

Alexander B. Grannis
Commissioner

Furbearer Management News

Summer 2008

“We’re Back!!!”

After a long absence and a couple of failed attempts at resurrection, the Furbearer Newsletter is back. We heard loud and clear from trappers how much they missed this item and we made it a priority and now we are able to deliver.

There have been many changes to the Furbearer Management Team since the last edition (see list of team members with contact info) and there has also been a tremendous amount of research being conducted on various furbearer species throughout the state. Some of that research is highlighted in the articles in this newsletter edition.

Our goal is to offer this newsletter on a regular basis but we could use your help in this endeavor. If there are items of particular interest to you either regionally or on a statewide basis, please contact your Regional Furbearer Biologist to discuss your ideas for future articles.

We sincerely hope you enjoy this and future newsletters!

The Editors,
Andy and Scott

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Is It One Research Project? or Three?

Several of our research projects are closely connected. Our efforts to understand bobcat populations in an area that has been closed to harvest for decades, and answering the implications of different harvest opportunity for fisher, tie directly to our research efforts to develop a furbearer harvest assessment and management program. The following three articles provide a summary update of this combined effort.

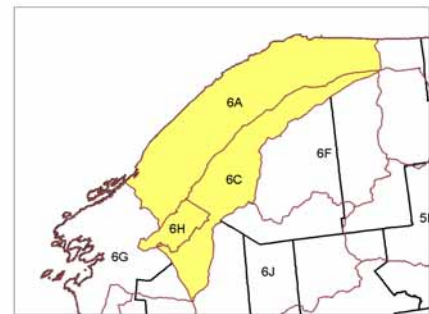
The Experimental Research Trapping Season for Fisher Results from Seasons One and Two

Andy MacDuff - Region 6

For many years, trappers have sought a change in fisher trapping season dates to better take advantage of peak fur primeness for this animal. Over the last couple of decades, trapping season dates have tended to lie between late October and early December. Department biologists chose this season structure due to concerns of the potential of over harvest of fisher.

Trappers who take fisher are required to complete a furbearer possession tag and have these animals or their pelts sealed before they are sold, allowing the Department to gather valuable data. A review of the data from 2001 to 2005 show that the total harvest of fisher exceeded two thousand animals annually in four of the five seasons including two years of record harvest. The pelt sealing data reveal that fisher were being taken in increasing numbers in areas where few or none had been taken previously. These data, combined with input from trappers, prompted the Department to evaluate the current season structure.

In 2004, the Department entered into a research project with Cornell University to look at the feasibility of using trapper effort data in conjunction with estimates of survival/mortality and population growth for the management of a number of furbearer species, including fisher. This venture led to the creation of an Experimental Research Trapping Season (ERTS) for fisher. The ERTS would run from October 25 to January 10 in the St. Lawrence River Valley aggregate (Wildlife Management Units 6A, 6C, and 6H - see map below) for three successive seasons. This area was selected for the research because it is located outside of "core" fisher range and had shown a trend of increasing fisher harvests in recent years. All trappers wishing to participate in the ERTS were required to obtain a free trapping permit from the Department. As a condition of the permits, trappers were required to maintain and submit a daily log book of their trapping activities (to provide effort data) and to submit the lower jaw (to provide age data) from all fisher taken in the study area. In year two, this second permit condition was expanded to require the submission of the entire carcass of female fisher to facilitate data collection on reproduction.



Experimental Fisher Trapping Area

The first year of the ERTS was completed in January of 2007. Three hundred and fifteen permits to trap were issued with a resultant total catch of 754 fisher. Roughly 27% of those fisher were taken from December 11, 2006 to January 10, 2007 (the "extended" portion of the season) by less than 25% of the permitted trappers. Compliance with jaw and daily log book submission was excellent.

Season two of the ERTS ended in January of 2008. Number of permits issued was down significantly from year one, with only 204 trappers requesting a permit. Harvest figures

from this recently completed season have not been compiled as of this date but early indications are that overall take will be less than in year one.

Trappers wishing to participate in the 2008-09 season should contact the Region 6 Wildlife Office in Watertown beginning in mid-August when licenses go on sale to obtain an application for a permit.

The Experimental Research Trapping Season for Bobcat

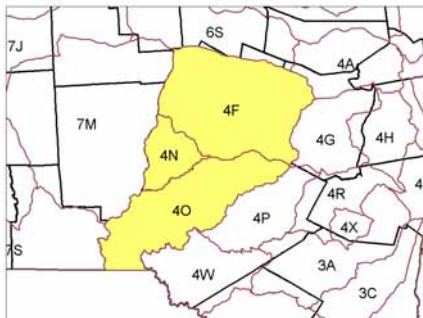
Bill Sharick - Region 4

During much of the 20th century, substantial numbers of bobcats were taken annually in the Adirondacks and portions of eastern New York. However, it was common knowledge that bobcats were rare, or at least uncommon, in central and western New York. During the first six years of the regulated harvest (1976-77 through 1981-82), the season was open in the three counties of the northern and western Catskills: Delaware, Otsego and Schoharie. However, the number of bobcats reported taken in this area was low, and capture locations were widely scattered. Beginning in the fall of 1982, the area including all of Otsego, western Schoharie and northern Delaware Counties, termed the Delaware-Otsego Hills (DOH) ecological zone, was closed to harvest. Wildlife biologists believed the bobcat population in the area was not secure and that any animals in the region were widely dispersed. The population of bobcats was simply deemed not large enough to provide an annual surplus that could be removed by hunting and trapping. Managers believed that, given protection from harvest, over time the number of bobcats would increase to fill all suitable habitat and sport harvest could resume.

As the years passed, outdoors enthusiasts began to report observing bobcats in ever increasing numbers. During the years 2002 through 2005 there were approximately 200 reported observations. By the end of 2005 bobcats were reported sighted in all but one town within the DOH Zone. As a result of these reports, DEC biologists began to believe the bobcat population in the DOH zone could be large enough to support a limited harvest.

DEC wildlife staff explored the use of a modified fur harvest season to gather biological information from the carcasses of animals taken by trappers. Specifically, age, sex, and reproductive information would be used to determine the size and health of the population. Harvest location information would further the knowledge of bobcat distribution.

In 2004 the DEC began a cooperative effort with Cornell University to estimate various furbearer population factors such as survival, mortality, and population growth. The project would also be designed to evaluate the use of information that can be obtained from measuring trapping effort. This is possible because trappers keep track of the number of traps they set, the number of days the traps are in operation, and the number of bobcats and other animals they catch.



Experimental Bobcat Trapping Area

The study of bobcats in the DOH Zone has required the design of a three-year experimental research trapping season in Wildlife Management Units 4F, 4N, and 4O, which include parts of Delaware, Otsego, Schoharie, Broome and Chenango counties (see map). The season is structured to run concurrently with the regular land fur trapping season in southern NY. No hunting of bobcats is allowed in the study area.

During the period of the three-year study, trappers

wishing to participate must obtain a special free permit from DEC, agree to keep a daily trapping log of their activities and, if successful, provide the entire skinned carcass to DEC. Bobcat trappers were also offered the option of allowing DEC to mark and release the animal in return for compensation comparable to current pelt values.

The first of the three experimental seasons was completed in February 2007. Seventy permits were issued and twenty-two bobcats were captured. One animal was tagged by DEC staff and released. During the second experimental season in 2007-08 fifty three permits were issued, and 18 bobcats were captured. Five of the 18 bobcats were tagged by DEC and released. One of the tagged bobcats was later captured and harvested.

Trappers who wish to participate in the 2008-09 season should contact the Region 4 Wildlife Office in Stamford at (607) 652-7367 in September of 2008 to obtain an application for a trapping permit.

Furbearer Harvest Assessment and Management

Nathan Roberts - Cornell University

NYSDEC and Cornell University have initiated a project to examine fisher, otter, and bobcat management in the state. The goal of this project is to determine what information should be used to make the most informed furbearer harvest and management decisions.

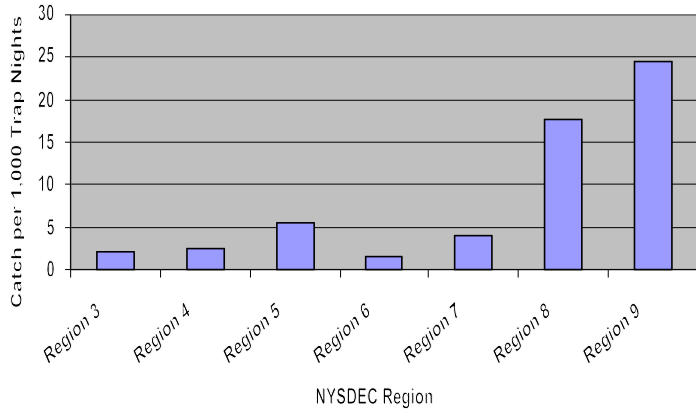
We are exploring the utility of using data collected from carcasses, such as age and sex ratios, to infer the status and trends of populations. In addition, we will evaluate the usefulness of trapper effort data to indicate similar trends.

Trappers have an opportunity to be directly involved with this research and contribute to the information used in making key management decisions. Trappers have been a tremendous help by voluntarily donating fisher, bobcat, and otter carcasses. Carcasses provide a wealth of information about the age structure of populations and their reproductive capabilities. As these carcasses are examined, we will be sending trappers reports on the animals they submitted.

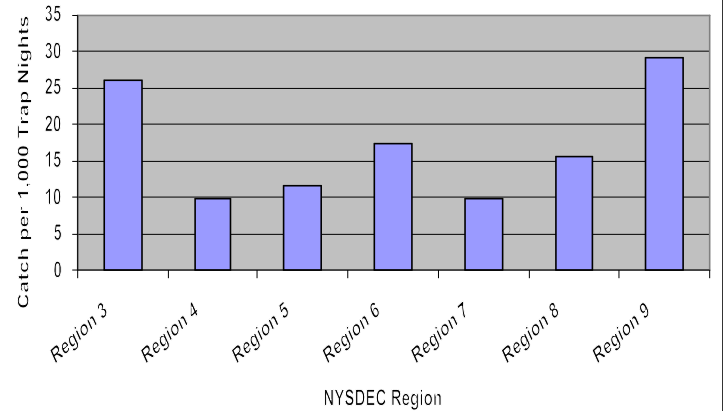
Since 2005, we also distributed more than 11,000 Daily Trapping Log booklets to trappers across the state. These logbooks are for trappers to record the number of traps they have set and their catch. We are not asking for the specific location of sets, what types of traps are used, whether the catch was intentional, or what was done with the animal. We are only looking for the number of traps set, WMU they were set in, and what was caught.

Why do we want to know this? We are looking to measure trapping effort as it relates to catch. This approach is used in several states for several game species as one indicator of population trends. We would like to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of collecting and using this information in New York. Participation from trappers is vital in this evaluation. **If you received a logbook, please mail it once completed.** Even if you only trapped a little, or only recorded your information for part of the season, please return the logbooks. The backs of these logbooks are addressed and the postage is paid. To mail, just tape the booklet shut and drop into the mail. We are in the process of analyzing this information we have collected to date; however, we wanted to share some of the preliminary results of the more common species here.

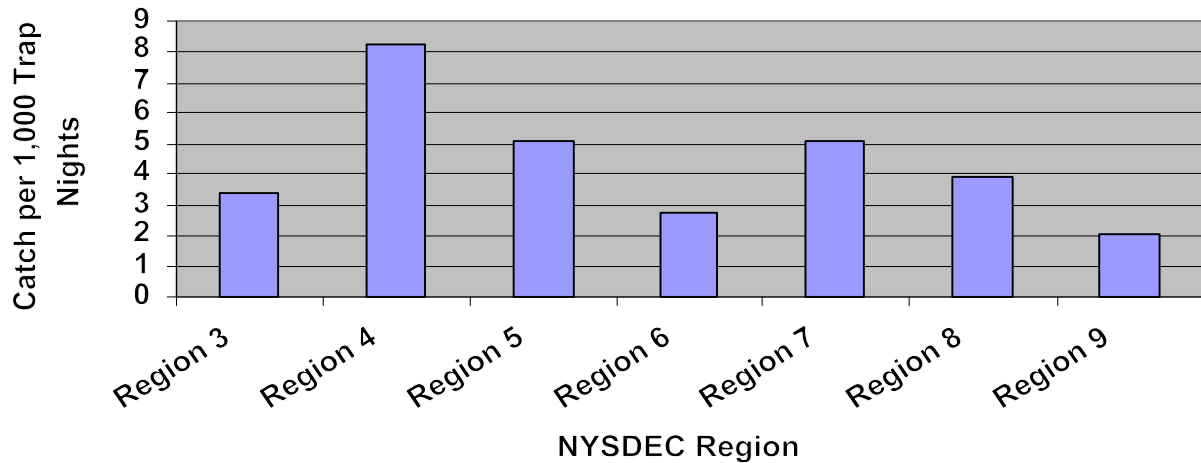
Red Fox Catch per 1,000 Trap Nights



Raccoon Catch per 1,000 Trap Nights



Coyote Catch per 1,000 Trap Nights



This research effort is expected to last another year. We appreciate your help and cooperation with this research effort. If you have any questions, concerns, or comments, please feel free to contact me: Nathan M. Roberts, Cornell University, 207 Fernow Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853, 607-254-5478, nmr25@cornell.edu, www.dnr.cornell.edu/furbearer

Region 7 Fisher Camera Study

Gary R. Pratt - Region 7

In recent years Region 7's Bureau of Wildlife has received numerous reports of sightings, road kills, track observations, and incidental catches by trappers of fisher in Wildlife Management Unit 7A. This unit is the only unit in what is grouped as an ecological zone called the Oswego Lowlands. This area has been transforming from primarily agriculture to more a mature forested habitat over the last century. This change coupled with increased populations of fisher in the nearby Tug Hill area has contributed to the ability of fisher to expand their range into WMU 7A.

Region 7 wildlife staff with the help of several Oswego County trappers and landowners planned and implemented a trail camera study for checking the presence or absence of fisher at several locations within WMU 7A. Because of nearly nonexistent public lands in 7A the Bureau of Wildlife sought and obtained permission from five gracious landowners to conduct this study on their properties.

Seven baited camera sites were selected in various locations within the Towns of New Haven, Palermo, and Mexico. The sites were chosen on the basis of fisher sightings and incidental catches of fisher by local trappers. The cameras were located in what is considered primary fisher habitat of mixed coniferous and hardwood forests adjacent to coniferous swamps or even muck fields. Muskrat carcasses donated by a local trapper were wrapped in one inch mesh chicken wire and the selected site was baited with a lure of skunk essence and petroleum jelly. The bait was attached to a leaning pole set with the camera placed 10-15 feet away.

The results of this study were encouraging. The cameras captured photos of fisher at five of the seven locations. Also, some interesting photos of other species such as deer, raccoon, redtail hawk, squirrel, and coyote were made at these sites.

This survey was a preliminary step in an effort to gain more knowledge of the expansion of fisher populations in the Oswego Lowland ecological zone.

New York Suburban Coyote Study

Dan Bogan (Ecology) & Heather Wieczarek (Human Dimensions)
Cornell University Graduate Research Assistants

In recent years, the NYSDEC has received an increasing number of reports about coyotes in residential areas. Many of these reports originate in rapidly expanding suburban areas and in other areas with high human population density. Within these regions, coyote populations are rarely exposed to hunting and trapping pressure. Additionally, local residents may not tolerate the presence of coyotes in backyards or developed spaces. These circumstances can lead to the opportunity for more frequent human-coyote interactions and conflict between people and coyotes.

To help with management and decision-making related to this emerging issue, the NYSDEC has partnered with Cornell University to study suburban coyotes and their interactions with humans in suburban Westchester County just north of New York City.

Ecology and behavior research

The Cornell Coyote Research Team captured and radio collared 31 coyotes living in or near residential areas of Westchester County. Using radio or G.P.S. equipped tracking collars,

the researchers document the location and movement of coyotes. Preliminary results indicate that coyotes spend most of their time in natural areas. However, some coyotes occasionally travel through residential areas, which can create the potential for negative human-coyote interactions.

In addition, the researchers are collecting scat and examining the undigested contents to determine what suburban coyotes eat. This may identify possible food attractants that draw coyotes close to people.

Using a combination of the home range data and state-of-the-art DNA techniques the researchers will estimate the relative density of coyotes living in the study area.

Human dimensions research

The human dimension's investigation explores people's attitudes about and behaviors toward coyotes. A random sample of 1,160 Westchester residents, were surveyed about coyotes. Survey results indicated that community members have a high awareness of coyotes, but that the occurrence of problematic interactions is less common. Respondents recognized the low risk in their community but expressed high levels of concern about coyotes in a variety of situations. Local and state agencies may have an opportunity to provide residents with information about coyotes and encourage the adoption of behaviors that avoid problems with coyotes.

The human dimensions' project is currently conducting a second inquiry in Saratoga County. Residents in this area have lived with coyotes longer and the NYSDEC receives fewer reports from this area than from Westchester. The survey will help to identify any potential differences between the two regions in community perceptions of coyotes, or the number of human-coyote interactions. This information will be used to assist the development of statewide coyote management protocol.

Through the integration of both the ecology and human dimensions research, the New York Suburban Coyote Study aims to provide comprehensive insight into issues surrounding suburban coyotes so that the NYSDEC and local communities can make informed management decisions.

For more information about the study, please visit: www.nycoyote.org

Population Status and Foraging Ecology of Coyotes in New York State

Dr. Jacqui Frair - SUNY ESF

In 2007, the DEC partnered with SUNY-ESF to investigate coyote ecology. The study objectives are: 1) estimate the number of coyotes occupying NY State, and 2) determine the potential impacts of coyotes on deer populations. These objectives will be met with a combination of intensive field monitoring of coyotes and through the use genetic techniques. We are conducting this research in two study areas: Otsego County in central New York where deer density is low and Steuben County in western New York where deer density is high. Robin Holevinski (Ph.D. candidate), has been intensively monitoring coyotes in Steuben County. Christina Boser (M.S. candidate), is trapping and radio-collaring animals in Otsego County. Coyotes have been fitted with G.P.S. and standard VHF collars that will allow us to better understand habitat selection, movements, and feeding behavior. With data collected from these collars, we intend to get to feeding locations quickly enough to determine whether coyotes were scavenging or preying on deer. Future work will include genetic mark-recapture efforts

using coyote scats to estimate population density and evaluation of a statewide approach to sampling coyote scats to derive a statewide population estimate. Initial genetic sampling of coyotes was undertaken with the help of trappers and hunters around the state.

REGION 7 BOBCAT OBSERVATION REPORT SOLICITATION SUMMARY

Wendy Baltzersen - Region 7

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Bureau of Wildlife has wanted to learn more about the occurrence and distribution of bobcats in Central and Western New York for some time. In areas of the state open to hunting and trapping of bobcats, information on bobcat populations is obtained through the mandatory pelt sealing of harvested bobcats. Information is sparse in other areas that are closed to bobcat hunting and trapping, which includes most of Central and Western New York. The Bureau of Wildlife in Region 7 initiated an effort to inform people that their bobcat observations are important to the NYSDEC and to encourage reporting them.

Informational packets including a personalized letter explaining our effort, an informational flyer to post in view of patrons, with Bobcat Observation Report Cards were mailed during October 2006. We also made the information available to hunters and trappers who speak with staff and distributed information at county sportsmen federation and trapper association meetings. Finally Bobcat observation information was posted on the NYSDEC website making the information available statewide.

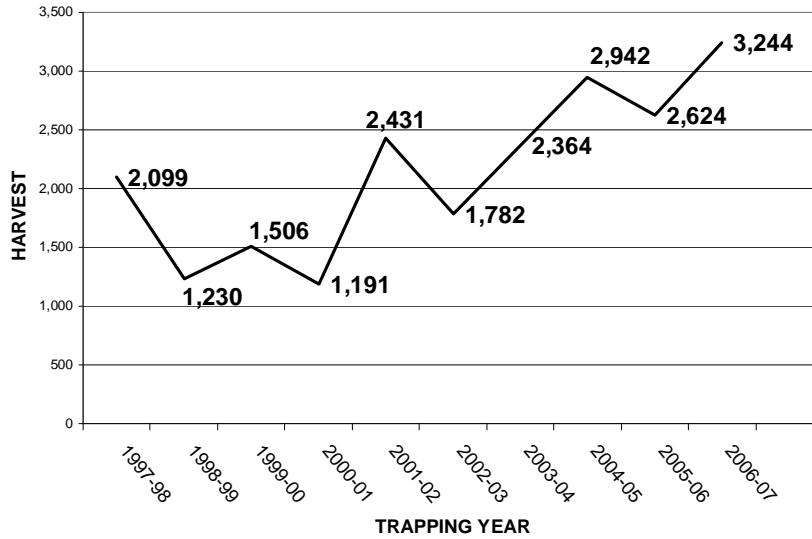
Fifty-six bobcat observation reports from 17 different counties were reported by the end of 2006. Seventy eight percent (44) of the reports were from Region 7. Onondaga Co. accounted for the highest number of reports (15) and Chenango county with six reports was the second highest.

In 2007, we expanded our effort to include fisher and otter observations as well as bobcat. Of the 161 reports we received, 105 were bobcat sightings. Otter accounted for 31 sightings and fisher 25. The greatest number of credible bobcat reports came from Onondaga (25) and Tioga (22) counties.

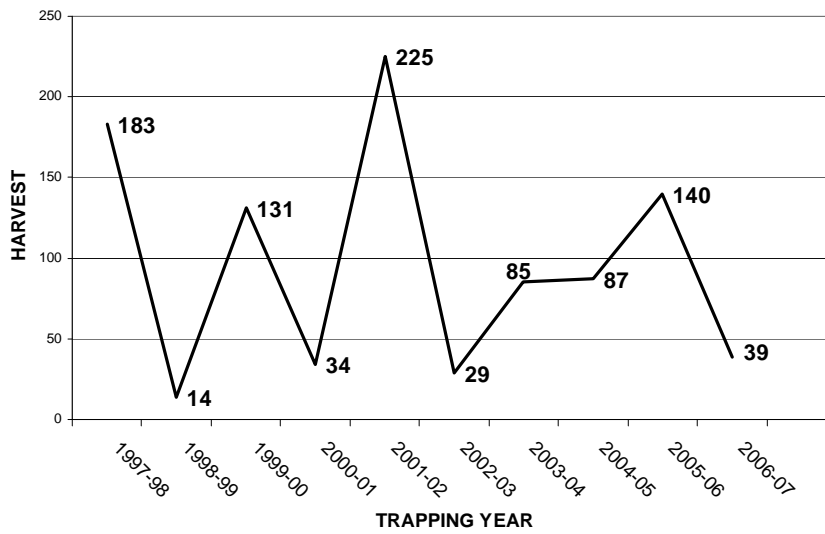
For 2008 For 2008 we plan on expanding the effort to Regions 8 and 9 to solicit observation from across Western and Central NY. The information on the website will be upgraded to include fisher and otter along with contact information for other regions.

Harvest Numbers of Pelt Sealed Furbearers

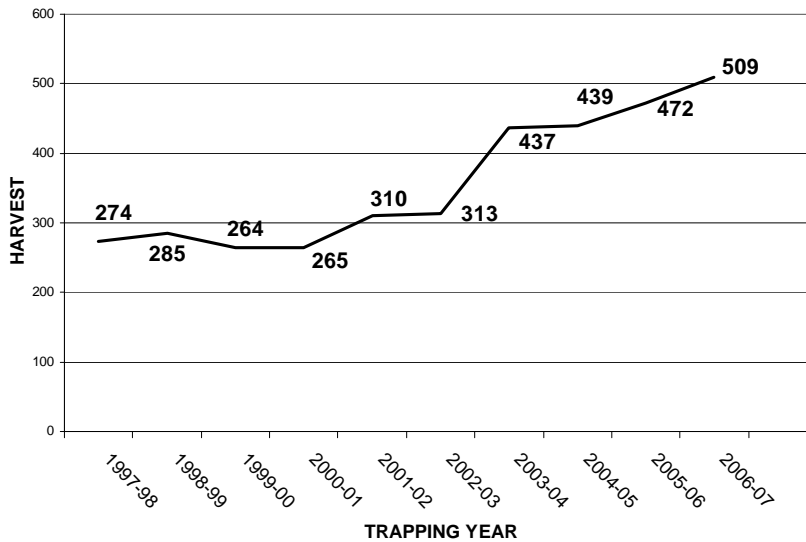
10 YEAR FISHER HARVEST



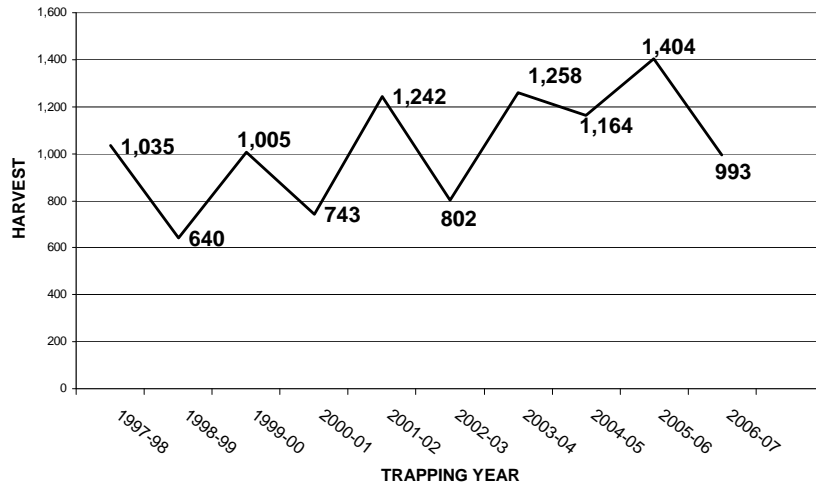
10 YEAR MARTEN HARVEST



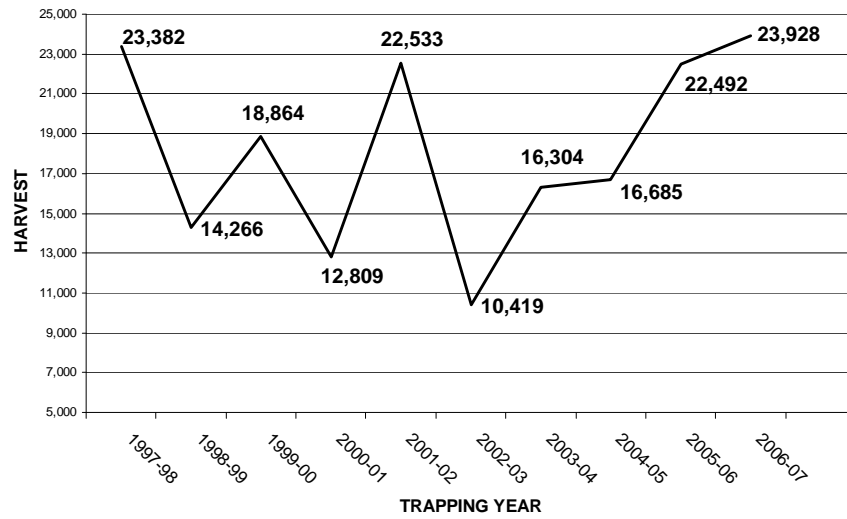
10 YEAR BOBCAT HARVEST



10 YEAR RIVER OTTER HARVEST



10 YEAR BEAVER HARVEST





Alexander B. Grannis
Commissioner

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
BUREAU OF WILDLIFE



FURBEARER OBSERVATION REPORT

FURBEARER OBSERVATION (select one)		BOBCAT <input type="checkbox"/>	OTTER <input type="checkbox"/>	FISHER <input type="checkbox"/>
OBSERVATION DATE	OBSERVATION TIME	COUNTY	TOWN	
EXACT LOCATION (Address, Nearest Cross Roads, GPS Location, Nearest Town, etc)				
NUMBER OF ANIMALS OBSERVED		TRACKS? Yes No (circle one) Please take pictures of the tracks		
YOUR NAME				
_____		First	Last	MI
MAILING ADDRESS				
_____		Street	Apt#	City
_____		State	Zip	
MAY WE CONTACT YOU FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR OBSERVATION(S) ?				
Telephone number (s) (____) _____ (____) _____				
e-mail address: _____				

Please report bobcat, otter, or fisher observed in the Southern Zone of NY. This Furbearer Observation Report can be mailed, or the same information phoned or emailed, to your regional Furbearer Biologist listed on the front page.