completed her analyses of fisher survival and den monitoring data collected by DEC Regions 5&6. The data revealed that adult fisher survival was lower on the Tug Hill due to heavy harvest mortality. However, the lower survival rates appear to be offset by higher productivity and kit survival compared to the central Adirondacks. On average, female fisher in the Adirondack study area produced fewer kits and kits were less likely to survive their first year than fisher on the Tug Hill.

Why is this? There are many potential factors that cause kit survival to be lower and more variable in the Adirondacks, including larger home range size of adult denning females compared to those in the Tug Hill. A larger home range size, likely due to foraging efforts, leaves kits unprotected for longer periods of time, increasing the chance of mortality.

Across both study areas, fisher survival and productivity was linked to beech mast cycles. In springs following good beech nut production, fisher tended to produce more kits and survival rates increased. Productivity and survival were also higher in areas with a mix of developed and undeveloped land (wildland urban interface). These areas likely produce more abundant and varied prey than large tracts of undeveloped forest.

Now what? The Furbearer Management Team will be considering these results and additional data while completing a structured decision-making process to make potential changes to New York's fisher trapping seasons.

Study Highlights

- ❖ 181 fisher were captured between the two study areas: 97 males (59 adults/38 juveniles) and 84 females (37 adults/47 juveniles).
- ❖ 146 fisher were outfitted with GPS or VHF collars and included in the analysis (67 from ADK, 79 from Tug Hill).
- ❖ Less than 50% of females monitored reproduced each year, and females appeared to reproduce only once every other year.
- ❖ Although the average number of kits produced per female was similar in both study areas (2.5 kits), kits in the Tug Hill had a 90% chance of surviving the denning season, while kits in the ADKs only had a 60% survival rate.
- ❖ 57 of the collared fisher were confirmed mortalities (others were lost and their fate was unknown).
 - In the Tug Hill, 24 collared fisher were harvested
 - In the ADK, 4 collared fisher were harvested
 - Other known sources of mortality included vehicle strikes, rodenticide poisoning, predation, and rabies

Speaking of Fisher Trapping Seasons...

Did you receive a survey this spring about fisher trapping?

In 2016, DEC made several changes to fisher trapping seasons in NY with the adoption of the NYS Fisher Management Plan. The changes included opening a limited 6-day trapping season for fisher in Central and Western NY and reduced the trapping season length in the Adirondacks to 30 days due to a declining fisher population.

With the season changes, DEC initiated several studies looking at fisher populations throughout the state, including a large-scale camera survey in Central and Western NY and the fisher demographic study (see previous page) in the Northern Zone. Now that those studies are completed and final analyses are in progress, the DEC has developed a process to help guide fisher harvest management decisions that incorporates trapper input from the survey and biological information to best meet the management goals outlined in the Fisher Plan.

The purpose of the survey was to understand what trappers in different parts of New York value (e.g., some trappers want later seasons to maximize pelt primeness, while others prefer earlier seasons to avoid conflict with other hunting & trapping seasons and unpredictable winter weather). DEC will work to balance these differing values and the implications for fisher populations to decide the appropriate season length and timing. We thank everyone who took the time to fill out this survey!!

Fisher Trapping in New York: Your Views and Interests



and the



Center for Conservation Social Sciences, Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, Cornell University

NEXT STEPS: look at the survey results in conjunction with fisher population data to develop recommendations for sustainable trapping seasons that best meet trapper preferences and values.



ROLE OF SURVEYS IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Each year, DEC's Bureau of Wildlife sends out surveys covering topics from hunting and trapping activities to sightings of wildlife species and more. Surveys are a very useful tool for wildlife agencies to make sure we're managing populations appropriately and providing opportunity that matches what stakeholders value.

Why so many surveys? As wildlife managers, a key part of our job is to manage New York's wildlife consistent with public need and desires. Surveys are one of the best ways for us to hear from key stakeholders (YOU!) to improve our management and better understand the demands placed on our wildlife populations.

What are these surveys used for? Each survey has a specific goal. For example, the main purpose of the Trapper Survey (pg 4) is to understand trapping harvest and how trapper effort varies over time. We use sighting surveys (such as the Bowhunter Sighting Log) to develop indices of abundance for species of interest. Other surveys, such as the Fisher Trapping Survey described above, serve as a way to get feedback from stakeholders that are impacted by management decisions. If you have questions or concerns about a particular survey, do not hesitate to contact us.

Why didn't I receive a survey? It would generally not be feasible to send surveys to every person impacted, and luckily we can achieve our objectives by surveying a random sample of stakeholders. Think of it this way: we measure water quality of a lake by taking samples throughout, not by sampling all of the water in the lake.

Is it worth my time to respond? YES! We know that responding to surveys can be time consuming, but it is the best way to ensure that your voice is heard and to play an active role in wildlife management in NY!

Ongoing and Upcoming Furbearer Projects

Estimating Occupancy and Abundance of Bobcats

Once restricted to mountainous regions in NY, bobcat populations have increased and expanded throughout central and western NY in recent years. To effectively manage this species, there is a need for better estimates of bobcat populations. DEC is currently using trail camera arrays to detect bobcats in several



areas of interest throughout NY. Results from these camera surveys will be paired with a mark-resight analysis of GPS collared and ear-tagged bobcats next year to estimate bobcat densities. This information will help us make harvest management decisions and evaluate the potential for additional harvest opportunities in the future.

Muskrats in New York

Since the 1970s, there has been a significant decline in muskrat populations across North America. In NY, harvests have declined by nearly 90% over this period. However, it is difficult to draw



conclusions from harvest numbers alone, as furbearer harvests vary widely based on market conditions and effort.

The DEC will be embarking on a new project, partnering with SUNY-ESF to develop methods for a statewide muskrat survey. This will give us a better understanding of our muskrat populations and a way to monitor the potential decline and better inform future harvest management.

These projects are funded by **Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration**, also known as the **Pittman-Robertson Act**.



What is the Pittman-Robertson (P-R) Act?

Following significant declines in many wildlife species, sportsmen and women partnered with the firearms and ammunition industry to request that Congress impose an excise tax on firearms and ammunition to help fund wildlife conservation. The resulting P-R Act was passed in 1937. Revenue from this excise tax is divided among state wildlife agencies to fund wildlife conservation and management programs as well as hunter and trapper education programs.

Over the past 5 years, NY has received over \$75,000,000 in federal funding under this program. This money has supported DEC projects on fisher, marten, bobcat, coyote, otter and more.

Best of Photos – Bobcat Surveys



NYS Pelt Sealing Instructions

The possession tag must be filled out immediately after you reach your motor vehicle, camp, or home, whichever comes first

To obtain a seal, set up an appointment with wildlife staff at a regional NYSDEC office

Bring your hunting/trapping license, completed possession tag, and carcass/pelt to your appointment

**Species that require a pelt seal in NY:
fisher, marten,
otter, and bobcat**

Whole carcass

Pelt

***Frozen:** The carcass must be thawed out enough to affix a seal through the webbing on the foot, or the head should be skinned from lip to eye hole.

Fresh/thawed: The seal will be affixed through the webbing on the foot, or the head should be skinned from lip to eye hole.

***Frozen:** the pelt must be thawed enough to get a seal through the webbing of the front or hind foot, nostril, eye holes, leg hole, or mouth.

***Dried:** The seal will be affixed through the eye hole. The hole should be big enough to get a seal through.

Upon arrival, a NYSDEC representative will collect your possession tag and affix a seal to the carcass/pelt

The carcass/pelt can now be sold, transfer ownership, leave New York State, or be mounted or tanned.

You must obtain a pelt seal before:

- 10 days have passed since the close of the season within the WMU where the fur was taken, or
- It is sold or ownership is transferred to another person, or
- It leaves NYS
- It is mounted or tanned

Pelt Sealing FAQ

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Where do I get a Furbearer Possession Tag?

Possession tags can be obtained from your regional DEC office or printed from the DEC website at: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9209.html#Seals>

?

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Do I have to attach the Furbearer Possession Tag to the carcass/pelt?

No. The completed possession tag needs to remain in the possession of the trapper/hunter OR with the pelt/unskinned animal.

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Can you mail me the pelt seals?

No, pelt seals cannot be mailed. By DEC regulation, only DEC authorized staff can affix pelt seals to the carcass/pelt.

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I want to get the harvested animal mounted; can I have my taxidermist skin the animal before it is sealed?

Yes, as long as arrangements are made by the trapper/hunter to have the pelt sealed before the end of the 10-day period after the season ends where the animal was harvested, and any required biological samples are turned in at the time of sealing. In most cases, NYSDEC staff are not able to travel to a taxidermist to seal pelts, and pelts must be taken to a DEC office to be sealed. The animal MAY NOT be mounted or tanned until the pelt seal is attached.

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Who do I call to obtain a pelt seal?

To set up an appointment to have the carcass/pelt sealed, you can contact your regional DEC wildlife office. See page 2 of this update for contact information.

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Can I put more than one species on my Furbearer Possession Tag?

No, only one species should be listed per page. However, you may list multiple animals of the same species on the same page.

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When can I remove the pelt seal?

Pelt seals can be removed once the pelt is processed for taxidermy, display, tanning, or manufacturing.

Pelt Sealing FAQ



What happens if the pelt seal breaks?

If the pelt seal breaks or falls off, contact the regional DEC wildlife office for a replacement seal.



Are there special preparations that need to be made if I want to have a frozen animal/skin sealed?

If a skin will be frozen at the time it is presented for sealing, even if it hasn't been removed from the carcass, a popsicle stick, pencil, dowel, or similar object should be inserted either from the mouth hole through one of the eye holes or through the webbing of a hind foot prior to freezing. Make sure this hole is accessible after freezing. Removal of the stick at the time of sealing allows the seal to be inserted in the skin without thawing it out. NYSDEC staff may refuse to seal frozen skins which have not been prepared in this manner.



Is there anything that I need to do for dried pelts?

For animals that have been pelted, the seal is typically placed through an eye hole. For river otter or fisher, please place a pencil, dowel, popsicle stick, or similar object through both eye holes before drying. When using wire stretchers, make sure to remove the skin from the stretcher before sealing occurs.



Can I keep a roadkill fisher, marten, river otter, or bobcat that I find?

If the trapping or hunting season is open for the species in a WMU, you may keep a dead furbearer found on roads within that WMU. You must have a valid hunting or trapping license for the season/species in question, complete a furbearer possession tag and obtain a pelt seal for that animal.