

Vermont Furbearer Management Newsletter



The MISSION of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the people of Vermont.

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Transitions

The Department has seen many changes in 2017. One that I have personally been involved in is a return to the furbearer project as project leader. After a six-year hiatus as the assistant to the Commissioner, I am looking forward to re-engaging with all of you to further the conservation of furbearers and their habitats in the state of Vermont. I welcome any feedback you might have and hope that in the coming year our paths will cross in meetings, presentations, or out in the field. Over the years, your willingness to provide valuable data needed to maintain healthy furbearer populations and the role of trapping has been critical. Let's continue this great relationship!



Kim Royar, Furbearer Management Project Leader

New for 2018 – Mandatory Mail Survey

The mandatory trapper mail survey was proposed by the Vermont Trappers Association in 2016 to support the Department's efforts to increase the declining rate of return of the voluntary survey. The Department uses this important information to assess the health of furbearer species that are less closely monitored through pelt tagging and other means. Without high quality data, it's difficult to justify season changes. The mandatory trapper mail survey will help to identify the influence of potential threats to furbearer populations such as habitat loss, climate change, or disease. In addition, we will be able to more clearly demonstrate that regulated trapping is not a threat to these populations. We will be working to design a survey that allows us to efficiently and easily collect the accurate information. We will track participation, but responses will not be tied to individuals.

The first mandatory survey will be sent out on April 1, 2018, and will ask trappers to report on this current season. In the meantime, please consider keeping a daily log so that you can report more easily and accurately. For those of you who've embraced the digital age, online apps are available that help with this, such as the iGoTrapping app! In the future, we will work on offering an option for electronic reporting. We hope that by working together we can make this system as simple and stream-lined as possible while still ensuring that the data is reliable and accurate. To that end, we welcome feedback from you as we work to implement this new system. Thanks for all you do to help us maintain the populations and habitats of these very unique and amazing animals.

Thanks to Chris Bernier

Many thanks to Chris Bernier for his leadership in moving the furbearer project forward for the last six years. While he will continue to support the project, he has also taken on the role of Turkey Project Leader. During Chris's tenure, with your help, many new initiatives have been enacted:

- 1) Ten-foot setback to beaver dams or lodges eliminated;
- 2) Lynx rules in WMU E to avoid incidental take implemented;
- 3) Several lynx and marten research projects initiated;
- 4) Statewide public outreach regarding furbearer management and trapping expanded;
- 5) Otter season expanded and off-set trigger rule ended; and
- 6) Trapper mail survey became mandatory.



Thank You

Trapper or Warden...or Both?

Lt. David Gregory, Game Warden, VFWD

It was 1993. I had saved enough vacation time to take the first three weeks of trapping season off in Vermont. That same year I had applied to become a Vermont State Game Warden. During that trapping season, a few people rode with me on that trap line, one being my uncle, who had just retired after 30 years as a Vermont game warden.

One day we were talking about where I was in the hiring process when he dropped a bomb on me. He said, "You do realize if you become a game warden, your trapping days are over?" That really took me back — I was fine with not hunting and fishing as much but trapping was another story. A couple of weeks later I

got a letter from Fish & Game stating that I was not hired at that time but my name would remain on a list for the next year or two if they needed more warden trainees. Problem solved!

Two months later I happened to be at Fish & Game headquarters picking up some Fur-Fish-Game trapping videos from Hunter Education when I ran into the Lieutenant Game Warden that was involved with the hiring process. Because of a recent retirement, I was offered a game warden trainee position that day and soon thereafter began the 18 months of training needed to become a warden.

That fall during trapping season, I managed to take a day off on

each side of a three-day weekend and get some traps out. Hey, I did it! I was a game warden and trapped a few days on my old trap line. Maybe I could do both, maybe not to the extent I once did but at least enough to still say I was a trapper.

A few months later I was in my garage when a fellow pulled into my driveway and asked if I was the new game warden. I told him I was and he introduced himself. I was speaking to Jim Colbeth from Newbury, VT. He was a long-time trapper that used a cane to get around but still managed an impressive water line each of the years I knew him. He had a few questions for me

Continued on page 11

The Importance of Your Contribution

Dr. Walter Cottrell, Wildlife Veterinarian, NWDC

Disease is one source of wildlife mortality. Some individual mortality from disease is normal and expected, but it is the diseases that can affect populations of animals that are of greatest concern to wildlife managers.

The incidence of some diseases appears to increase as populations of the susceptible host animals increase. These diseases are thought to be density dependent (e.g. mange). Because many diseases are transmitted by oral and respiratory secretions (e.g. canine distemper), the incidence of these diseases can be expected to increase when animals naturally congregate such as during breeding season or when populations are at their peak. Usually these population fluctuations are minor and short lived but such outbreaks can have lingering impacts on some wildlife populations.

The ever-increasing human presence on the landscape and the resulting loss of wildlife habitat increases the potential for contact between people and wildlife leading to additional concern.

Furbearer managers must then be alert for evidence of zoonotic diseases, those shared by animals and people. Rabies and Lyme disease are examples of zoonotic diseases.

After receiving a report of a potentially diseased animal, an investigation may follow, possibly including the collection of an animal. It is only after a laboratory examination is performed that a confirmed diagnosis can be made. The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department utilizes the Northeast Wildlife Disease Cooperative (NWDC), a consortium of diagnostic laboratories and veterinarians, to perform such diagnostic work as well as to provide disease related training, response preparedness and research support. Once a diagnosis is determined, an appropriate response can be made.

The article in the 2017 Vermont Hunting and Trapping Guide titled "Our Eyes and Ears On the Ground" refers to how hunters and trappers contribute to the

Department's goals of science-based management of the various species for which it has statutory responsibility. This can take a variety of forms from participating in research or surveys conducted by VFWD to individuals reporting what they find to biologists or wardens. The sheer number of sportsmen and women that are at any time out in the natural habitats of these species provides an unequalled opportunity to effectively monitor the health of the State's wildlife populations.

Much of the data about current wildlife populations comes after the fact as a result of surveys and research, but some, especially as it relates to disease, comes from the "here and now" reports made by hunters and trappers. Without this partnership, the kinds of management the public has a right to expect would be nearly impossible.

When suspect diseased animals are encountered on your trap line, please report your observations to the Department ASAP at (802) 289-0628.



Northeast Wildlife Disease Cooperative Fact Sheets

<http://sites.tufts.edu/nwdc/disease-fact-sheets/>

Bobcat Research Update for Vermont

Rory Carroll, UNH PhD student

In the 2016 issue of the Furbearer Newsletter, we reported how Rory P. Carroll, a PhD student, and a diverse team of researchers at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) are using genetic information to assess the dispersal patterns of bobcat populations in the New England/ Quebec region. Results from this study indicate that bobcats are fairly well connected throughout the region, but interstates, especially I-89 and I-91, are significant barriers to dispersal. Bobcats in western Vermont (and south of I-89) are most likely part of a large population that extends into New York and the Adirondack mountains.

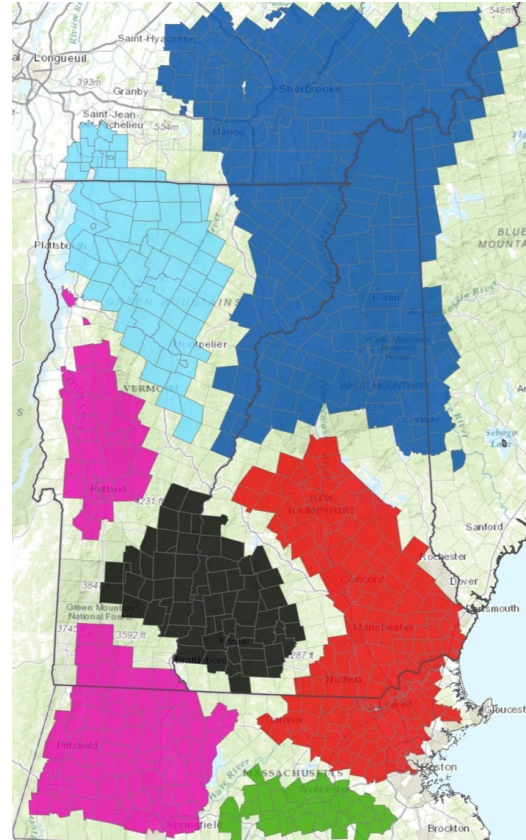
Carroll and the team are also sampling hunter/trapper harvested bobcats from Vermont and road-killed bobcats from New Hampshire to detect changes in diet throughout the region and through time. In the last 60 years, bobcats in New England have increased in size, which may be due to differences in diet. Turkeys, in particular, are a common prey item today that were not as available to bobcats in the past. Chemical signals in the hair of bobcats can be linked to those in their prey to determine what species bobcats are eating and how important each prey species is to bobcats in a particular area.

The same chemical signals can help detect how much bobcats

benefit from humans. Prey species that have eaten human-provided food (i.e. from bird feeders, bait piles, garbage, etc.) will have a different chemical signal than ones that eat more natural foods. If bobcats are eating those animals, the signal will get passed on to them. So far, evidence suggests that in more developed areas like the seacoast of New Hampshire, bobcats are eating more human-subsidized prey than they are in

more rural areas like southern Vermont.

Bobcats seem to be adapting well to developed landscapes, but that may not be good for them in the long term. These landscapes are constantly changing, which makes life unpredictable for more urban bobcats. This, in turn, can increase stress levels, making bobcats more susceptible



Core areas of bobcat subpopulations in New England. An estimate of the effective population size (i.e. only includes successful breeders) of the southwest VT population (pink) is more than double that of any other population, suggesting a large contiguous VT-MA-NY population. The greatest genetic diversity was found within the southeast NH population (red).

BMPs – Methods, Materials, and Mentors *John Pellegrini, Hunter Education Coordinator, VFWD*

In 2016, just under 300 new trappers were certified through Vermont's Trapper Education program. However, there has always been a disconnect that exists between the time a trapper is certified and the setting of his/her first trap. New students can be intimidated by the vast amount of knowledge and experience that trapping requires as well as by the cost of getting properly set up. Unless new students have a mentor available to help them get started and access to the basic equipment needed, students more often than not never get started trapping despite having successfully completed the trapper education course.

In the Fall of 2016, the Vermont Trapper Education Program held its first "getting started" trapping seminar. It was aptly titled, *BMPs – Methods, Materials and Mentors*. The purpose of the seminar was to eliminate the existing disconnect by facilitating the new students' transition from the classroom to

the field. Ten students were selected to participate in this trial course.

Each student was required to attend two workshops for training in the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) approved traps. BMPs are carefully researched recommendations designed to address animal welfare, increase trappers' efficiency and selectivity, and to promote the best technology available for trapping. Upon completion of the classroom requirements, each student was provided a BMP trapping "kit" which included several traps (both land and water), a trowel, sifter, sodbuster, wire, pliers, and the additional tools needed to effectively start trapping. Last, and perhaps most influential for overcoming the disconnect, the students were each paired with an experienced trapper mentor to apply their newly acquired skills, knowledge, and tools in the field.

By all measures, the course was a resounding success with every



Photo Credit: Hewitt

student/mentor team applying their new skills and tools to catch a variety of furbearers.

Kevin Lawrence, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board Chair and experienced trapper, took the lead in instructing this seminar. The Vermont Trappers Association also played a key role by providing several of the mentors.

Bobcat Research Update for Vermont *(continued from page 4)*

to illness and lowering their reproductive ability. A stressed-out bobcat produces stress hormones which get incorporated into its hair. Thus far, the team has found that female bobcats have much higher chronic stress levels

than males across the entire region, and that the amount of development in a town increases a bobcat's stress. Further research will help pinpoint landscapes where bobcats are most at risk for the negative long-term effects of

chronic stress and where efforts to minimize human impact on wildlife populations can have the greatest effect.

Rabies Surveillance Update

Fred Pogmore, USDA, APHIS, Wildlife Services

Since 2012, the USDA Wildlife Services (WS) in Vermont has been conducting research to evaluate new baits for the Oral Rabies Vaccination program (ORV). These new baits have shown great potential prompting the implementation of an Enhanced Rabies Surveillance initiative (ERS) in 2016. The ERS initiative utilizes an intensive rabies monitoring protocol that covers the northern two-thirds of the state. The results of such monitoring provides key data for informing ORV program management decisions.

In 2016, WS collected and submitted 667 samples to the VT Department of Health Laboratory for Enhanced Rabies Surveillance, 349 of which came from nuisance wildlife trappers.

A total of 48 animals tested positive for rabies and 2 for distemper. Trappers had collected 27% of these samples. An additional 36 of the animals tested positive for tularemia. Given these statistics, cooperation by trappers has proven to be a very effective method of collecting disease samples from across the landscape in Vermont. The goal is to continue to utilize samples from legally-harvested animals to monitor wildlife disease distribution and prevalence throughout Vermont.

WS is continuing to collect non-exposure specimens (i.e., no physical contact with a human) which meet the following criteria:

1) strange acting animals that have been euthanized;



- 2) animals that were found dead;
- 3) road kills;
- 4) targeted collection of surveillance samples from specified rabies risk areas; and
- 5) nuisance animals trapped and euthanized.

Contact WS at 1-802-223-8697 or at 1-800-4RABIES if you come across an animal that fits the criteria above.

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THANK YOU, THANK YOU

Trappers, hunters, game wardens, biologists, seasonal staff, education specialists, support staff, and volunteers for your help in the management and conservation of Vermont's furbearers



In Memory of a Good Friend, Conservationist, and Ally



Trappers, hunters, anglers, and the staff at VFWD lost a great friend and ally when Jim Stewart passed away a year ago November. Jim was a passionate trapper, hunter, and fisherman and a supporter and encourager of those of all ages who participated in these pursuits. He supported the work of the VFWD Furbearer Project Team and volunteered happily and often to help with research and education. His regular visits to the office here in Springfield always brightened our day.

Jim was a devoted, energetic Trapper Education Instructor. He took 10-20 students at a time and over the course of a few Saturdays, turned them into trapping and outdoor enthusiasts with the highest regard and respect for the animals they were going to pursue. At his own expense, he gave each student that passed the course a new trap. Vermont State Game Warden Dave Gregory greatly appreciated Jim's annual participation as an

instructor at the Advanced Trappers Course, a full weekend of trapping demos and hands-on instruction.

In addition to his support of trapper education, Jim ran the Vermont Trappers Association Rendezvous for years, was a co-Vice President of the VTA and was always involved in the VTA Fur Auctions and Banquet. He was inducted into the VTA Hall of Fame for his unwavering dedication. Jim took part in Best Management Practices testing for fisher here in Vermont, provided beaver meat for the marten reintroduction project, and annually joined VFWD to process carcasses.

Jim died while doing what he loved — tending his traps. He will be missed by all who knew him.

"Jim's passing left a hole in our hearts that will not soon be filled. The loss to the Vermont Trappers Association and his friends was devastating, but I like to think that he will always be with us through all the lives that he touched and especially through the kids that he taught to trap. Whenever one of them makes a nice catch or witnesses a beautiful sunrise out on the line, Jim will be there as well. Whenever one of them passes along something that Jim taught them to another, he will be there."

— Bruce Baroffio, President,
Vermont Trappers Association



VFWD Furbearer Project on the Road

Look for the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department Furbearer Project Display and staff at the following events:

- ☞ [Yankee Sportsmen's Classic](#)
January 19-21, 2018
Champlain Valley Expo
Essex Junction, VT
- ☞ [Herrick's Cove Wildlife Festival](#)
Sunday, May 6, 2018
Rockingham, VT
- ☞ [Vermont Trappers Association Annual Rendezvous](#)
Saturday, September 8, 2018
Barton, VT
- ☞ [Southern Vermont Wildlife Festival](#)
Sunday, September 23, 2018
Dover, VT
- ☞ [Dead Creek Wildlife Days](#)
Saturday, October 6, 2018
Dead Creek WMA
Addison, VT

Furbearer Kit News

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

It has been just over 11 years since the first Furbearer Fundamentals Education kits were delivered to 15 Northeast states and provinces. The kits were funded through a grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Federal Aid Administrative Fund. They were developed and assembled by the Education Committee of the Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee (NEFRTC), an organization comprised of wildlife biologists from states and provinces in the northeastern region of North America. Education Committee members from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York, led by Vermont Furbearer biologist Kim Royar, were the driving force behind the project. The curriculum was written by Mary Goodyear, a wildlife educator from the NH Fish and Game Department.

Here in **Vermont**, our “fleet” of mobile kits has grown to 12 (thanks in part, to contributions from trappers and the VTA)! It is becoming more and more unusual to talk with a student who *has not* been exposed to the kits in one form or another. Recently we checked in with some of the other states that received kits and asked, “Where are they now?” Here are the responses we received.

Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife: The kit is housed in

the Bangor headquarters and has grown in popularity to where a two-week limit on its use is in place. It is used by public school teachers, homeschoolers, public libraries, forestry companies, and even the Army National Guard! It’s been a very successful program!

Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources: Initially, individual elements of the Furbearer Fundamentals Kit were used for educational purposes, but recently the Wildlife Education and Outreach folks there built upon the original concept to develop a “Furbearer Trunk”. The Furbearer Trunk is a mix of the contents originally provided and material added that is specific to Maryland. The kits are in high demand and many borrowers use it year after year.

New Hampshire Fish and Game Department: New Hampshire now has four kits that are on loan most of the time. NH Parks AmeriCorps volunteers use them extensively as part of providing environmental programs in the Manchester School District.

LOCAL FUR MILLINER REPURPOSES FURBEARER KIT PELTS

Deb Healey, seamstress, milliner, and proprietor of Otter Way Fur Millinery in Vergennes, Vermont,



has graciously offered a solution for what to do with the worn, tail-less furbearer education kit pelts. Deb has donated her time and skills to craft beautiful headbands and warm, furry earmuffs out of several gray fox, red fox, and coyote pelts that had lost their tails. These fur items have been distributed to the kits so folks can experience the warmth and beauty of wild fur firsthand.

As a kid, Deb roamed every wooded lot she could find in suburban New Jersey and loved all the birds and animals. College brought her to Vermont, and marriage to a small place in paradise on Otter Creek. Deb told us, “*My idea to create fur hats evolved over many years starting with simply loving the feel of my mom’s fur coat when I was little. I had learned to sew clothing as a youngster. Blending cloth sewing techniques and the challenges of leather has been a fun, creative process.*”

Thank you Deb! We are grateful for your generous contribution to and enthusiastic support of the Furbearer Education Kits!

Using Expert Opinions of Trappers, Researchers, and Community Members to Model Marten Habitat in Vermont

Cody Aylward, Graduate Student, UVM

Recent evidence shows that two detectable populations of American marten exist in Vermont, one of which is remnant of a reintroduction effort from 1989-91. This population in the southern Green Mountain National Forest is small and isolated from the population in the Northeast Kingdom, yet suitable habitat may exist to help connect the two populations and promote migration, gene flow, and long-term persistence. As part of my Master's degree thesis, I have estimated habitat quality for marten throughout Vermont based on expert opinion data from trappers, scientists, managers, and community members in the Northeast.

Working with Dr. Jed Murdock, University of Vermont (UVM), and Chris Bernier, VT Fish &

Wildlife Dept., I developed an online survey tool to collect expert opinion data, which is being used to build a model that predicts the probability that marten occupy any given point on the landscape. The tool presented survey participants with approximately 30 sites placed strategically in one or more states of their choosing (New York, Vermont, New Hampshire or Maine). For each site, survey participants were presented with a Google map showing a satellite view of the site and the surrounding landscape, and a list of habitat information related to the site. They were then asked to provide their best estimate of the probability that martens occupied the site, and to show their confidence in their estimate by

giving a range of acceptable probabilities.

Eighteen experts completed the survey. The expert pool was diverse; individuals declared expertise in marten habitat in all four states and experience in trapping, science, and management of martens. Their answers were combined, and a model was developed to map marten habitat throughout the Northeast with emphasis on mapping habitat connectivity in Vermont. The project also investigated differences in opinion related to geography and experts' backgrounds, and the advantages and disadvantages of the approach to gathering expert opinion data from community members, trappers, scientists, and wildlife managers.

Have you seen these rare furbearers in Vermont?



If you think you've seen them or their tracks, now you can report it at our website:

<https://anrweb.vt.gov/FWD/FW/FurbearerReportingForm.aspx>

Best Management Practices Update

This past year Vermont trappers once again participated in the national study that began in 1992 to collect trend data regarding the ownership and use of traps nationally, regionally, and by state. The study, which was conducted by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies as part of its ongoing effort to evaluate animal welfare, to identify the best traps and techniques, and to develop recommendations for state fish and wildlife agencies to consider, solicited information from trappers across the nation regarding their trapping activities, their primary target species, their preferred traps, and their knowledge and use of the Best Management Practices for Trapping in the United States (BMPs). As they have in the past, Vermont trappers again made a significant contribution to this effort by returning 113 completed surveys!

Although the findings of this study are interesting on many fronts, the degree to which Vermont trappers support and use the BMPs was particularly exciting. With 74% responding that they had heard of the BMPs, Vermont trappers ranked 3rd in the nation in their awareness of these traps and trapping techniques (MA 82%, ME 75%). Furthermore, of those having heard of the BMPs, 76% of Vermont trappers reported having a good deal or a moderate

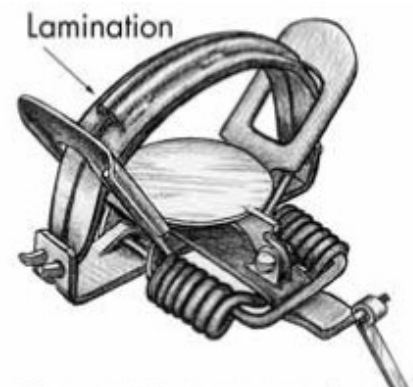


amount of knowledge about the BMPs placing them 7th in the nation in this regard. Vermont trappers also ranked 7th in the nation (tied with WV, CT, NE) with 86% of respondents expressing either strong or moderate support for the BMPs. Not surprisingly, 40% of the northeastern trappers reported improved animal welfare as their main reason for supporting the BMPs as compared to 34% of trappers nationwide. And most importantly, trappers across the northeast, including those in Vermont, ranked highest in the nation (71%) for using the BMPs on their trap lines.

Given our objective of increasing trapper use of BMP traps and trapping techniques, these numbers are encouraging. The results of this survey clearly demonstrate the progress we have made in getting the BMPs into circulation and use among our trapping community. It is

important to remember that the BMPs are designed to not only help trappers make informed trap choices but are also intended to provide species specific, field-tested and research verified practices that can improve your trapping efficiency, selectivity, and safety in addition to improving animal welfare. The BMPs are readily available upon request and can be easily located on the Department's website.

www.vtfishandwildlife.com



Trapper or Warden...or Both? *(continued from page 2)*

about trapping laws and how I interpreted them, said he didn't want to run into any problems that fall. Before I knew it, we had talked trapping for a couple of hours, and he invited me to stop by his place any time and check out his old sugarhouse that he converted into a fur shed. I stopped by countless times, tagged fur, talked trapping, or asked him about someone or some place I was not familiar with. That old trapper was a lot of help to a new game warden.

That same year I was invited to join another trapper on his coyote

line. I met him at his home early one morning and rode the whole line with him and his friend. I learned so much that day — the names of a lot of farmers I had yet to meet, where they had been seeing strange activity, and the out-of-the-way hidden routes into many back fields and pastures. Both trappers were lifelong residents of the area to which I had been newly assigned and were a wealth of information.

Now, over 20 years later, I've been very fortunate that trapping has been a larger part

of my job as a game warden than I ever would have imagined. I've been a member of the Department's Furbearer Team, involved with trapper education and with training new wardens in trapping as well as taking part in updating numerous trapping regulations.

If I could offer just one piece of advice to trappers, it's to take the initiative that Mr. Colbeth did years ago with me and meet the warden in your area, especially if they are new. It will be much appreciated and beneficial for all.



Wardens Chad Barrett and Jeremy Schmid visited Smilie Memorial Elementary School in Bolton to teach the students what they do and all about furbearers.

The students had so much fun!

From a Furbearer Education Kit Report Card

After one week, my preschoolers can easily name all of the animals by their fur, recognize many of the tracks and skulls. They gained an understanding of different animal gaits, the use of animal furs by people, and many facts about the different animals' habitats, diets, etc. We love this kit! You have no idea how much fun and learning we had with this. Thank you!

*Kerry Malloy
Director, Teacher
Lincoln Cooperative Preschool*



Fish & Wildlife Department

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Your purchase of hunting and fishing licenses as well as equipment supports Fish and Wildlife Restoration.

Permanent License Holders Take Note!!

On January 1, 2016, a new statutory requirement was put in place to facilitate the Department's collection of accurate harvest and licensing information for permanent and lifetime license holders. The statute specifically requires that such license holders annually renew their licenses prior to exercising their hunting, trapping, and fishing privileges that year. There is no fine or other penalty for failing to renew your license, but doing so gives the Department the ability to accurately identify who among our growing number of permanent license holders is still active. It will also keep you on the mailing list for the Annual Trappers Report and the newsletter.

So please take a minute to "renew" your license each year. Doing so is as simple as reprinting it. **Licenses can be renewed for free online at our website or in person at your nearest licensing agent (Note: A license agent may charge you up to \$1.50 for reprinting your license).**

SPREAD THE WORD!!

