



# VERMONT FURBEARER MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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*Brehan Furfey  
Furbearer Management Project Leader*

## Greetings Valued Readers!

Welcome to our yearly newsletter, where we share updates and educational materials to help you stay informed in the conservation of Vermont’s furbearer’s species. I am excited to fill the role of furbearer project leader for the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, although I must admit that I have some large shoes to fill! I am grateful for the massive amount of support from the Furbearer Team.

I am deeply passionate about wildlife and have 10+ years of experience with wildlife management from different areas throughout the U.S. I moved here from Oregon and have not lived in the Northeast since I was 12. I finally gave up my lust for working with large charismatic game mammals to be closer to my family. Ironically my last name, Furfey, seems to fit well with the new task at hand!

A few highlights throughout my career have been research on rare and imperiled birds, crocodile projects, bighorn sheep capture and disease monitoring, human/wildlife conflict, wolf conflict management, upland game birds, managing big game hunting seasons and bag limits/quotas, and habitat improvement projects. Some of the fun furbearers I have worked with are pacific marten and wolverines.

Through this varied experience, my approach has shifted toward incorporating adaptive management strategies because there is constantly new information and changing circumstances. Working as a biologist in state government was not what it was even 10 years ago – we are evolving toward more human dimension work. Our relationship with wildlife is changing for better or worse as we inevitably change the landscapes around us. Adaptive management helps to optimize conservation efforts, enhance ecological resilience, and ensure the long-term sustainability of wildlife populations and their habitats.

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I am constantly learning, and what motivates me is the feeling of doing what is best for a species by conquering dynamic and complex challenges and working within a framework of incorporating stakeholder perspectives, collaboration, and continuous monitoring. I am committed to keeping an open mind on different perspectives as they relate to the issue at hand, developing relationships, and working with others to expand sound management policies that contribute to the sustainability of furbearers in Vermont.

Aside from professional pursuits, I enjoy cooking, painting, running, fishing, hunting, and going on adventures with my Irish Setter, Sligo. I am currently preparing to hike to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro in a few months. My personal pursuits inspire fresh perspectives, nourish my creativity, and fulfill my deep love for learning and adventure. I am looking forward to purchasing my first trapping license this year and learning from any trapping mentors that are willing to take on a rookie!

We have several challenges ahead: trapping bills in the legislature; more education and outreach; investigating potential impacts of rodenticides to bobcat, fisher, and other wildlife species; incorporating developments in population models – just to name a few! My goal is to continue to move forward on projects Kim had worked on, develop relationships with trappers, VFWD partner organizations, and the public, and continue to learn about furbearers in Vermont to ensure our program is doing all that it can for the best outcome of the species we work with.

Thank you for being part of our journey.

*Bree Furfey, Furbearer Management Project Leader*

## Trapping BMPs and Coyote Hunting Regulation Updates



Many of you are familiar with the outcome of the last legislative session and the efforts to respond to that outcome by the Furbearer Team- Acts 159, 165, and H.191. The overall objective of Act 159 has been to modernize trapping practices to improve animal welfare and selectivity. This legislation charged the Department with implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping based on the decades-long scientific research effort conducted by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Vermont is the first state to incorporate recommendations from this research.

Act 156 directed the Fish and Wildlife Board to regulate the practice of hunting coyotes with the aid of dogs and enacted a moratorium (7/1/2022) until rules are passed.

H.191 was introduced last session to ban all trapping except for damage and research purposes. It is likely that H.191 will come up again in the next legislative session as a segment of Vermont's population are challenging many forms of hunting and trapping.

In January, the Department submitted a report to the Legislature outlining the Department's recommendations in response to Acts 159 and 165. Some of the recommended regulation changes have significant implications to trappers and coyote hunters, as summarized below.

You can find resources, information, and the specific rule proposals in an easy to read table format on our website at: <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/trapping-bmps-and-coyote-hunting-regulations-updates#BMPs>. Please contact us with any questions!

### Act 159: Best Management Practices for Trapping

In 2022, the Department established a working group to incorporate feedback from a diversity of interests and organizations. The working group

used the Act 159 criteria to identify specific issues that members agreed deserved further discussion and development. There was unanimous agreement to explore and attempt to develop recommendations related to the following five topics: *BMP strategies to improve animal welfare and selectivity, baits and lures, technical items related to body-gripping traps, trail setbacks, and methods of dispatch.*

The Department proposed several regulations including modifications to foothold traps, placement of body-gripping traps 5 feet or more above the ground unless in an enclosure or in water, covering of meat-based bait, trail setbacks at 50 feet for both foothold and body-gripping traps, and defining legal methods of dispatch as firearms or archery only.

The resulting regulation changes exceed the recommendations outlined in AFWA's BMPs and marks significant advancement toward addressing animal welfare, trap selectivity, and safety in accordance with the intent of Act 159.

### Act 165: Hunting Coyotes with the Aid of Dogs

Board rules must include:

- A limit on number of dogs
- A prohibition on the substitution of any new dog for another during pursuit.
- The legal method of take for coyote pursued with dogs.
- A definition of control that minimizes the likelihood that dogs will enter land that is posted against hunting or where the pursuit of coyote with dogs is not authorized.
- Provisions to encourage persons pursuing coyote with the aids of dogs to seek landowner permission before entering or releasing dogs onto land that is not legally posted.
- A reporting requirement for every coyote killed during pursuit with the aid of dogs.

It is also directed the Board to consider seasonal restrictions and baiting as well as addressing permits (no more than 100, up to 10% non-resident), non-resident training season is tied to home state, and landowner permission.

The resulting rules were modeled after the bear management rule and developed to ensure consistency and enforceability. The most contentious issues were definition of "control" of dogs, defining the pack size and methods of take.

### Next Steps for Acts 159 and 165

As of the printing of this newsletter, the Department is getting ready to meet with the Vermont Legislative Committee for Administrative Rules (LCAR). The Board's 3rd vote may occur on October 18th, but is more likely to happen in December. Rules will go into effect January 2024.

## Conservation Corner

### *HOW DO TRAPPERS CONTRIBUTE TO FURBEARER CONSERVATION IN VERMONT?*

- **They help to maintain the balance between wildlife and people by:**
  - Reducing and preventing damage to agricultural crops and human property.
  - Minimizing exposure risk to diseases such as rabies.
  - Providing the most efficient and practical means available to accomplish localized population reduction at a limited cost to the public. This helps to keep some species, like beaver, at healthy levels and within carrying capacity.
  - They provide a valuable service to their neighbors and community. This is important because if trapping was banned, many of our furbearers would be villainized as pests resulting from a likely increase in human/wildlife conflicts.
- **They provide us with data that would be cost prohibitive and difficult to obtain otherwise. The data we derive from the animals they turn in includes:**
  - Catch per Unit Effort (CPEU) from yearly trapper reports. This information gives us long-term population trends.
  - Sex and age data from otter, fisher, and bobcat.
  - General location information on harvested species
  - Incidental take information that may help guide us in incorporating trap modifications to prevent non-target catch.
  - In-season vs. out-of-season capture for damage control
  - Research opportunities for collecting data on otters, fisher, bobcats, which currently includes rodenticide exposure testing, and sampling for Gamma Herpes virus in bobcats
  - An overall picture of health of the otter, fisher and bobcat populations.

- General species ecology information and harvest trends that can help us investigate if season changes are needed
- Muskrat sex and age information from fur auctions.
- **They collaborate with VFWD staff and partner researchers, often on short notice, to collect samples from the various furbearers they have harvested to detect the presence of disease.**
- **They utilize species harvested:** Using furbearers to make clothing and other products as well as for human and pet food is sustainable and environmentally sound. Their trapping efforts can help eliminate wasting important renewable resources available to us.
- **They help to protect and recover endangered species:**
  - Many furbearer species were extirpated in the state by the late 1800s. Beaver, fisher, and American marten are successful recovery stories in Vermont, and we could not have done that without their expertise in trapping and their overall support. Trappers help us monitor rare and endangered species such as marten and lynx simply by providing observation and sharing other environmental information.
  - Trappers can focus on removing invasive species that threaten native ecosystems or predators that pose a threat to endangered species, thereby contributing to the preservation of biodiversity. There are no examples where this has been done in Vermont, but in the Delmarva Peninsula of Maryland, nutria were eradicated from the state by including regulated trapping as one too. This enhances the protection of fragile coastal ecosystems.
- **They provide funding for wildlife conservation:** Trapping license fees paid by trappers are used for the protection of wildlife habitat and populations. Trappers who add a Vermont Habitat Stamp when purchasing a license help continue important habitat improvement project throughout Vermont.
- **They are a valuable collaborator with conservation organizations by:**
  - Helping us to implement management plans and to make meaningful changes for sustainable populations of furbearers in Vermont.
  - Communicating about the importance of trapping and what it means to them to other organizations, media and legislators.
  - Helping to raise funds for activities and events that further promote furbearer conservation.

## Vermont Habitat Stamp Raises \$450,000 for Conservation in Fiscal Year 2022



The Vermont Habitat Stamp raised \$221,337 in 2022 and leveraged a \$228,567 federal match, totaling just under \$450,000 for the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's land conservation and habitat improvement efforts.

"This is our second strongest year for the Habitat Stamp since the program was established in 2015," said Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Lands and Habitat Program Manager John Austin. "The growing support for habitat conservation and enhancement reflected in healthy Habitat Stamp sales over the past eight years is encouraging."

## Furbearer Program Research and Testing

An important component of furbearer management in Vermont is the ongoing partnerships the Department has with multiple universities and researchers to collect disease, genetic, and contaminant data from the carcasses that trappers are required to turn in on an annual basis. These data are critical to understanding the status of furbearer population health and well-being. During the 2022-23 season, we collaborated with trappers and several researchers on projects led by VFWD or one of our partners.



Coyote, Dan Dzurisin

## Rodenticides in Fisher and Bobcat

### *Vermont Results*

The 2021-22 trapping season was the third year the Department collected liver samples from fisher to test for the presence of rodenticides. It was the first season we tested for their presence in bobcats. Other states in the region have also been testing for rodenticides; however, they are more challenged since, unlike Vermont, few other states have mandatory collection of fisher, otter, and bobcat carcasses.

Results of testing fisher and bobcat for anticoagulant rodenticides (AR) indicate the presence of up to six different AR compounds in 94 percent of the fisher tested. Bobcat results indicated up to three compounds present in 31 percent of the samples tested. While concerning, no conclusions can be drawn yet. The source of the compounds found and the concentration at which they could potentially negatively affect an individual animal's health is yet to be determined.

Earlier this year, VFWD shared the results of our fisher testing with a team of researchers at the Frair Lab at State University of New York's School of Environmental Science and Forestry. The SUNY ESF team is exploring options for using models to help us understand the potential population level impacts. They found widespread exposure in not only Vermont but in other states as well. It is one more collaborative effort by trappers, hunters, wildlife managers, and researchers. Hopefully this collaboration can lead us towards understanding the effects of rodenticides on fisher and other wildlife species.



Fisher

## Testing bobcats for the presence of gammaherpes virus and parvovirus

Researchers from St. Michael's College continued the partnership with VFWD in the study of two viruses in the Vermont bobcat population. Through the collection of samples from trapped and hunted bobcats, they will identify the presence of viral DNA from gammaherpesvirus and parvovirus in Vermont bobcat tissue samples; estimate the relative prevalence of viral infection; test for associations with bobcat age, sex, and location; and characterize levels and types of genetic diversity in viral genomes. Parvoviruses are capable of infecting and causing disease in other carnivores as well and are found worldwide. As of this date, the project is still in the analysis phase, and no conclusions have been drawn yet.

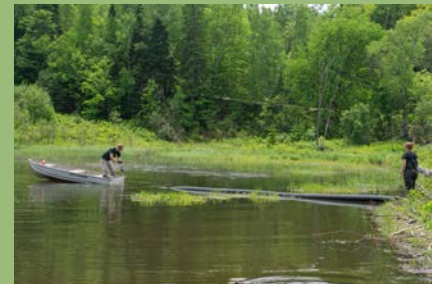
## Echinococcus multilocularis

We are pleased to report that 68 fecal samples from Vermont coyotes and fox submitted to be tested for Echinococcus multilocularis (EM) proved negative for the parasite. During the 2021-22 trapping season, Staff collected the samples from coyotes and foxes voluntarily turned in by trappers and hunters. The samples were sent to two different labs to test for EM, a zoonotic tapeworm that can cause Alveolar echinococcosis (AE), a severe zoonotic disease in humans that affects the liver. The testing was done in cooperation with a researcher from Virginia Tech University studying the prevalence of this parasite after several cases were reported in humans in the Northeast. Samples from wild canids in Maine and Pennsylvania were also tested. While Vermont did not participate in the effort this past winter, the research is ongoing, and staff will be keeping abreast of future developments.

## Beaver Program Update

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's beaver baffle project is still serving Vermonters throughout the state. Staff receive, on average, 400 calls/emails, conduct over 50 site visits, and install 15 baffles and exclusion fences a year. This project assists landowners, road crews, towns, and other municipalities and organizations who are experiencing conflicts with beavers. The goal of the project is to maintain, whenever possible, the valuable wetland habitat that beavers create for the many benefits to fish, wildlife, and people. These dam building activities can sometimes create difficulties for people by plugging culverts, flooding agricultural land, chewing trees, etc. To date, the project is responsible for the installation of over 330 devices influencing almost 3,700 acres of beaver-created wetland habitat.

The Beaver Baffle Project is funded largely by a US Fish and Wildlife Service grant and funds from the Vermont State Duck Stamp. More information can be found here: <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/beavers>



Top: Tyler Brown and Bree Furfey install a beaver baffle.  
Below: Tyler Brown installs a beaver exclusion fences.



# Roadkill Observation and Data System (ROaDS)



Bobcat

## Why care about roadkill data?

Why did the bear cross the road? To get to the other side is the common answer. But as we dig into that, we realize there is more to it than that. All animals need food, water, shelter, and access to mates. Some animals' movement across the road, particularly among species with big home ranges, is to meet these basic needs. Different food sources are available in different spots at different times of year, causing some species to move around to get what they need. A black bear might utilize lower elevation wetlands in the spring, as they are home to some of the first plants to green up. In the summer they might eat berries in open meadows and in the fall gorge on beechnuts and acorns up on the ridges. That might take them across many roads over the course of a year. A single black bear can have a home range of 10,000 to 20,000 acres. Similarly, radio tracking data from the Champlain Valley shows male bobcats have a 27-mile home range, moving approximately 19 miles each day.

Some movements are part of annual migration. Each spring salamanders emerge from underground in forested uplands and move downslope (often across a road) to wetland breeding sites. After breeding, they head back up the hill. This is a movement of perhaps only 600 feet, but in places where this happens, thousands of animals might cross a road in a single night in the spring.

Many species are adjusting their home ranges in response to a warming climate. The Nature Conservancy estimates entire populations are moving north and south away from the equator at about 1 mile per year. In Vermont, that movement is not just south to north. Wildlife crossing usually happens where wetlands and forests are close to both sides of the road. Excellent spots for wildlife crossing are where streams and rivers go under the road. Many of our bridges and culverts do facilitate that kind of movement. Some structures, particularly older ones, often do not.

Thinking about wildlife movement leads us to think about habitat connectivity; the network of connected waters and forests across the state that allows for animals to move around to meet their needs now and into the future. Roadkill tells us where our road system is still acting as a barrier and can be helpful information to fish & wildlife and transportation managers about spots where improvements are necessary. In some cases that could mean enlarging nearby bridges or culverts to allow for under-the-road movement.

Please help us learn more about where wildlife is crossing roads by using the Roadkill Observation and Data System (ROaDS) app to report roadkill and animals close to the road. Download the "ArcGIS Survey123" app onto your phone or tablet and then go to <https://anr.vermont.gov/content/vt-roads-and-wildlife> for the QR code and instructions on how to get started using the app.

## STAY SAFE WHILE COLLECTING ROADKILL DATA

- Don't collect data while driving.
- Never pull over on the side of interstates and state routes.
- Use only established parking areas.
- Only get out to take a photo if you have appropriate reflective gear and are on a less-traveled road with safe access to the carcass.

## Outreach and Education Corner

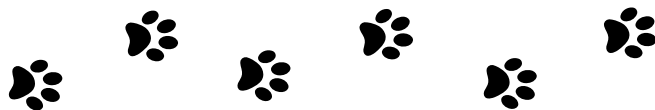
Outreach and education are just as important to VFWD's work as biological and ecological management and conservation. Here's a look at the combined efforts that the Furbearer Project and Outreach and Education Teams have accomplished in the past year:

- Completing a statewide survey of Vermonter's knowledge and attitudes about furbearer conservation and summarizing the key findings for visitors to our web page: [.https://vtfishandwildlife.com/vt-residents-furbearer-survey](https://vtfishandwildlife.com/vt-residents-furbearer-survey).
- Giving interviews with Vermont Public, WCAX, VTDigger, and other media about our beaver baffle project, coyotes, eastern wolves, marten, and proposed changes to trapping and hunting coyotes with the aid of dog regulations
- Writing an op-ed on the importance of regulated trapping to furbearer conservation, which was printed in VTDigger and many local papers across the state.
- Keep the furbearer webpage on the Department's website up to date with the current data, proposed and/or current regulation changes, BMP news, and a variety of publications focusing on furbearers.
- Using social media to educate others about furbearer species, especially the importance of beaver and wetland conservation and restoration in Vermont, to share news about the importance of trapping, and to highlight opportunities for public comment on the furbearer rule changes.
- Completing two full-day photoshoots on furbearer conservation topics including beaver trapping and beaver baffle installation, to create media that we can use to educate others about our work.

- Meeting with landowners and public groups to educate them about beavers and how beaver-related problems can be resolved.
- Giving furbearer-related presentations to school classes of all age groups, for town conservation committees and libraries, and for campers at Vermont State Parks.
- Providing correct and scientific information about mange and wildlife diseases in light of citizen concern for the animals and what citizens can and shouldn't do to help.
- Attending local outreach events year-round (see calendar of events in related article).
- This newsletter!

We have much more furbearer outreach planned for the coming year as well. Along with keeping the initiatives outlined above going strong, here are some things to watch for in the future:

- Developing signs for state lands like WMAs to increase public awareness about trapping seasons in public use areas.
- Creating a video and brochure giving instructions on how to remove domestic pets from foothold traps.
- Educating the public on the wide array of threats to furbearer populations like habitat loss, climate change, and conflict with people.
- Speaking out about the dangers of online harassment when hot button topics like trapping are getting attention on social media.
- Creating a fact sheet to show how regulated trapping provides the most cost-effective and reliable sources of furbearer data.





## Furbearer Education Kits Continue to Get Excellent Reviews

Now that Covid-19 restrictions have lifted, the furbearer education kits are once again back in circulation and getting excellent reviews. No surprises there! The kits have visited preschools, summer camps, adult education classes, wildlife management courses for educators, regional high school tech centers, and even the Vermont Envirothon – a statewide competition where high school students put their knowledge of forestry, wildlife, soils, and water resources to the test.

The education kits are available to anyone interested in giving kids and adults a hands-on look at the history and biology of the 14 species of furbearers in Vermont. The contents include field guides; videos; a curriculum guide; scat, track, and skull replicas; and pelts. If you would like to reserve a kit, contact your district VT Fish & Wildlife office, or call or email Mary Beth Adler for more information (802-289-0629 or marybethadler@vermont.gov).



*Furbearer Kit*

## Upcoming Outreach Events

A team of VFWD staff attended and helped organize the Herricks Cove Wildlife Festival in

Rockingham this Spring in partnership with the Ascutney Mountain Audubon Society. IT was the first after a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic. The VFWD tent was elbow-to-elbow with inquisitive kids and adults asking questions about bats, bears, fish, furbearers, invasive plants, and reptiles. The furbearer pelts and skulls, scat, and track replicas were, as always, a hit with young and old alike. There were a variety of wildlife-related exhibits, birding and turtle walks, a demonstration of an evidence search by a State Game Warde and his canine partner, crafts for kids and lots of food.

The Herricks Cove Wildlife Festival was one of several that VFWD staff will be attending this year. Come say hello at these upcoming events:

### **Dead Creek Wildlife Day**

Saturday, October 7, 2023

Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area  
966 VT Route 17,- Addison, VT

### **Yankee Sportsman Classic**

January 19-21, 2024

Champlain Valley Expo, Essex Junction, VT

### **Herrick's Cove Wildlife Festival**

Sunday, May 5, 2024

Herrick's Cove, Bellows Falls, VT

**NEW DUE DATE FOR ANNUAL TRAPPER REPORT: Beginning in 2024, Annual Trapper Reports will be due April 15. Reporting forms for the 2023-24 trapping seasons will be available on our website Jan. 1, 2024 as well as mailed to licensed trappers the first week of March.**

## Furbearer Harvest and Effort Data

The Department thanks you for your efforts to provide the critical data necessary to monitor the health and sustainability of furbearer populations in Vermont. Below are the harvest numbers for every furbearer species based on your trapper mail survey reports and the blue card returns (otter, bobcat, and fisher). We use this information both to monitor changes in harvest levels and to compare the harvest with the effort expended (number of traps X number of nights) by trappers. This is very important when monitoring wildlife populations so we can know what factors may be most significantly affecting the harvest.

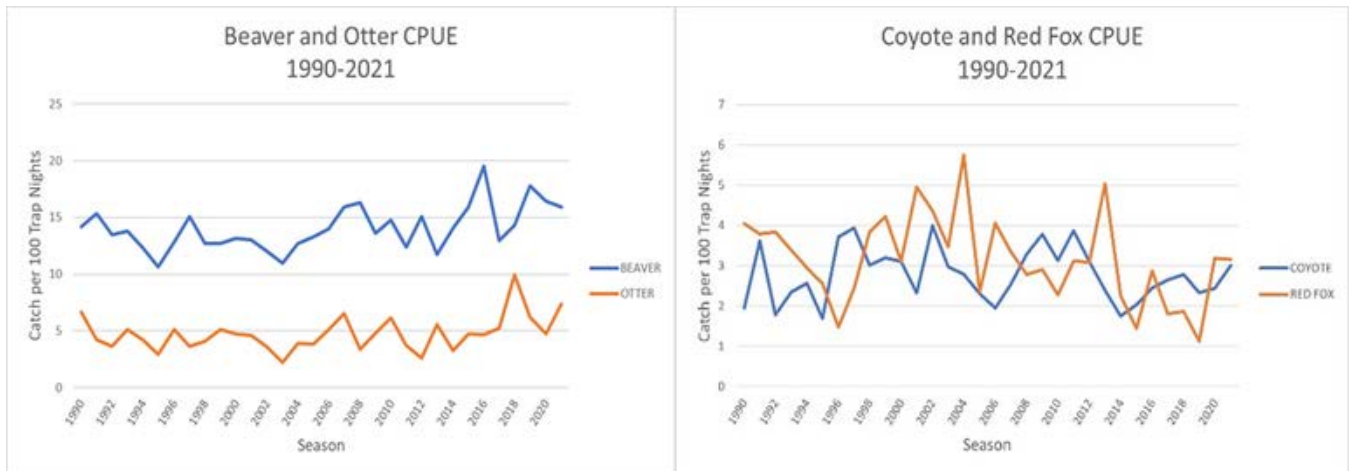
### Summary of annual trapper mail survey derived estimated\* furbearer harvests, 2012-13 through 2021-22

Season	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Mink 	749	748	800	299	212	168	95	125	184	113
Raccoon 	1,044	1,004	953	648	382	504	442	273	361	323
Muskrat 	10,770	8,737	9,053	8,199	2,490	1,558	1,291	686	716	1,325
Skunk 	385	218	218	241	204	106	183	89	105	116
Opossum 	139	61	214	79	63	109	56	27	66	84
Weasel 	340	36	92	11	72	14	54	18	46	25
Coyote 	612	726	626	462	378	511	357	298	352	341
Red Fox 	229	306	270	181	126	221	118	81	130	87
Grey Fox 	175	130	81	69	31	60	51	26	43	45
**Bobcat 	150	154	116	93	107	84	100	117	111	109
**Fisher 	539	417	428	263	232	184	248	198	179	90
**Otter 	269	246	154	155	113	128	93	85	90	109
Beaver 	2,125	2,139	1,504	1,789	1,198	865	776	725	844	909
<b>Total Estimated Harvest</b>	<b>17,505</b>	<b>14,825</b>	<b>14,452</b>	<b>12,419</b>	<b>5,536</b>	<b>4,461</b>	<b>3,774</b>	<b>2,649</b>	<b>3,155</b>	<b>3,634</b>

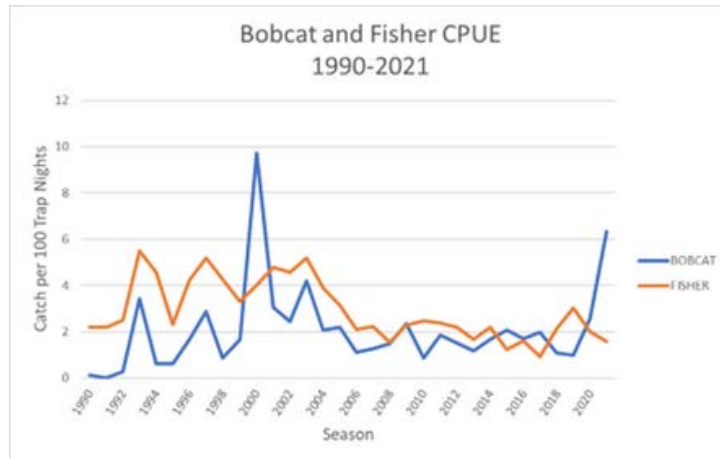
\* Total reported harvest multiplied by correction factors until 2017-18 season when figures represent those reported from the mandatory survey.  
 \*\*Fisher, otter, bobcat data are from pelt tagging records and in the case of bobcats, includes hunted and incidentally taken animals (roadkill, starvation, etc.).

The Fish & Wildlife Department monitors furbearer population trends through the annual collection and assessment of trapper derived Catch per Unit of Effort (CPUE) data. It is an indirect index of population trends that helps biologists track the growth or decline of furbearer populations over time. This index is universally used across the world to measure capture rates for trapping, and is similarly used for other applications including wildlife field camera surveys, hunter sighting rates, etc.

In the case of trapping, CPUE is the average number of animals trapped per 100 trap nights, where trap nights equal the number of traps set multiplied by the number of days they were deployed (e.g., 5 traps X 6 days = 30 trap nights). The graphs below show the trends from 1990 to 2021. For more information about CPUE for all furbearer species as well as furbearer management in Vermont, visit the Furbearer Management and Conservation In Vermont webpage at <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/hunt/hunting-and-trapping-opportunities/furbearers-and-trapping/furbearer-newsletter-and-other-resources>.



**Catch per Unit of Effort of Beaver, Otter, Coyote, and Red Fox, 1990 to 2021**



**Catch per Unit of Effort 1990 to 2021 of Fisher and Bobcat**

## Memories from a Lifetime on the Trapline

Recently I saw an ad for a subscription to Fur-Fish-Game magazine and the iconic red letters pictured on the front cover of the latest issue transported me back in time. As a 10-year-old boy, I would run downtown and stare through the drugstore window at the magazine rack in anticipation of the next issue. When it finally arrived, I would flip through the pages breathlessly to the Trapline section and read about trappers running their lines in far flung wild places for marten, fisher, mink, and beaver. Seeing that magazine again, I was flooded with trapline memories I experienced over the years and what they have meant to me. In 55 years of trapping, one covers a lot of ground and is blessed with many unique experiences.

My goal was to run wilderness traplines like the trappers I read about in the remote Adirondacks, northern Maine, and Alaska. For me, trapping was never solely about catching animals but was also the experience of surviving in the wild backcountry and honing my skills as a woodsman. My evolution as a trapper would take me on bike, car, and canoe traplines often accompanied by schoolboy chums, my brother, and the neighborhood kids. In time, I would run my own trapline in the backcountry while living out of a tiny log cabin reached by a faint steep foot trail in the Green Mountains. I also would follow long, grueling traplines above 3,000 feet elevation along the spine of the high Green Mountains for bobcat and fisher.

Of all my trapping, my days on the beaver trapline in the backcountry were my favorite. I was lucky to have as a mentor Middlebury trapper Barry Forbes, who unselfishly took this 15-year-old kid under his wing. These traplines emulated most closely a true wilderness trapping experience. Together we ran beaver traplines in the Green Mountain covering a large loop of backcountry to reach active colonies that we scouted in the summer and fall.

We ate beaver meat sandwiches for lunch and spent hours chopping holes through 2' thick ice to set our number 3 jumps and double long spring traps carefully on dry poles and 330 conibears in the beaver channels. The sight of a conical beaver lodge protruding above the alders topped with freshly peeled yellows sticks still produces a sense of excitement and anticipation in my heart all these years later!

I will never forget kneeling in the snow and peering down the icy hole to where my trap was set and finally seeing the scaly tail of my very first beaver come into focus in the tannin-stained pond water. The frigid water splashing up from my excited chopping formed an icy sheath on my wool clothes which had to be thawed out later that night by the home woodstove, but I was burning hot with excitement within! On these long traplines we were cold and tired often, lugging blanket-size beaver in our pack baskets down icy mountain trails. If we had more than we could carry, we would drag them out tying them together like I had seen pictures of how the Cree trappers did it in the far North. We wanted the carcasses to eat or to feed our dogs. Long nights were spent in our old farmhouse cellar performing the arduous process of skinning, fleshing, and stretching each of the big rodents.

As a young, easily influenced boy, I reveled in the trapping culture and felt a keen connection with trappers around me. Gayle Forbes



was also influential in shaping me as a trapper. An expert trapper with a sharp wit and keen mind, Gayle knows more about trapping and furbearers than most of us ever will. I hung on every word that he told me- each of his stories sprinkled with his characteristic Vermont humor. When I picked up some new trapping instruction book at the annual trappers meeting, he would laugh and say, "Remember Willy, the mink don't read the same books you do!"

When I graduated from high school, I lived in a tiny log cabin for a year on a mountain and tried my hand at trapping for a living. It was very slim living indeed! When I reluctantly moved on to higher education the next year, trapping would help pay my college expenses. On winter break I ran high mountain traplines following the Long Trail, spending cold nights in a pup tent and crude shelters I built in the wind-whipped spruce and fir forest. Snowshoe hares cooked on my tiny camp stove supplemented my meager food supply, and their raw skins were wrapped around my wet socks for warmth. On another memorable winter trapline, I camped in a makeshift plastic tipi with my hound dog as my only companion, who would crawl each night deep in my sleeping bag for warmth. I suffered physically and sometimes emotionally as well, but the lure of the lifestyle and the anticipation of what adventures awaited me each morning on those long traplines drove me on despite the cold, lack of food, and aching legs. I would not trade those experiences for anything!

Today, my trapping has been reduced to a week or 10 days each fall trapping for mink and muskrats near home, but this fall ritual is still important because it connects me to my past, the natural world, and a rural culture I still find alluring. It is vital to defining who I am. I no longer beaver trap because my beloved plott hounds now call to me each winter, and we work as a team to trail the mysterious bobcat through the dense cedar swamps and bogs of the Northeast Kingdom. I feel so blessed to have the treasured memories of traplines from the past that are triggered whenever I see the next new issue of that iconic magazine – Fur-Fish-Game!

*By Will Staats, Victory, Vermont*

**THANK YOU FROM THE  
FURBEARER MANAGEMENT  
PROJECT STAFF!**

### ***Bobcat in White Wine***

2 lbs. bobcat meat  
¼ cup butter  
Pinch of thyme  
1 tsp. chopped parsley  
½ cup chicken bouillon  
½ cup white cooking wine  
Salt & pepper

Remove all fat from two pounds of bobcat meat. Slice ¼ inch thick and lightly season with salt and pepper. Heat butter in a skillet and brown meat on both sides. Transfer to a casserole dish. Combine pinch of thyme, chopped parsley, chicken bouillon, and cooking wine. Pour this sauce over meat, cover casserole, and bake at 350 degrees for approximately 45 minutes.



*Recipe contributed by Clyde Noyes from The Maine Way cookbook.*

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## Your Furbearer Management Project Staff



We are here to serve the wildlife resource and you! Please don't hesitate to contact us with questions or comments.

**Bree Furfey - Furbearer Program Leader**

Brehan.Furfey@vermont.gov

**Tyler Brown - Wildlife Specialist**

Tyler.Brown@vermont.gov

**Mary Beth Adler - Furbearer Technician**

MaryBeth.Adler@vermont.gov

**Chris Bernier - Furbearer Program Biologist**

Chris.Bernier@vermont.gov

**David Sausville-Wildlife Management Program  
Manager**

David.Sausville@vermont.gov

**Maj. Sean Fowler-Deputy Chief**

Sean.Fowler@Vermont.gov

**Katy Gieder - Biometrician**

Katherina.Gieder@Vermont.gov

**Chris Saunders - Fish & Wildlife Planner**

Chris.Saunders@Vermont.gov

**Nicole Meier - Hunter/Trapper Education**

Nicole.Meier@Vermont.gov