

State of California
The Resources Agency
Department of Fish and Game
Wildlife Programs Branch

LICENSED FUR TRAPPERS' AND DEALERS' REPORT

1998-99

by

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Fish and Game 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 his/her 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 1998-99 that fee was:

Adult: \$70.00

Junior: \$23.50

Nonresident: \$351.75

Over the years, the take and monetary return to trappers for their 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. During the 1980s, the number of trapping licenses sold decreased from 3,021 to 834, and the take decreased from 131,491 to 21,046. License sales decreased by 42 percent in the 1998-99 season, and the take (compared to last year) decreased by 10,599 animals. The decrease in trapped animals is no doubt due to the passage of Proposition 4 on November 3, 1998. Passage of Proposition 4 eliminated the use of any body-gripping traps for commercial purposes.

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). If the trapper's annual report is not received by July 1, the trapper's license will be revoked. On these reports, the trappers note the number of each species of furbearing 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

One hundred seventy trapping licenses were sold during the 1998-99 trapping season, a decrease of 42 percent from the 292 licenses sold in the 1997-98 season (Table 1).

TABLE 1 NUMBERS OF TRAPPERS BUYING LICENSES AND REPORTING THEIR HARVEST			
Reports	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Licensees who reported successful trapping effort	185	177	69
Licensees who reported but did not trap or were unsuccessful	73	77	59
Licensees not reporting	24	38	42
Total licenses sold	282	292	170

Estimated revenue received by trappers from the sale of furs during the 1998-99 season, based on average prices paid by fur buyers, was \$13,685.00 (Table 2). This is 79 percent less than the estimated revenue of \$64,209 received in 1997-98.

The average income per successful trapper decreased from \$362 in 1997-98 to \$242 in 1998-99.

Each year a portion of the fur harvest is reported as unsold. During the 1998-99 season, 42 percent was unsold, compared to 33 percent unsold during the 1997-98 season. Unsold pelts still have value, and for the purpose of this report are considered to have the same monetary value as marketed pelts. Therefore, the estimated value of the 1998-99 fur harvest was \$34,212 (Table 2), a decrease of 67 percent from the \$103,705 of the 1997-98 season.

Furs were reported taken in all counties except Alameda, Alpine, Del Norte, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Marin, Merced, Nevada, San Benito, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Sierra, Sutter, Ventura, Yolo, and Yuba (Table 3).

Muskrats were the most economically important animals, providing 35 percent of the total value of California's furs. Although 224 export tags were sold for bobcats taken during the 1998-99 season, in a program requiring tags for the sale or shipment of bobcat furs, holders of trapping licenses reported the sale of 190. Part of this difference is because some trappers fail to send in their annual reports. Other trappers hold pelts to be sold in the future.

Bobcats were second in value behind muskrats during the 1998-99 season. Raccoons ranked third in estimated fur value. Beaver estimated fur value ranked fourth for the year.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF ANIMALS TAKEN, AVERAGE PRICE PAID, AND REVENUE
RECEIVED BY SPECIES DURING 1997-98 AND 1998-99

1997-98						
Species	Harvest			Pelt Average	Estimated Revenue	Estimated Fur Value
	Sold	Unsold	Total			
Badger	18	29	47	10.08	181	474
Beaver	185	607	792	13.92	2,575	11,025
Bobcat	837	222	1,059	31.11	26,039	32,945
Coyote	535	592	1,127	10.49	5,612	11,822
Gray Fox	569	698	1,267	7.46	4,245	9,452
Mink	47	29	76	6.15	289	467
Muskrat	10,675	2,695	13,370	1.96	20,923	26,205
Opossum	25	304	329	2.61	65	859
Raccoon	492	491	983	8.51	4,187	8,365
Spotted Skunk	3	95	98	NR	0	0
Striped Skunk	42	908	950	2.20	92	2,090
Weasel	1	0	1	NR	0	0
Total	13,429	6,670	20,099		64,209	103,705
1998-99						
Species	Harvest			Pelt Average	Estimated Revenue	Estimated Fur Value
	Sold	Unsold	Total			
Badger	0	5	5	11.01	0	55
Beaver	126	187	311	13.06	1,646	4,088
Bobcat	150	40	190	30.55	4,583	5,805
Coyote	14	287	301	10.80	151	3,251
Gray Fox	44	188	232	7.17	315	1,663
Mink	11	2	13	NR	0	0
Muskrat	3,529	3,104	6,633	1.81	6,387	12,006
Opossum	9	283	275	2.39	22	698
Raccoon	62	397	459	9.22	572	4,232
Spotted Skunk	0	11	11	NR	0	0
Striped Skunk	4	1,046	996	2.30	9	2,415
Weasel	0	1	1	NR	0	0
Total	3,949	5,551	9,427	—	13,685	34,212

NR = none reported sold

TABLE 3
TRAPPING TAKE BY COUNTY 1998-99

County	BA*	BC*	BE*	CO*	GF*	MI*	MU*	OP*	RA*	SP*	ST*	WE*	Total
Alameda													
Alpine													
Amador		16											16
Butte			91	5	5		1245		6				1352
Calaveras					2								2
Colusa		4			3		700						707
Contra Costa			5					4	4		44		57
El Dorado					4			21			25		50
Fresno													
Glenn	3	3	10		2		698		9		5		730
Humboldt		6		26	6			10	13		15		76
Imperial				52									52
Inyo			100										100
Kern													
Lake									2				2
Lassen		8				1	104						113
Los Angeles		15		8	69			2	3		2		99
Madera													
Mariposa		1											1
Mendocino		10			15				2				27
Merced													
Modoc		18	2	5						11	8		44
Mono			4	17									21
Monterey									17		6		23
Napa								4			28		32
Nevada													
Orange	1			7				20	55		20		103
Placer			2					28	11		42		83
Plumas		3											3
Riverside		26			17			2					45
Sacramento								78	56		168		302
San Bernardino	1			48									49
San Diego		10		3	7			16	17		17		70
San Joaquin			63	19	26		12	22	40		43		225
San Luis				51									51
San Mateo								25	116		466		607
Santa Barbara													
Santa Clara								5	7		3		15
Shasta		15	26	3	25		533	12	19		28		661
Siskiyou		30	5	43		11	3341		16			1	3447
Solano			2					17			54		73
Sonoma				2	20	1		5	52		4		84
Stanislaus		2	1					4	10		18		35
Sutter													
Tehama		1		12	7								20
Trinity					22				4				26
Tulare		22											22
Tuolumne					2								2
Ventura													
Yuba													
Total	5	190	311	301	232	13	6633	275	459	11	996	1	9427
Percent	0.0	2.0	3.3	3.2	2.4	0.1	69.8	3.1	4.8	0.1	11.1	0.0	99.9

* BA = Badger; BC = Bobcat; BE = Beaver; CO = Coyote; GF = Gray Fox; MI = Mink; MR = Muskrat; OP = Opossum;
RA = Raccoon; SP = Spotted Skunk; ST = Striped Skunk; WE = Weasel

Licensed trappers who did not send in their annual reports (Table 1) will have their licenses revoked pursuant to Section 467, Title 14, California Code of Regulations.

Once again, more muskrats were taken than any other species (Table 3). The 6,633 muskrats taken during the 1998-99 season represented 70 percent of the total take.

Licensed fur dealers reported buying 5,505 pelts in California, amounting to a total purchase of \$39,028 (Table 4). This represents 139 percent of the 3,949 furs reported sold by licensed trappers (Table 2). Many furs are sold out of state. Also, some trappers sold pelts held over from previous years' trapping. The average prices paid by the reporting dealers are used to calculate the estimated fur value (Table 2) for each species and the value of furs (Total Spent in Table 4) reported bought by the dealers.

TABLE 4 FURS PURCHASED BY DEALERS, 1998-99			
Species	Range of Average Prices	Number of Furs Purchased	Total Spent
Badger	8.00 - 12.28	8	88.00
Beaver	6.18 - 16.67	281	3,672.00
Bobcat	9.06 - 33.36	530	16,189.00
Coyote	6.59 - 15.50	217	2,344.00
Gray Fox	6.63 - 8.65	892	6,397
Mink	—	No Sales	0.00
Muskrat	0.85 - 2.80	3,021	5,457
Opossum	1.17 - 3.40	20	48
Raccoon	6.51 - 9.75	520	4,796
Spotted Skunk	—	No Sales	0.00
Striped Skunk	2.00 - 2.30	16	37
Weasel	—	No Sales	0.00
Total	—	5,505	39,028.00