STATE OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME NONGAME BIRD AND MAMMAL SECTION

LICENSED FUR TRAPPERS' AND DEALERS' REPORT 1989-1990

by

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January 1991

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INTRODUCTION

The Department has been gathering information on the number of furbearing mammals harvested, their value, and the number of licenses sold in California since 1919. Early reports of take were gathered by compiling data from a sample of licensed trappers. Since the 1952-53 season each licensed trapper has been required to report their annual take of furbearing or nongame mammals for profit in order to purchase a trapping license for the following season. As of January 1, 1983, anyone being issued a trapping license must pass a test of trapping competence and proficiency and pay a fee. For 1989-90 that fee

Adult: \$50.75 Juvenile: \$17.00 Nonresident: \$253.50

Over the years the take and monetary return to the trapper for his/her furs has varied greatly. The number of licenses sold increased during the 1920s to 5,243 in the 1927-28 season. Fur revenues were relatively high at that time as well. With the depression and World War II fur revenues and trapping license sales decreased dramatically. This decline continued until about 1970 when the fur value and take began to increase. The increase was rather dramatic over the next decade; the number of licensed trappers increased from less than 500 to more than 3,900 and the fur value increased from about \$50,000 to almost \$2,400,000. Until 1988-89 the 1980s has seen a slight decrease and stabilization of both fur values and the number of licensed fur trappers, at level of revenue and number of trappers about half of that at the beginning of the decade. During 1988-89 the fur market returned to a level similar to that of the mid-1970s, just at the beginning of the resurgence in interest in furs that has dominated the market since that time. In trapping year 1989-90 fur revenue dropped to \$47,669.54.

METHODS

Section 467, Title 14, California Code of Regulations, requires that all licensed trappers report their season's harvest by the end of the trapping year (July 1) or not receive a trapping license for the next season. On these reports the trappers note the number of each species of furbearer or nongame animal taken for commercial purposes, the number of each species sold, the county of take for each species, and the dealers to whom the furs were sold.

Likewise, licensed fur dealers and their agents annually report their purchases of furs. The dealers are required (Section 4040, Fish and Game Code) to report the number of furs of each species taken in California that they bought and the average price paid per fur for each species.

After the trappers' and fur dealers' reports are received by the Department, the data from these are compiled to determine the take for each species, the distribution of that take, and the variations in that take from previous years. These compilations of data are presented herein.

RESULTS

A total of 834 trapping licenses were sold during the 1989-90 trapping season, a decrease of 33% from the 1,244 licenses sold in the 1988-89 season (Table 1). This was the seventh successive year in which license sales were below 1,800 and the lowest number of licenses sold since the 1975-76 season. This level is well above the 450 to 1,000 licenses sold annually during the period from 1950 to 1976 but below the 3,000 plus licenses sold in the years immediately preceding the increase in license fees and the mandatory proficiency examination. Current fur prices are not likely to encourage license sales to reach 3,000 in the near future.

| Table 1. Numbers of trappers buying lice | nses and rep | porting their | harvest. |
|--|--------------|---------------|----------|
| | 1987-88 | 1988-89 | 1989-90 |
| Licensees who reported successful trapping effort | 979 | 706 | 382 |
| Licensees who reported but did not trap or were unsuccessful | 271 | 271 | 214 |
| Licensees not reporting | 120 | 267 | 238 |
| Total licenses sold | 1,370 | 1,244 | 834 |

Revenue received by trappers from the sale of furs during the 1989-90 season, based on average prices paid by fur buyers, was \$47,699.54 (Table 2). This is 90% below the revenue of \$489,850.54 received in 1988-89 and 98% below the high of \$2,399,565 of 1978-79. Fur revenue is the lowest since the 1967-68 season.

The average income per successful trapper decreased by 82% from \$694.00 in 1988-89 to \$125.00 in 1989-90. This is the lowest income per successful trapper in at least 25 years.

Each year a portion of the fur harvest is reported as unsold. During the 1989-90 season 37% was unsold, compared to 30% unsold during the 1988-89 season. Unsold pelts still have value, and for the purpose of this report they have the same monetary value as marketed pelts. Therefore, the estimated value of the 1989-90 fur harvest was \$86,907.22, a decrease of 87% from the \$650,183.48 of the 1988-89 season.

Furs were reported taken in all counties except Alameda, Contra Costa, Del Norte and San Francisco (Table 3).

Bobcats continued to be the most economically important animals providing 61% of the total value of California's furs. Although 2,980 export tags were sold for bobcats taken during the 1989-90 season in a program requiring tags for the sale or shipment of bobcat furs, holders of trapping licenses only reported the take of 2,493. This is a 57% decrease from the reported take of 5,165 during the 1988-89 season. The average price paid per bobcat was \$17.91, an 82% decrease from the average price of \$102.31 paid during the 1988-89 season. This year the lower value of bobcat pelts, along with the decrease in take, resulted in a 93% decrease in the overall value of bobcat.

Muskrats, historically the most economically important furbearer, were third in importance behind bobcats and gray foxes during the 1989-90 season. The 72% decrease in average value of muskrat pelts, and the 56% decrease in take, resulted in an 83% decrease in the overall value of muskrats. The gray fox, the second most important furbearer, had a 36% decrease in pelt value and a 66% decrease in take which resulted in a 77% decrease in the overall value of gray foxes. Coyote was the fourth most economically important furbearer and it sustained a 43% decrease in take, and an 18% decrease in average pelt value.

Number of animals taken, average price paid, and revenue Table 2. received by species during 1987-88 and 1988-89. 1988-89 Fur Value Harvest Species Sold Unsold Total Average Revenue NR* 25 67 92 Badger \$ 2,113.92 \$ 5.76 255 622 Beaver 367 1082 5165 \$102.31 \$417,731.73 4083 Bobcat 3614 5228 6.39 \$ 10,313.46 Coyote 1614 2412 6952 \$ 5.92 \$ 26,876.80 Gray Fox 4540 \$ 10.34 \$ Mink 140 31 171 1,447.60 20066 1.57 \$ 28,391.88 Muskrat 18084 1982 \$ NR Opossum 172 440 612 3.06 2,701.98 883 862 1745 \$ Raccoon NR Spotted Skunk 205 231 26 2281 2.19 313.17 Striped Skunk 143 2138 Weasel NR 13091 43168 \$489,890.54 Total 30077 1989-90 Harvest Fur Value Sold Unsold Total Revenue Species Average \$ 72 \$ 2.85 11.40 Badger 4 68 154 586 \$ 5.82 896.28 Beaver 432 872 2493 \$17.91 \$29,032.11 Bobcat 1621 Coyote 592 2373 2965 \$ 5.26 \$ 3,113.92 3091 \$ 3.78 \$ 6,297.48 Grav Fox 1666 1425 102 46 148 \$ 8.23 839.46 Mink Muskrat 8065 818 8883 \$.60 \$ 4,839.00 NR Opossum 11 256 267 \$ 2.51 \$ 2,610.40 Raccoon 1040 1104 64 10.90 Spotted Skunk 5 46 51 \$ 2.18 \$ Striped Skunk 17 1334 1351 \$ 1.43 18.59 Weasel 34 1 35 7735 Total 13311 21046 \$47,669.54 * NR = None reported sold

Table 3. Number of animals reported taken by licensed fur trappers and by species and county during the 1989-90 trapping season.

| State | County | Badger | Beaver | Bobcat | Coyote | Gray Fox | Mink | uskrat | : 1 Opossum | Raccoor | Spot.Skur | Strip.Sk nk | unk Wease | Total |
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| Yolo 1 1 55 2 Yuba 11 1 90 1 Unknown 21 2 6 1 1 Total Animals Trapped 72 2493 586 2971 3091 148 8883 267 1104 51 1351 35 21 | | 1 | | 168 | | | | | | | | | | 84 |
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| Unknown 21 2 6 1 1 Total Animals Trapped 72 2493 586 2971 3091 148 8883 267 1104 51 1351 35 21 | | | 1 | | | 11 | | | | | | | | 10: |
| Total Animals Trapped 72 2493 586 2971 3091 148 8883 267 1104 51 1351 35 21 | | | | | - | | 1 | 90 | | | | | | |
| Trapped 72 2493 586 2971 3091 148 8883 267 1104 51 1351 35 21 | Unknown | | | 21 | 2 | 6 | | *************************************** | | 1 | | | | 3 |
| | | 72 | 2/.03 | 584 | 2071 | 3001 | 1/2 | 2222 | 247 | 1104 | 51 | 1351 | 35 | 2104 |
| % Total Take .3 2.8 11.8 14.1 14.7 .7 42.2 1.3 5.2 .2 6.4 .2 9 | | | | W. 100 1000 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | % Total Take | .3 | 2.8 | 11.8 | 14.1 | 14.7 | .7 | 42.2 | 1.3 | 5.2 | .2 | 6.4 | .2 | 99. |

Once again more muskrats were taken than any other species. The 8,883 muskrats taken during the 1989-90 season represented 42% of the total take. This is a slight decrease from the 46% that this species represented during the 1988-89 season but the total take is the lowest reported for this species since the 1934-35 season.

During the 1989-90 season there were 16 licensed fur dealers. Three (19%) licensed fur dealers reported on their 1989-90 activities and reported buying furs. All reporting dealers were from California. They reported buying 2003 pelts in California, amounting to a total purchase of \$7,970.44. This represents handling only 15% of the furs reported sold by licensed trappers and a 84% decrease of California furs sold to licensed fur dealers during this last year. The average prices paid by the reporting dealers is used to calculate the fur value for each species and the value of furs reported bought by the dealers.

| | Range of | | No. of Furs | Total | | |
|---------------|------------|------|-------------|------------|--|--|
| Species | Average Pr | ices | Purchased | Spent | | |
| Badger | 2 | .85 | 7 | \$ 20.00 | | |
| Beaver | 3.00 - 10 | .00 | 90 | \$ 523.47 | | |
| Bobcat | 15.00 - 17 | .92 | 268 | \$4,801.14 | | |
| Coyote | 2.00 - 20 | .00 | 29 | \$ 152.57 | | |
| Gray Fox | 3.67 - 19 | .75 | 220 | \$ 833.67 | | |
| Mink | 6.50 - 8 | .41 | 11 | \$ 90.63 | | |
| Muskrat | | .60 | 1004 | \$ 610.73 | | |
| Opossum | | NR | 0 | 0 | | |
| Raccoon | 2.27 - 10 | .00 | 368 | \$ 923.79 | | |
| Spotted Skunk | 1.24 - 4 | .01 | 4 | \$ 8.72 | | |
| Striped Skunk | 2 | .86 | 2 | \$ 5.72 | | |
| Weasel | | NR | 0 | 0 | | |