

State of California  
Natural Resources Agency  
Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Wildlife and Fisheries Division  
Wildlife Branch



**BOBCAT HARVEST ASSESSMENT  
2019-20**

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## ABSTRACT

The 2019-20 bobcat hunt season ended two months early when new law took effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 that prohibits the taking of bobcat by hunters until 2025 at the earliest, contingent on the Department's development of a bobcat management plan (Fish and Game Code Section 4158) which shall include a statewide population estimate for bobcats and specific elements identified in the statute. Sport hunter take increased 28% in 2019-20, from the 328 bobcats taken during the 2018-19 license year. Historically, commercial trapping accounted for the majority of bobcats harvested in California (Table 1). Bobcats have not been taken by fur trappers since the 2014-15 season as a result of the November 2015 implementation of the Bobcat Protection Act of 2013 (Fish and Game Code 4155), which banned the commercial trapping of bobcats in California.

From 1977 through 2015, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife reported annually to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the number of bobcats taken through trapping and hunting in order to fulfil its obligations to the Federal Government, as a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). This international treaty restricts trade in endangered species and establishes procedures to monitor the trade of other species that might be faced with endangerment in the future. The bobcat was one of the species selected by the parties to the treaty as a possible candidate for future endangerment, primarily because of concern for the Mexican bobcat. Because other North American bobcat subspecies are considered "look-alike species" to the Mexican subspecies of bobcat (i.e. species whose specimens in trade look like those of species listed for conservation reasons), they remain listed under Appendix-II of CITES. However, California no longer allows for recreational take of bobcat through regulated trapping and no commerce in bobcat fur is allowed.

Since the 2015-16 season, data on the harvest of bobcats have been gathered exclusively through bobcat hunter tag returns. In previous seasons, data were also gathered through the issuance of tags for export of bobcat furs in accordance with CITES and the annual reports of trappers, licensed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

## INTRODUCTION

Bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) occur in southerly regions of Canada, throughout the majority of the contiguous United States and into Mexico. Bobcats occur in virtually all counties in California and inhabit virtually all suitable terrestrial habitat types. Bobcats are obligate carnivores because their diet consists of only meat. They typically stalk or ambush their prey which consists primarily of small mammals, though they may supplement their diet with birds, reptiles, amphibians or fish.

Bobcats weigh up to 40 lbs. and have a thick soft pelt with color and patterning that varies regionally. Due to the value of their fur and their status as a predator, bobcats have been trapped and hunted across their range in North America since the arrival of western settlers. Today bobcats are also valued greatly by those who enjoy recreation, wildlife watching and photography in California's wild landscapes.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Determine the bobcat harvest on a regional basis.
2. Use this and other information collected on bobcat biology and population dynamics to complete a management plan for bobcats, consistent with the provisions of Fish and Game Code Section 4158.



## METHODS

The sport hunter take of bobcats was determined through assessment of mandatory hunter tag returns for successful bobcat hunters. Hunter returned bobcat tags provide information on the method of take, the date, time, location and sex of harvested bobcats.

## RESULTS

For the 2019-20 season, the total hunter harvest of bobcats was 420 individuals. This represents an increase of 28% from the 328 bobcats taken during the 2018-19 season (Figure 1). Sport hunters took bobcats in 48 counties (Table 2).

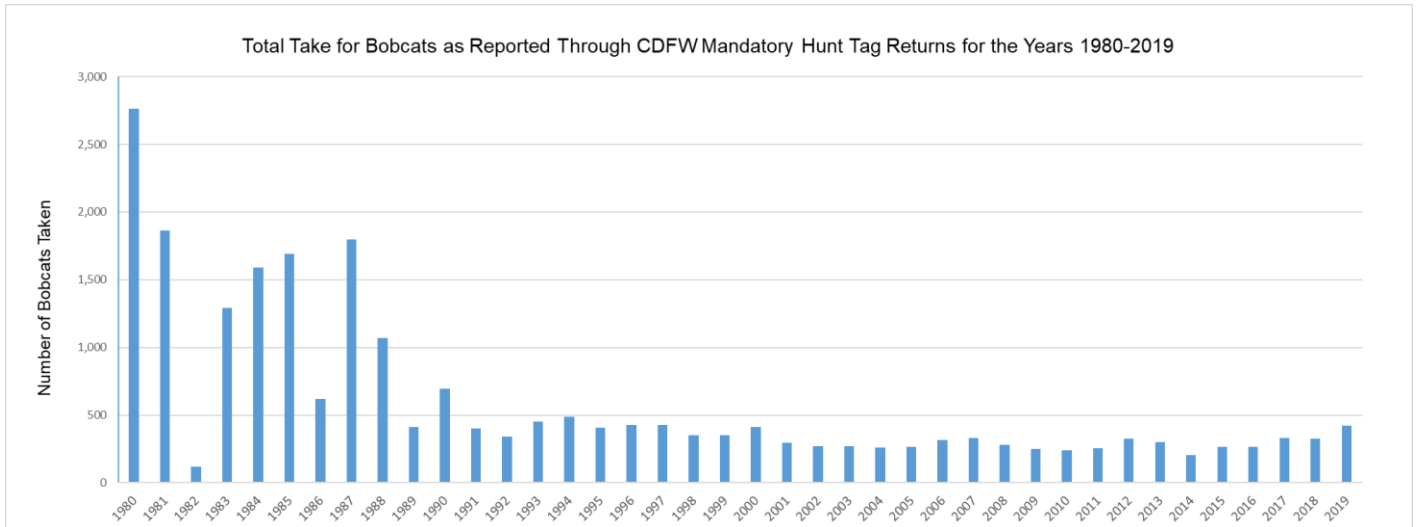


Figure 1:  
Total Take for Bobcats as Reported Through CDFW Mandatory Hunt Tag Returns for the Years 1980-2019.

## 2019-20 Bobcat Harvest Assessment

Season	Sport Hunter Take	Commercial Trapper Take	Commercial Hunter Take
1983-84	1,291	6,576	786
1984-85	1,591	7,495	1,402
1985-86	1,689	6,927	1,172
1986-87	619	8,003	1,120
1987-88	1,796	8,017	977
1988-89	1,069	4,877	709
1989-90	412	2,677	303
1990-91	695	962	186
1991-92	401	1,089	0
1992-93	342	1,039	0
1993-94	451	1,148	0
1994-95	488	1,319	0
1995-96	410	660	0
1996-97	429	1,066	0
1997-98	426	1,165	0
1998-99	353	224	0
1999-00	352	182	0
2000-01	414	190	0
2001-02	295	214	0
2002-03	342	394	0
2003-04	268	429	0
2004-05	261	506	0
2005-06	265	627	0
2006-07	317	885	0
2007-08	336	641	0
2008-09	281	623	0
2009-10	251	457	0
2010-11	240	893	0
2011-12	255	1,499	0
2012-13	324	1,214	0
2013-14	308	1,292	0
2014-15	206	760	0
2015-16	263	0	0
2016-17	265	0	0
2017-18	331	0	0
2018-19	328	0	0
2019-20	420	0	0

Table 1: Estimated Annual Take of Bobcats through Hunting and Trapping in California from 1983 - 2019

## Sport Hunting

The 2019-20 season opened October 15<sup>th</sup> and closed when new law took effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 with implementation of Assembly Bill 1254 and its take prohibition on bobcats. The maximum number of bobcat hunt tags available for purchase was 5 tags per hunter, for the 2019-20 season. A total of 10,661 tags were sold, and 3.9% of tags were reported as “successful” by bobcat hunters during the 2019-20 season.

Among bobcats harvested, 175 were female (41.7%), 245 were male (58.3%). The use of a rifle was the primary method of take for bobcat and accounted for 79% of all animals harvested (331 individuals). The use of shotgun accounted for 13% of bobcats taken (56 individuals) and 6% (27 individuals) were taken with archery equipment. Pistol or revolver and muzzle-loading rifle accounted for the remainder of bobcats taken (Figure 2).

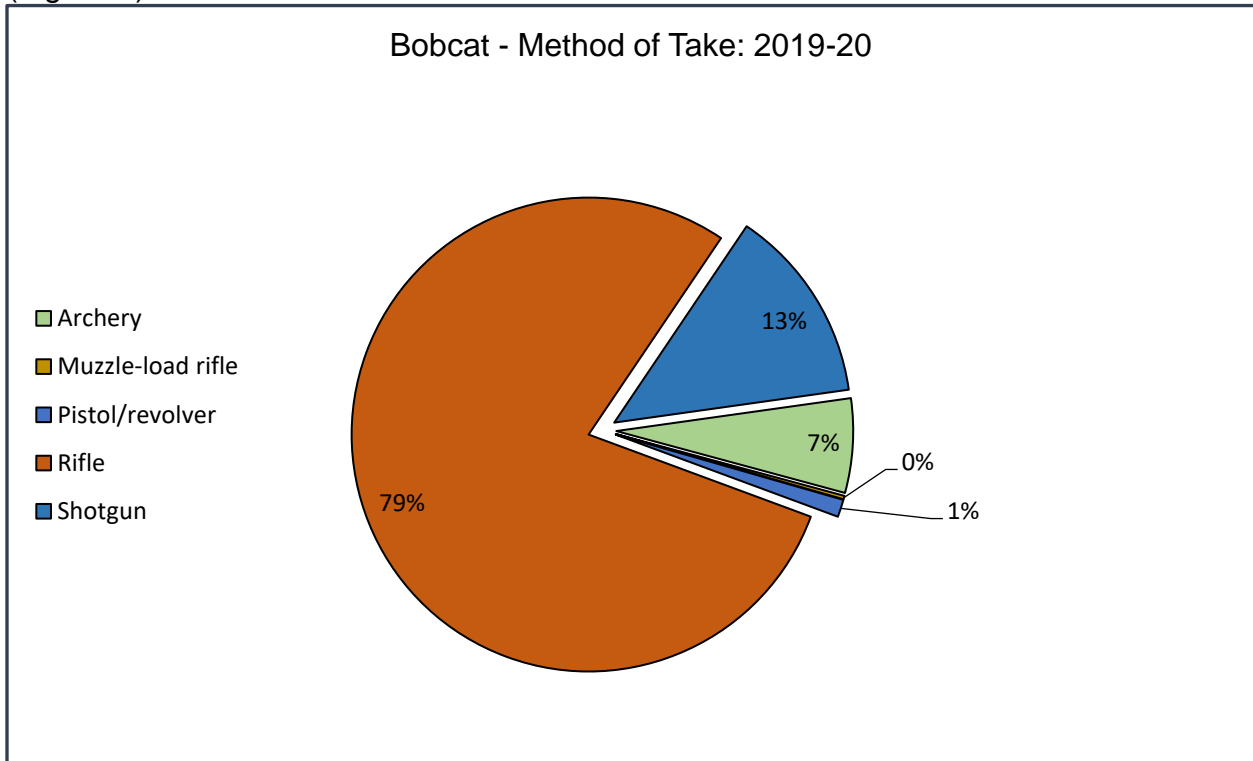


Figure 2: Bobcat Sport Hunter Method of Take for the 2019-2020 Season.

Information on the extent and distribution of the sport hunting take of bobcat was gathered through mandatory returns of hunting tags from successful hunters. Sport hunters took bobcats in 48 counties during the 2019-20 hunt season. The three counties comprising the highest percentage of take were Kern (11.7%), San Bernardino (7.9%), and San Diego (5.7%). Table 2 summarizes bobcat sport hunter take by county.

## 2019-20 Bobcat Harvest Assessment

COUNTY	SPORT HUNTER HARVEST
Alameda	3
Amador	3
Butte	1
Calaveras	14
Contra Costa	1
El Dorado	12
Fresno	9
Glenn	4
Humboldt	11
Imperial	8
Inyo	9
Kern	49
Lake	1
Lassen	12
Los Angeles	21
Madera	16
Mariposa	15
Mendocino	4
Merced	6
Modoc	7
Mono	1
Monterey	11
Napa	5
Nevada	1
Placer	2
Plumas	3
Riverside	15
Sacramento	1
San Benito	13
San Bernardino	33
San Diego	24
San Luis Obispo	18
Santa Barbara	8
Santa Clara	7
Shasta	16
Sierra	1
Siskiyou	11
Solano	2
Sonoma	1
Stanislaus	3
Sutter	1
Tehama	5
Trinity	5
Tulare	12
Tuolumne	5
Ventura	4
Yolo	1
Yuba	5
Unknown	0
Total	420

Table 2: Bobcat Take by County for the 2019-2020 Season

## DISCUSSION

The take of bobcats by sport hunters during the 2019-20 license year increased 28% from the 328 individuals taken in 2018-19. Historically, commercial trapping has accounted for the majority of bobcats harvested in California. No bobcats may be taken by fur trappers since the November 2015 implementation of the Bobcat Protection Act of 2013 (Fish and Game Code 4155), which banned the commercial trapping of bobcat in California.

New law became effective January 1, 2020 that prohibits bobcat take by hunters until 2025 at the earliest. Commencing January 1, 2025, the Fish and Game Commission, “may open a bobcat hunting season in any area determined by the commission to require a hunt”, after consideration of the effects of those factors identified in Fish and Game Code Section 4157 as well as the recommendations of a bobcat management plan that meets the specific conditions included in Fish and Game Code Section 4158.

In June of 2020, the Department of Fish and Wildlife received appropriations from the legislature consistent with Fish and Game Code Section 4158, and is beginning a statewide investigation of bobcat populations in order to develop a bobcat management plan that shall be submitted by the Department to the Commission and the Legislature.

The bobcat management plan shall utilize an ecosystem-based approach and assess the health of California’s bobcat populations on a regional basis to offer a comprehensive strategy for their management that calls on the best available science. The plan will incorporate existing and emerging environmental and habitat factors as well as human dimensions of wildlife and utilize the principles of adaptive management. The CDFW will use this information to determine the management needed to maintain viable bobcat populations in California, and to make future recommendations to the Fish and Game Commission concerning hunting of bobcats.