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California Department of Fish and Game
Job Final Report

Project Number: W-65-R-4 Project Title: Nongame Wildlife Investigations

Job Number: I-10 Job Title: Furbearer Harvest Reports and Coordination

Period Covered: July 1, 1986 - June 30, 1987

Summary:

Commercial Fur Trapping

During the 1986-87 season, 1,347 trapping licenses were sold, a decrease of 9% from last year, and still well under the 3,900 sold in 1982-83. This reduction continues to reflect the increased fees for a trapping license and decreasing raw fur values. Data on the total reported take of furbearing mammals can't be assessed by the deadline for this Job Final Report because of the chronic tardiness of some commercial fur takers in returning their annual reports.

During 1985-86 revenues from sales of furs decreased 34% from \$1,381,571.64 in 1984-85 to \$907,898.46. Also, the average income from furs, per trapper, decreased by 21% from \$1,342.64 in 1984-85 to \$1,063.11 in 1985-86. Again bobcat was economically the most important furbearer; the reported take of 7,043 was 22% below the reported take of 1984-85. The average price paid per bobcat pelt was \$107.86, a 14% decrease from the average of \$121.96 paid in 1984-85, and resulted in a 22% decrease in the total revenue received from bobcat pelts. The 26,509 muskrats taken during the season comprised 48% of the total furbearer take. The take and value of all major species of furbearers taken in California were below the levels of take and value in 1984-85.

Eighteen of 23 licensed fur dealers reported their purchases for the 1985-86 season. They bought 52% of the fur reported sold by licensed trappers and spent \$475,848.31 doing it. Six dealers reported buying no furs and three reported purchasing more than \$100,000 worth of furs.

Trapping Regulations

There were no changes made in the furbearer and nongame mammal hunting and trapping regulations.

Coyote Hunting

Generally, coyote hunters and their take have decreased over the last 15 years. These hunters are spending more time hunting but the percent of successful hunters and the average annual take per coyote hunter has remained relatively

constant over the same period. However, in 1986 coyote hunters spent relatively little time in the field but their take and success increased to the point that take per unit of effort doubled from 1985 to 1986.

Background:

Furbearer harvest data, including the number of trapping licenses sold, fur revenues, and total fur values are available for nearly every year since 1919. The total number of trapping licenses sold reached a peak of 5,234 during the 1927-28 season, then fluctuated each year until 1947-48, when a period of gradual decline began, reaching a low of 466 sold in 1967-68. An increasing trend began in 1972-73 and reached a peak of 3,901 in 1982-83. Average revenue per trapper remained below \$300 with a low of \$12.39 in 1932-33, until an upward trend began in 1971-72, and reached a peak of \$1,741.34 in 1978-79. For many years the annual fur revenue averaged about \$100,000 after a low of \$10,572 in 1932-33. In the mid-1970's a dramatic increase in total annual fur value started. It peaked in 1978-79 at \$2,399,565. The most economically important pelts before 1937 included skunk, raccoon, coyote and mink. In 1937 the muskrat became the most important until it was replaced by the bobcat in 1975.

The 1985-86 trapping season was the eighth year since laws were enacted requiring trappers to: a) submit a trapping report by July 1, and b) to submit a trapping report whether or not a license was to be purchased for the following season. These laws were enacted to gather harvest information on the previous season before the onset of the next season. Over the last eight years many trapping reports have not been submitted within the legal time period and there is a long history of a large percent of licensed trappers not reporting each year. The 1985-86 season is the sixth full season where fur dealers were licensed and had to report their purchases.

Senate Bill No. 1671, Watson, was approved by the Governor on September 29, 1982 and became effective on January 1, 1983. This bill made four major changes in trapping laws. First, it required all traps, including those being used for animal damage control, even by a government agency, to be identified. Secondly, it required the Department to develop standards necessary to insure the competency and proficiency of all applicants for a trapping license. In practice this results in license applicants passing an examination or taking a course and then passing an examination to become licensed. Once the licensee has passed the examination he/she will not have to pass it again in succeeding years. This law required the Department to design examinations and courses; part of this work was done by staff. Thirdly, SB 1671 increased the fee for a resident's trapping license from \$10 to \$50 after July 1, 1987 with annual increases of \$5 prior to that date. Junior licenses were increased to \$15 and the fee for non-residents was increased to \$200. These latter two increases were to become effective with the bill. The non-resident fee was increased to \$225 for the 1986-87 season as the result of increased Department costs. The last major change increased the penalty to \$5,000 and/or imprisonment for six months for failure to properly identify traps.

Since 1968 the Department, as part of its annual survey of licensed California hunters, has queried hunters on their annual take of coyotes and bobcats. These are the two most commonly hunted species of nongame mammals and furbearers, and contribute substantially to the over-all mammal hunting program in the state.

Objectives:

1. Determine the annual harvest of furbearers and nongame mammals in California and compare data to that of previous years.
2. Review suggested changes in trapping laws and regulations and make recommendations for the future management of furbearing mammals including possible changes in trapping seasons, methods and/or bag limits.

Procedures:

Annual trapper reports and fur dealer reports are due to the Department by July 1 of each year. An annual report is prepared in which the season's harvest is tabulated by species and by county, the value of the annual fur catch is estimated from fur prices paid by licensed fur dealers, and the economic benefit to Californians is determined. Results are compared with those of previous years, and recommendations for the next trapping season are formulated. These recommendations are reviewed by the Department and are considered for Department recommendations. Legislated changes (changes in law) originate as Senate or Assembly bills and follow the normal paths of any legislative bill.

The sport hunting take of coyotes is determined through the Department's annual hunter survey questionnaire. This survey queries a 3-4% sample of California's licensed hunters about their hunting effort and success for various species. Information on total take, distribution of hunting effort, and percent successful hunters is gathered on coyote hunting from this survey.

Findings:

Commercial Fur Trapping

Attached is the report cited below on the 1985-86 fur harvest:

Calif. Dept. Fish & Game. 1987. Licensed Fur Trappers and Dealers Report, 1985-86. Calif. Dept. Fish & Game, Wildlife Management Branch, Project W-65-R-4 (554) Job I-10, Multilith Report (September 1987), 5 pp.

During the 1986-87 year there were 1,347 trapping licenses sold--1,259 resident licenses, 43 junior licenses and 45 non-resident licenses.

Trapping Regulations

There were no changes made in hunting and trapping regulations pertaining to furbearing and nongame mammals.

Coyote Hunting

Coyotes continue to be one of the most important mammals hunted in California with consistent annual harvests of over 50,000 animals, hunter success rates of over 50%, and accounting for more than one-quarter million hunter days each year (Table 1). However, some interesting trends have developed over the 19 years for which the hunter survey has gathered information on the hunting of coyotes.

The total number of hunters has decreased by about 25% since the early 1970's and the number of coyote hunters has dropped as well, but by almost 50%. However, the total number of days spent hunting coyotes has doubled.

The number of coyotes taken has decreased by 35-40% and the number of coyotes taken per hunting day has decreased by about 65% indicating that coyotes are becoming harder to take. However, the percent of successful coyote hunters has dropped little, less than 10%, and the average coyote hunter still gets his two coyotes per year.

However, results from 1986 season show some rather dramatic changes in recent patterns. There were fewer coyote hunters than previously reported and they hunted for much fewer days. But the hunters took more coyotes and had higher success than at anytime in the last six years, and the take per effort was twice what it has been in recent years.

Analysis:

It appears that the downward trend in the fur market may not have stopped. A comparison of the take and dollar figures in recent years demonstrates this. Highs in total revenues received for furs peaked in 1978-81 at \$2,093,000 to \$2,400,000 and have since dropped by about 59%. The average income per trapper has decreased by as much as 49% since the 1978-79 season.

There is little doubt that the reduced fur market has been partly responsible for the decrease in the number of licensed trappers. However, the requirement that all trappers must pass a trapping proficiency test in order to be licensed and must pay a license fee 300% more than the previous fee were the main reasons for the decline and continued relatively low number of licensed trappers.

The regulation requiring licensed trappers to submit their annual report by July 1 continues to be a problem although compliance was not monitored this year. We continue to manage furbearing mammals with a two-year delay. This is not good management practice and every effort is made to avoid this situation with other species of game animals.

Except for the 1986 data, trends indicate that current day coyote hunters appear to be much more dedicated than their counterparts of 15 years ago, are fewer in number, and are spending more time in the field in order to maintain a high rate of success. Such trends could indicate less overall hunting pressure, or it could indicate a reduction in the number or availability of coyotes. The latter explanation is possible since after the Environmental Protection Agency's ban on predator poisons in the late 1960's, there appeared to have been an increase in coyote numbers. Such an increase would be expected to reach a high in the early 1970's and then fall back as an equilibrium amongst coyotes and between coyotes and other predator populations is reached. The current situation is difficult to assess, in part because we don't have hunter survey data prior to the late 1960's with which to compare the data since that time.

Recommendations:

1. Rescind regulations requiring licensed trappers to submit their annual report by July 1.
2. Continue to analyze trends in furbearer harvest data for future management considerations.

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Table 1. Summary of the effort expended and take in the sport hunting of coyotes, 1968-86

Year	Total # Licensed Hunters	Calc. Total # Taken	Calc. Total # Hunters	Calc. % Succ. Hunters	Calc. Avg. take Per Hunter	Calc. Tot. days Hunted	Calc. Days Hunted Per Hunter	Calc. # Animals Taken/day
1968	759163	86169	35126	.00	2.453			
1969	762732	89930	34561	.00	2.602			
1970	756975	78683	32029	.00	2.457			
1971	698799	71959	35544	.00	2.025			
1972	650023	83291	40073	44.23	2.078	188483	4.70	.442
1973	674034	83726	42456	56.42	1.972	166267	3.92	.504
1974	667349	103807	48782	57.86	2.128	198454	4.07	.523
1975	617000	92231	39859	61.28	2.314	177858	4.46	.519
1976	580080	71126	36212	56.85	1.964	171490	4.74	.415
1977	572000	67817	32955	62.07	2.058	256251	7.78	.265
1978	532000	54810	27443	64.42	1.997	192142	7.00	.285
1979	522400	67933	28529	59.97	2.381	253169	8.87	.268
1980	532850	59422	29149	61.87	2.039	232454	7.97	.256
1981	540000	53849	26887	58.10	2.003	295428	10.99	.182
1982	512433	47837	25432	52.38	1.881	287364	11.30	.166
1983	507344	54648	26496	54.69	2.063	285108	10.76	.192
1984	510516	45612	26316	54.31	1.733	305496	11.61	.149
1985	502396	53900	23667	56.52	2.277	335895	14.19	.160
1986	454073	58191	21216	59.86	2.743	180999	8.53	.321