

2013-14 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #14-4

The Fur Harvest Survey provides estimates of (1) numbers of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, (2) values of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, and (3) distribution of the harvest among resource users. This project is supported in part by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program (Project W-99-R, Study X).

METHODS

State law requires licensed fur buyers to maintain records and submit reports of all raw furs purchased. We mailed report forms and written instructions to licensed buyers about 10 days before the opening of the muskrat trapping season. Buyers who failed to report by the deadline were sent up to 2 reminders by first class mail and another by certified letter.

Buyers provided estimates of (1) raw fur purchases from Illinois hunters and trappers, (2) average pelt prices for all sizes and grades, and (3) percentages of pelts taken by fur hunters. We corrected estimates for non-response and out-of-state pelt sales. Trappers who captured a river otter were required to purchase an Otter Registration Permit within 48 hours; sales of pelts were based on sales of permits to trappers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Department issued 181 permits to fur buyers during 2013-14. Based on a 96% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 230,020, an increase of 14.5% from 2012-13 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers increased 8.2% to \$2,763,629.75. Raccoon and muskrat accounted for 85% of the total harvest and 79% of its value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 6% for striped skunk to 67% for coyote; they were intermediate for opossum (15%), red fox (22%) and gray fox

(31%). Hunters accounted for the same proportion of the raccoon harvest in 2013-14 as 2012-13 (49%).

Today, pelt values are driven mainly by demand from foreign markets such as Russia and China. Economic conditions, monetary exchange rates, political events and severity of winters in overseas countries shape fur markets in North America and contribute to their volatility.

Favorable global markets lifted pelt prices to levels not seen since the late 1970's and early 1980's. Sales of trapping licenses increased accordingly (from 6,384 in 2012-13 to 7,870 in 2013-14). This was the greatest number of licenses sold since 1988-89. During 2012-13, approximately 10,200 raccoon hunters spent 97,000 days afield and 31,000 coyote hunters spent 257,000 days afield (Miller et al. 2013).

Pelt sales during 2013-14 were similar to long-term averages (since 1975-76) for striped skunk (105%) and raccoon (94%). Sales exceeded historic averages for beaver (139%), coyote (256%) and badger (142%), but lagged for muskrat (18%), mink (18%), opossum (46%), red fox (26%), gray fox (3%) and weasel (14%).

LITERATURE CITED

Miller, C.A., A.L. Stephenson, L.K. Campbell, and J.P. Clark. 2013. 2012-13 Illinois hunter harvest report. INHS Technical Report 2013 (38). Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, Illinois, USA.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2012-13 vs. 2013-14.

Species	Number of pelts sold ^a		Change in sales from 2012-13 ^b		Average price per pelt (dollars)		Total value to fur-takers (dollars)		Change in value from 2012-13 (dollars)	
	2012-13	2013-14			2012-13	2013-14	2012-13	2013-14		
Muskrat	32,453	25,122	-7,331	(-22.6)	9.65	8.90	313,171.45	223,585.80	-89,585.65	(-28.6)
Mink	1,193	1,389	+196	(+16.4)	16.80	15.05	20,042.40	20,904.45	+862.05	(+4.3)
Raccoon	139,879	169,543	+29,664	(+21.2)	12.30	11.55	1,720,511.70	1,958,221.65	+237,709.95	(+13.8)
Opossum	3,833	7,550	+3,717	(+97.0)	1.35	1.25	5,174.55	9,437.50	+4,262.95	(+82.4)
Red fox	923	1,134	+211	(+22.9)	29.95	33.70	27,643.85	38,215.80	+10,571.95	(+38.2)
Gray fox	87	59	-28	(-32.2)	22.90	21.90	1,992.30	1,292.10	-700.20	(-35.1)
Beaver	9,708	6,690	-3,018	(-31.1)	13.95	13.45	135,426.60	89,980.50	-45,446.10	(-33.6)
River otter	2,002 ^c	1,303 ^c	-699	(-34.9)	73.30	57.10	146,746.60	74,401.30	-72,345.30	(-49.3)
Striped skunk	544	573	+29	(+5.3)	3.30	2.95	1,795.20	1,690.35	-104.85	(-5.8)
Weasel	7	6	-1	(-14.3)	0.85	0.65	5.95	3.90	-2.05	(-34.5)
Coyote	10,246	16,607	+6,361	(+62.1)	17.60	20.80	180,329.60	345,425.60	+165,096.00	(+91.6)
Badger	38	44	+6	(+15.8)	9.45	10.70	359.10	470.80	+111.70	(+31.1)
Total/mean	200,913	230,020	+29,107	(+14.5)	12.70	12.00	2,553,199.30	2,763,629.75	+210,430.45	(+8.2)

^aIncludes correction for non-response and allowances for out-of-state pelt sales as estimated by the Illinois Trapper Survey, 2013-14 (Wildlife Harvest and Hunter Opinion Surveys, W-112-R).

^bNumbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.

^cBased on sales of Otter Registration Permits.