

ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY

STATE: Alaska

GRANT AND SEGMENT NO. W-33-10

PROJECT NO.

PERIOD: July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

PROJECT LOCATION: RI, RII, RIII, RIV, RV

PROJECT TITLE: The Status of Alaska Furbearers and Factors Influencing their Populations

REPORT DESCRIPTION: This performance report describes Furbearer survey and inventory activities. Activities are listed by game management unit.

Statewide Activities:

PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING LAST SEGMENT

OBJECTIVE 1: Trapping and fur sealing materials were distributed to ADF&G Regional Sealing Coordinators in a timely manner.

OBJECTIVE 2: The list of active trappers to which the Alaska Trapper Questionnaire is mailed was periodically updated.

OBJECTIVE 3: The Trapper Questionnaire form and associated databases were updated to address shortcomings discovered following the first use of the scan-able data forms following the 2010-11 season.

OBJECTIVE 4: Analysis of the 2010-11 Trapper Questionnaire data was delayed by difficulties making the new database work with analysis tools. Those difficulties have been resolved and we look forward to completing this objective during fall 2012.

OBJECTIVE 5: The 2010-11 Trapper Questionnaire Report will be published and distributed to trappers during fall 2012.

OBJECTIVE 6: The response rate and proportion of erroneous answers on the new scan-able Trapper Questionnaire form was similar to the previous survey form. Because the scan-able form greatly reduces data entry time and costs, it will be used in future surveys.

OBJECTIVE 7: Owing to the demands of other job duties the 2011-12 Trapper Questionnaire was not distributed during the project period, but it will be mailed to trappers in late August 2012.

PUBLICATIONS

None during the project period. Publication of the 2010-11 Trapper Questionnaire Report was delayed due to problems extracting and using data from the scan-able data forms.

Those problems have been resolved and we look forward to publishing that report during fall 2012.

Region I Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Collect harvest data on beavers, martens, otters, lynx, and wolverines as they are harvested and presented for sealing.

ADF&G Wildlife Conservation staff, FWP Troopers, and designated sealing agents sealed furbearer pelts harvested in the region. Area biologists and other staff tracked harvest trends and collected biological samples opportunistically. About 266 beaver, 3,696 marten, 601 otter, 20 wolverine, and 6 lynx pelts were harvested and sealed in the region.

ACTIVITY 2: Use trapper questionnaire, interviews, and other anecdotal information from reliable observers as a basis for determining the status of various furbearer populations.

This was done as opportunities allowed. This type of information helped managers with recommendations about changes to current trapping regulations.

ACTIVITY 3: Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

This was done as opportunities presented themselves through sealing fur and conversations with trappers and hunters. Efforts were made to improve communication with authorized fur sealers where trappers are using temporary sealing forms that have been incompletely filled out.

ACTIVITY 4: Assist in the collection of samples for use in the compilation of a DNA library by species.

Tissue was collected from most of the wolverines captured in the region as well as some marten associated with several research projects ongoing in the region.

Submitted by: Neil L. Barten, Region I Management Coordinator

Region II Activities:

Activity : Prepare a triennial regional furbearer management report.

Area staff continue to collect information in preparation for drafting report in 2013.

Activity : Collect harvest data when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

All furbearers that require sealing in Region II were presented to staff for specimen collection and sealing. See area specific activities for additional information.

Activity : Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

These are standard activities accomplished in each office. See Area specific activities.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 6

ACTIVITY : Collected harvest data for 146 marten, 22 beaver, 17 wolverine, 7 lynx, and 88 otters. These are within the normal range of harvest.

ACTIVITY : Conducted river otter latrine surveys in western Prince William Sound. See research performance report for otters in unit 6D.

ACTIVITY : No winter track counts were conducted because of poor freeze/thaw conditions.

Units 7&15

ACTIVITY : Collect harvest data when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

Preliminary harvest results are:

	7	Unit 15A	Unit 15B	Unit 15C	Total
Beaver	6	43	3	9	61
Marten	94	3	1	1	99
Wolverine	6	0	0	5	11
Otter	3	15	3	10	31
Lynx	26	93	96	241	456

ACTIVITY : Conduct wolverine survey.

No wolverine surveys were conducted due to poor weather conditions.

Unit 08

Activity : Seal furbearer pelts presented for sealing by trappers and hunters. There were 11 beavers brought in by 8 trappers, yielding an average harvest of 1.4 beavers/trapper. All of the trappers were local residents and trapping was the most common method of take (90%).

Highway vehicles were the most common method of transportation used by beaver trappers (63%), and the harvest was primarily occurred during November, December and April. Five (45%) beaver were harvested along the Kodiak road system.

During the 2011–12 season, 25 trappers brought in 128 otters for sealing yielding an average of 5.1 otters/trapper. The harvest was composed of 56 males (44%), 33 females (26%), and 39 of undetermined sex (30%). Most trappers were local residents (84%), and trapping was the most common method of take (92%). Boats were the most common mode of transportation used by otter trappers (70%), and December was the most productive month (68%). Twenty-seven otters (21%) were harvested along the Kodiak road system.

Trapper questionnaire respondents reported that furbearer populations were high. With the current low harvest in most areas, developing management objectives for furbearers is not a high priority.

ACTIVITY : Conduct river otter latrine survey. Conducted river otter latrine surveys in a portion of GMU 8. See related research performance report for otters in unit 8.

Unit 14C

ACTIVITY : Harvest data was collected when pelts were presented for sealing by trappers and hunters. See below:

ACTIVITY : Furbearer harvest was monitored through field observations, fur sealing reports, and contact with trappers and hunters.

Harvest:

Beaver: 19 taken by trappers and 2 through depredation permits.

Lynx: 2

River Otter: 1

Wolverine: 1 research related mortality.

Marten: 4

Submitted by: Gino Del Frate

Date: 1 September 2012

Region III Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Use trapper questionnaires and interviews as a basis for determining the status of various furbearer populations.

Trapper questionnaires not distributed due to insufficient personnel to accomplish the task; interviewed trappers opportunistically.

ACTIVITY 2: Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

Monitored preliminary harvest of 1,429 lynx, 60 river otter, and 208 wolverine through field observations, fur sealing reports, field observations and contact with trappers and hunters

ACTIVITY 3: Collect harvest information when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters and analyze harvest data.

Collected data on preliminary harvest of 1,697 furbearers when pelts were presented for sealing by trappers and hunters, and analyzed harvest data.

ACTIVITY 4: Provide furbearer management information to State and Federal regulatory processes.

Provided information to 15 State fish and game advisory committees, the Alaska Board of Game, and 2 Federal regional advisory councils.

Activities by Unit

Units 20A, 20B, 20C, 20F and 25C

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct beaver cache surveys in Unit 20B.

Conducted beaver cache survey in October (n = 23 caches).

Submitted by: Roy A. Nowlin, Region III Management Coordinator

Region IV Activities:

Project Location: Game Management Units 9, 10, 11, 13, 14A, 14B, 16, and 17

ACTIVITY 1: Collect furbearer harvest data when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters, questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

<i>Unit</i>	beaver	lynx	marten	otter	wolverine
<i>9</i>	111	76	2	36	33
<i>11</i>	11	186	N/A	2	8
<i>13</i>	290	809	N/A	35	41
<i>14A</i>	87	12	60	21	5
<i>14B</i>	62	5	51	3	3
<i>16</i>	268	3	528	28	28
<i>17</i>	157	18	N/A	54	50

No furbearer harvests were reported in Unit 10.

ACTIVITY 2: Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

The annual trapper questionnaire was completed. Furbearer populations appear to be healthy and fluctuating normally.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 13

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial and ground transect surveys to determine status and trend of lynx populations.

A total of 26 aerial lynx transects were flown in Unit 11 and 13 in April, 2012. Significantly fewer lynx tracks were observed compared to the previous year.

Submitted by: Lem Butler, Region IV Management Coordinator

Date: 15 August, 2012

Region V Activities:

ACTIVITY 1: Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on furbearer management.

Area management staff reviewed State and Federal regulatory proposals, attended regulatory process meetings, and presented furbearer information to the State Board of Game, State Fish and Game Advisory Committees, Federal Subsistence Board, and Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils.

ACTIVITY 2: Maintain the ability in all units to monitor harvests by collecting data through the furbearer sealing process.

The area offices in Barrow, Bethel, Kotzebue and Nome maintained designated fur sealers in villages in each Game Management Unit to collect harvest information through sealing certificates. Staff supported 29 fur sealers in Unit 18, 16 in Unit 22, 9 in Unit 23, and 3 in Unit 26A.

ACTIVITY 3: Monitor the harvest through the fur sealing program, fur acquisition reports, annual hunter/trapper questionnaires and community-based harvest surveys conducted annually in selected villages.

Unit 18: We analyzed fur sealing data for the 2011–2012 trapping season. With improvement to the reporting process, these preliminary harvests should be very close to the final numbers. The reported harvests are 109 river otters, 652 lynx, and 28 wolverine. The high number of lynx sealed in 2011-12 trapping season is related to better than average snow conditions, increased trapping effort, and presence of a local fur buyer.

Unit 22: The preliminary furbearer harvest based on 2011-2012 sealing certificates indicates 107 lynx were sealed by 18 hunters with one hunter being a non-resident. The breakdown of lynx sealed by subunit is 72 in Unit 22A, 32 in Unit 22B, 1 in Unit 22C, and 2 in Unit 22D. Four river otters were sealed by four resident hunters; 3 in Unit 22A, and 1 in Unit 22C. Twenty-six wolverines were sealed by fourteen resident hunters; 11 in Unit 22A, 8 in Unit 22B, 2 in Unit 22C, 3 in Unit 22D, and 2 in Unit 22E. Community-based harvest assessment surveys were not completed in Unit 22 during the reporting period, however previous harvest surveys show beaver, marten, and red fox are also harvested by Unit 22 communities.

Unit 23: The preliminary harvest reported on 2011-2012 sealing certificates included 109 lynx (32 females, 33 males and 44 unknown), all but two were taken by residents. Eleven lynx were shot, and 87 were trapped and for 11 the method of take was not reported. All of the lynx were taken using a snowmachine. No otters were taken during this regulatory year. Nineteen wolverines were sealed (5 female and 13 males), six were taken by ground shooting and 13 by trap, and all were taken using snowmachine. Community harvest assessment survey data is not available at this time but usually indicates dramatically higher harvest than sealing records indicate.

Unit 26A: We examined sealing certificates for wolverine and lynx. During 2011-2012, 18 wolverines were sealed by 9 Unit 26A residents. Sixteen were male and 2 were female. Fifteen were ground shot and 3 were trapped. Snow machines were used for transportation for all 18. Five wolverines were harvested in February, 9 in March, and 4 in April. Four lynx were harvested and sealed by 1 Unit 26A resident trapper. One male and 3 females were sealed. The trapper ground shot them, used a snow machine for transportation, and they were captured in March.

ACTIVITY 4: Use public communication and education to obtain better harvest data through increased observance of sealing requirements.

Throughout Region V we communicated with local trappers to improve harvest reporting through the fur sealing process; explained the importance of harvest reporting at public meetings in villages; prepared newspaper articles explaining the importance of sealing furs to obtain harvest data; and attended meetings hosted by local chapters of the Alaska Trappers Association.

ACTIVITY 5: Assess population status and trends utilizing sealing records, track surveys, cache surveys, hunter/trapper interviews and questionnaires, village harvest surveys and observations by staff and the public.

Unit 18: We observed furbearers and furbearer sign opportunistically during aerial and ground based work for other species; and continue to interview trappers, pilots, and others regarding furbearers. We have determined there are no problems related to low furbearer populations in Unit 18. Lynx numbers and harvest are at record highs in Unit

18. Interest in trapping lynx increased and trapping pressure targeting these species is high in some localized areas however most of the habitat in Unit 18 remains untapped. *Unit 22:* -Furbearers appear abundant, particularly in Units 22A and 22B where hare numbers continue to be high. In Unit 22A and 22B lynx are thought to be abundant and stable. Observers and pilots during the 2012 spring moose survey in the 22A Unalakleet River drainage noted an abundant sign of furbearers. The number of lynx sealed from Unit 22B remained constant with the 2010-2011 regulatory year. However, the number of lynx sealed in 22A increased 41% from the last reporting period. River otters are believed to be more common than the low harvest numbers would indicate, but their abundance is unknown. Observations and public reports suggest wolverines are common throughout the unit and increasing in Units 22D and 22E. Wolverine sealed from Unit 22B remained the same as previous reporting period however it is still low harvest compared to the 2009-2010 reporting period, likely due to decreased trapper efforts in Unit 22B.

Unit 23: Furbearer populations appeared to be within the range of levels observed in previous years based on sealing records, opportunistic observations of furbearers, contacts with hunter and trappers, and community-based harvest assessments. Lynx population levels appear to be high although their distribution has varied substantially among drainages in recent years. Wolverine numbers appeared to be low throughout Unit 23 during the reporting period however, the higher harvest this year may indicate an increase.

Unit 26A: Through opportunistic observations of fur bearers and interviews with local residents, we felt that the current population number of wolverines is fairly high and stable, while arctic and red foxes are both in a period of medium population level. Coyotes are rare and river otter densities are very low. The number of wolverines sealed is probably more an indicator of trapper effort than of wolverine numbers. Four lynx were sealed, indicating that lynx numbers are low but are probably fairly stable.

ACTIVITY 6: Prepare unit summaries of furbearer population status and harvest to be included in the Statewide Trapper Questionnaire report.

Work on trapper questionnaires and trapper responses have been delayed due to staffing changes in headquarters. All backlogged reports were finalized and distributed so regional staff will continue this activity with the current cycle questionnaire.

In Unit 22, an updated list of furbearer hunters & trappers from the past five years was generated to help maximize Unit 22 participation in the annual trapper questionnaires.

ACTIVITY 7: Record wolverine and lynx sightings during moose surveys in Unit 26A as an indicator of population trends.

During 8 hours of moose surveys in April of 2012, we observed 3 wolverines and no lynx compared to 3 wolverines and 4 lynx during 8 hours of surveys in 2010, indicating that lynx densities are may be lower in the Colville River drainage than in past years.

Submitted by: Peter Bente, Survey and Inventory Coordinator, Region V

Date: 1 September 2012