

MIDWEST FURBEARER GROUP ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2015

MEETING TIME AND PLACE

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) hosted the Midwest Furbearer Workshop on May 4 – 7, 2015. Presentations, discussion and lunch took place at Abe Martin Lodge, within Brown County State Park near Nashville, IN. A field trip was held at Stillwater Marsh on Lake Monroe, near Bloomington, IN.

ATTENDANCE

Twenty-five (25) participants attended the workshop in 2015, including state furbearer biologists from 11 Midwest member states (North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky and Wisconsin) and attendees from other organizations/agencies including: University of Minnesota, Southern Illinois State University, Purdue University, Indiana University, University of Washington, and Fur Takers of America. A complete list of attendees and contact information for state furbearer biologists is available in Appendices 1 and 2.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Numerous speakers presented information on issues relative to furbearer research and management (Appendices 3 and 4). Professional presentations were given on the following topics:

- Fisher and marten den site selection
- Development of a multi-state study of carnivore occupancy in the Midwest
- Nebraska mountain lion research and management update
- North Dakota mountain lion update
- Muskrat float set research in North Dakota
- Gray fox genetics update
- Statistical population reconstruction update
- Wolf monitoring in Minnesota
- Preliminary results from an undergraduate river otter ecology program in Indiana
- Integrating field studies in a simulation model to investigate marten dispersal
- Development of an automated dispenser for the delivery of medicinal or vaccine-laden baits to raccoons.
- Best Management Practices for trapping update
- Using a trap incident report to track non-target captures.

The somewhat isolated setting allowed for relaxed, group participation in numerous discussions throughout the course of the meeting, during meals at the lodge, and well into the evenings. The use of citizen scientist in regional trail camera research, gray fox management, and statistical population reconstruction were a few of the highlights of these discussions.

Forums such as the Midwest Furbearer Workshop provide valuable opportunities for state furbearer biologists to become acquainted with emerging issues and exchange information and ideas related to furbearer research and management. The need for state fish and wildlife agencies to establish and maintain furbearer biologist positions and support travel of furbearer biologists to the annual Midwest Furbearer Resources Workshop is imperative for exchanging information to promote quality furbearer management and research in each state. It is more important than ever that state agencies are in the forefront of issues related to furbearer management and trapping in order to protect the heritage and recreational opportunities of hunting and trapping for future sportsmen and sportswomen.

DIRECTOR ACTION ITEMS

None

DIRECTOR INFORMATION ITEMS

1. The group had an informal discussion on mountain lion management. There were several questions relating to current mountain lion harvest seasons. The group discussed the possibility of drafting language focused on responsible management of mountain lions in the Midwest. This document would be on behalf of regional states that do not currently have mountain lion populations, but would be supportive of the species recolonizing additional areas of the Midwest.
2. The Midwest Furbearer Working Group thanks state Directors for their continued support of travel of state furbearer biologists to the annual Midwest Furbearer Resources Workshop. With tight budgets and restricted travel this annual workshop continues to be a critical component of sound resource management in the Midwest. Annual meetings allow for an open, thorough exchange of information and knowledge resulting in efficient, effective, and sound management of these unique species.
3. The Group would also like to thank the state Directors for their continued support of the development of Best Management Practices for Trapping in the US. This program helps sustain regulated trapping as a wildlife management technique by conducting research on trapping and maintaining the wild fur trade between the US and European Union.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will host the 2015 Midwest Furbearer Workshop. A time and location will be determined in the next couple of months. A complete list of previous host states is available in Appendix 5.

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Appendix 1. 2015 Midwest Furbearer Workshop Attendees.

Name	Agency/Affiliation
Jeff Beringer	Missouri Department of Conservation
Matt Peek	KS Dept of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
Dave Hastings	Fur Takers of America
Stephanie Tucker	ND Game and Fish Department
Rodney Gross	ND Game and Fish Department
Laura Palmer	Kentucky Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Adam Bump	MI Department of Natural Resources
Sam Wilson	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Shawn Rossler	IN Department of Natural Resources
John Erb	MN Department of Natural Resources
Gerianne Albers	WI Department of Natural Resources
Bob Bluett	IL Department of Natural Resources
Mike Clawson	University of Washington
Casey Day	Purdue University
Vince Eversizer	IA Department of Natural Resources
Jim Lady	University of Washington
Michelle LaRue	University of Minnesota
Brian MacGowan	Purdue University
Clay Nielsen	Southern Illinois University
Kelsey Philippi	Indiana University
Tim Smyser	Purdue University
Charles Andres	Fur Takers of America
Pat Zollner	Purdue University
Scott Johnson	IN Department of Natural Resources
Rex Watters	IN Department of Natural Resources

APPENDIX 2. Midwest Furbearer Biologists – Contact Information.

Colorado

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Kentucky

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Michigan

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Minnesota

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Missouri

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Appendix 3. 2015 Midwest Furbearer Workshop – Agenda.

Midwest Furbearer Workshop 2015

Abe Martin Lodge, Brown County State Park

Nashville, Indiana

May 4th – 7th, 2015

Monday, May 4th (Travel Day)

4:00 – 8:00PM **Arrival at Abe Martin Lodge, Check-in, and Registration**

8:00 PM **Evening Social** – Family Group Cabin

Tuesday, May 5th

7:00 –
8:30 AM **Breakfast** (Included, Little Gem Restaurant at Abe Martin Lodge)

9:00 AM **Logistics, Introductions, and Agenda repair**
Shawn Rossler – Furbearer Biologist, Indiana Department of
Natural Resources

9:15 AM **Welcome and Opening Remarks**
Shawn Rossler – Furbearer Biologist, Indiana Department of
Natural Resources

9:30 AM **Fisher and Marten Den Site Selection in MN**
John Erb – Furbearer Research Biologist, Minnesota Department
of Natural Resources

10:00 AM **Development of a Multi-state Study of Carnivore Occupancy in
the Midwest: Lessons Learned from Large-scale Research in
Illinois**
Clayton K. Nielsen, Southern Illinois University
Michelle LaRue, University of Minnesota

10:30 AM **Break**

11:00 AM **Nebraska Mountain Lion Research and Management Update**
Sam Wilson, Furbearer/Carnivore Program Manager, Nebraska
Game and Parks Commission

11:30 AM **North Dakota Mountain Lion Update**
Stephanie Tucker, Furbearer Biologist, North Dakota Game and
Fish Department

- 12:00 PM **Lunch** (Included, Little Gem Restaurant at Abe Martin Lodge)
- 1:00 PM **Muskrat Float Set Research in North Dakota**
Rodney Gross, University of North Dakota
Stephanie Tucker, Furbearer Biologist, North Dakota Game and Fish Department
- 1:30 PM **Ohio's Muskrat Study – Preliminary Results**
Suzie Prange, Furbearer Research Biologist, Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- 2:00 PM **Group Discussion on Muskrat in the Midwest – Updates on Status, Research, and Research Needs**
- 3:00 PM **Break**
- 3:30 PM **Gray Fox Genetics Update/Group Discussion**
Jeff Beringer, Furbearer Research Biologist, Missouri Department of Conservation
- 4:00 PM **Statistical Population Reconstruction Update / Group Discussion**
John Skalski, Professor of Biostatistics, University of Washington
- 4:30 PM **Wolf Monitoring in MN**
John Erb – Furbearer Research Biologist, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- 5:00 PM **Adjourn for the day, Dinner on your own**
- 8:00 PM **Evening Social – Family Group Cabin and/or Fire pit**

Wednesday, May 6th

- 7:00 – 8:00 AM **Breakfast** (Included, Little Gem Restaurant at Abe Martin Lodge)
- 9:00 AM **Preliminary Results From an Undergraduate River Otter Ecology Program in Indiana**
Casey Day, PhD Candidate, Purdue University
- 9:30 AM **Integrating Field Studies in a Simulation Model to Investigate Marten Dispersal**
Patrick Zollner, Associate Professor, Purdue University

- 10:00 AM **Development of an Automated Dispenser for the Delivery of Medicinal or Vaccine-Laden Baits to Raccoons**
Tim Smyser, Purdue University
- 10:30 AM **Break**
- 11:00 AM **Professional Trappers College Furbearer Management Short Course**
Brian MacGowan, Extension Wildlife Specialist, Purdue University
- 11:30 AM **BMP Update**
Presenter TBA
- 12:00 PM **Lunch** (Included, Little Gem Restaurant at Abe Martin Lodge)
- 1:00 PM **Using a Trap Incident Report to Track Non-Target Captures**
Gerianne Albers, Assistant Furbearer Specialist, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
- 1:30 PM **Depart - Field Trip to North Fork Waterfowl Resting Area**
- 2:30 PM **North Fork Property Tour and General Management Discussions**
Rex Watters, Wildlife Specialist, Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- 4:30 PM **Travel back to Brown County State Park/Abe Martin Lodge**
- 5:30 PM **Adjourn for the day, Dinner on your own**
- 8:00 PM **Evening Social – Family Group Cabin and/or Fire pit**

Thursday, May 7th

- 8:00 AM **Breakfast** (Included, Little Gem Restaurant at Abe Martin Lodge)
- 9:00 AM **Business Meeting** (State Biologists)
 - State Reports
 - Location for 2016 Midwest Furbearer Workshop
 - Other
- 11:30 AM **Adjourn – Safe Travels Home!** (Lunch on your own)

Appendix 4 – 2015 Midwest Furbearer Workshop – Abstracts.

Title: Development of a multi-state study of carnivore occupancy in the Midwest:
Lessons learned from large-scale research in Illinois

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Abstract: The importance of large-scale research to inform wildlife management is unequivocal. The intent of our presentation is to stimulate discussion regarding the development of a large-scale, multi-state study of carnivore occupancy in the Midwest. To frame the discussion, we discuss lessons learned from a recent large-scale occupancy study conducted in southern Illinois. We deployed remote cameras during 3-week surveys to detect the 6-species carnivore guild at 1,118 camera locations in 357 2.6-km² sections (3–4 cameras/section composing a cluster) in the 16 southernmost counties of Illinois (16,058 km²) during January-April, 2008-2010. We evaluated competing models for detection, species-specific habitat occupancy, multispecies co-occupancy, and multiseason (colonization and extinction) occupancy dynamics. We developed occupancy models for each species to represent hypothesized effects of anthropogenic features, prey availability, landscape complexity, and vegetative land cover. Of the 102,711 photographs of endothermic animals, we recorded photographs of bobcats (n = 412 photographs), coyotes (n = 1,397), gray foxes (n = 546), raccoons (n = 40,029), red foxes (n = 149), and striped skunks (n = 2,467). We observed little evidence for spatial partitioning among species based on interspecific interactions, with the exception of gray foxes and coyotes, and found that habitat preferences were more important in structuring the carnivore community. Habitat had a stronger influence on occupancy of foxes than it did on presence of bobcats. However, the level of red fox activity was negatively correlated with bobcat activity. Gray fox occupancy and number of detections within occupied sites were reduced in camera clusters occupied by coyotes but not bobcats. We will further discuss findings from this study and pros/cons to our study design. Then, to broaden this type of monitoring program to a multi-state approach, we discuss possible funding mechanisms, citizen science, and coordination of this program by the co-authors and their organizations.

Title: Integrating field studies in a simulation model to investigate marten dispersal

Co-authors/affiliations: Patrick A. Zollner Purdue University, Department of Forestry
and Natural Resources
Jonathan H. Gilbert Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission
Casey C. Day, Purdue University, Department of Forestry and Natural Resources
Nicholas P. McCann Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission

Abstract: In this talk we review a series of empirical studies on American marten in and around the Great Divide Ranger District of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in Wisconsin. These field studies were developed to parameterize a simulation model of marten dispersal. Our ongoing objective is to use this simulation model to improve our understanding of how human activity is influencing marten dispersal. We focus on dispersal because it is a fundamental ecological process that influences important phenomena including, habitat use, mate finding, genetic structure of populations and ultimately viability of populations. Furthermore, this marten population remained restricted for decades after reintroduction and one hypothesis for that limited population growth was that human land use and activity limited the ability of these reintroduced animals to find and occupy suitable habitat. The field work we conducted includes studies of home range size and home range level habitat selection that we use in the simulation to determine how large of an area dispersing virtual martens require to settle in a location. We used our field metabolic rate studies and small mammal trapping studies to estimate how much food and energy virtual marten were likely to acquire and require in different cover types. We analyzed our radio tracking data to estimate annual survival of marten which allowed us to calibrate the cumulative risk faced by virtual marten in the simulation. We used snow track counts of terrestrial predators to relatively scale instantaneous predation risk faced by virtual marten in each of these cover types. Fine scale snow tracking data of marten movements realistically parameterized the correlated random walk values used to simulate movement by virtual marten and refined our definition of suitable habitat to emphasize the importance of small sub-stand scale inclusions of hemlock and cedar. The results of all of these field studies and other ongoing work were synthesized in the dispersal simulation we created called SEARCH. SEARCH is unique relative to other individual based spatially explicit dispersal models because of the fine scale sophistication it incorporates into animal behavior while retaining an ability to track changes in population size across years. We are currently in the midst of using empirical data from the translocations of 90 marten into this population between 2008 and 2010 and an analytical approach called pattern oriented modeling to evaluate and validate the best virtual marten we can simulate in SEARCH. Once we are satisfied with the behavior of that virtual marten SEARCH will provide us with the opportunity to investigate hypothetical management actions and future scenarios for how they will impact marten populations. Ongoing examples of this approach include combining SEARCH with spatial genetic data to investigate how Iron County Wisconsin connects the Great Divide Ranger District marten population with well-established marten populations in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Once SEARCH helps us understand how and where in Iron county marten disperse between these two known populations we will use it to compare scenarios for future land use in Iron County to see how potential activities might impact the marten population. Within the great divide range district we are also interested in comparing the impacts upon marten of scenarios for future forest management. We are also in the midst of applying SEARCH to study how barriers may be limiting dispersal by Humboldt marten in Northern California. This is another system where human land use may be limiting marten access to unoccupied apparently favorable habitat. We summarize the above work in a discussion of how the integration of empirical and simulation modeling studies is providing opportunities to ask questions we could not otherwise consider and how the resulting inference has important

practical implications. We conclude by acknowledging that the results presented in this talk represent the cumulative efforts of many agencies and individuals to components of this work both in the field and in simulation development and application. Without those innumerable contributions this work would not have been possible and we discuss the necessity of cooperation to developing this kind of research program.

Title: Muskrat float set research in North Dakota

Co-authors/affiliations: R. J. Gross^{1,3}, Stephanie Tucker², and Susan N. Ellis-Felege¹

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Abstract: Muskrats (*Ondatra zibethicus*) are becoming a highly sought after furbearer species in North Dakota due to an increase in pelt prices. In 2011, regulation changes by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department allowed trappers to use float sets to trap muskrats during the spring season. Current regulations require float sets used during the spring trapping season to have a covering made of either wire mesh, wood, or plastic and must not have an opening exceeding 20.32 cm (8 in) to attempt to minimize the incidental take of non-target species. The primary goal of this project was to determine if muskrat float set covers are effective in eliminating incidental take of non-target species. Float sets used included uncovered, 2.54 cm by 2.54 cm (1 in x 1 in) wire mesh, and 15.24 cm by 15.24 cm (6 in x 6 in) wire mesh float sets. Trapping efforts were focused in four locations across eastern North Dakota over a two year period. During the study, seven non-targets species (three black-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), two blue-winged teal (*Anas discors*), and two painted turtles (*Chrysemys picta*)) were captured over 4,245 trap nights (0.002 captures/trap night). All non-targets were captured on uncovered float sets except for the painted turtles (1 in x 1 in and 6 in x 6 in). In addition to float sets, cameras were placed at each float set to evaluate the number of encounters and behaviors displayed of non-target water birds at float sets. Cover type did not influence encounter rates, Water birds in general were 7.5 times more likely to encounter a float in the spring as compared to the fall. We found non-duck water birds were 10.1 times more likely to contact float sets as compared to puddle and diving ducks. Also, regardless of guild, birds were 2.3 times less likely to contact a float set with a 1 in x 1 in cover as compared to an uncovered float set. Although only a few non-targets were captured, we found a vulnerability of non-target water birds to muskrat float sets, especially during the spring trapping season, and illustrate the need for further investigation.

Title: Preliminary results from an undergraduate river otter ecology program in Indiana

Co-authors/affiliations: Casey C. Day, Purdue University, Department of Forestry and Natural Resources

Patrick A. Zollner. Purdue University, Department of Forestry and Natural Resources

Abstract: From 1995 to 1999, 303 river otters (*Lontra canadensis*) were reintroduced to 12 sites throughout northern and southern Indiana. Since that time the otter population has expanded its range and is now found in at least 65 of 92 Indiana counties. Such restorations of a top predator are bound to have implications for not only the prey community of the restored species, but the ecosystem as a whole through processes that operate at multiple trophic levels. To better understand the impact that river otters have on the ecology of Indiana's riparian ecosystems, we developed an undergraduate research program at Purdue University to address specific questions about otter ecology. To date, 7 undergraduate students have contributed to the project by way of question development, field work, lab work, grant writing, and data analysis. Questions currently being asked and investigated by the various undergraduates include: What comprises otter diet in Indiana, and how does diet vary seasonally? How does the presence of otters and otter latrines affect activity patterns and visitation rates of related species? What is the role of invasive Asian carp in otter diet, and can we investigate that role through the use of stable isotope analysis? To answer these questions, we have collected otter scat at 7 different locations along the Tippecanoe, Pigeon, St Joseph's, and Blue River watersheds across the state. We have also deployed remote trail cameras to record the presence and activity of river otters and other species of wildlife at both otter latrines and at control sites. Through 2014, we have collected over 250 scats at 35 latrine sites. Preliminary results show fish to be the primary class of prey of otters, followed by crayfish. Crayfish are seasonally important, making up 60% of otter diet in summer, but only 14% in winter. We have also collected 3,554 pictures of otters, 2,650 of raccoons, 18 of mink, 67 of coyotes, and 18 of red foxes. Lab work and data analysis to determine more detailed diet as well as to investigate the dynamics of carnivore species interactions are currently underway. We have found that encouraging undergraduate students to develop, fund, and carry out independent but related research projects has led to collaboration among students and provided a unique setting to develop scholarship among young researchers.

Title: Program PopRecon: Using Age-at-Harvest Data to Reconstruct Population Abundance

Co-authors/affiliations: James M. Lady¹, Michael V. Clawson², John R. Skalski¹
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Abstract: Annual age-at-harvest data are commonly collected information on furbearer populations. User-friendly software is being developed by the University of Washington to perform statistical population reconstruction (SPR) using this information. The computational core of the software is AD Model Builder, which allows fitting of both fixed- and random-effect models. An interactive interface has been added to the software

which allows data analysis without the user required to develop statistical models or learn the syntax of ADMB. In 2014, PopRecon 1.0 was developed to analyze full age-class data (<http://www.cbr.washington.edu/analysis/apps/PopRecon>). Currently, the software is being expanded to permit analysis of either full or pooled adult-age-class information. PopRecon 2.0 will be available in summer 2015. This version will estimate annual abundance, recruitment, harvest probabilities, and natural survival rates, and present the results in tabular and graphic form. The capabilities of the population reconstruction software will be illustrated using trap data for martens (*Martes americana*) from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Title: Using a Trap Incident Report to Track Non-Target Captures

Co-authors/affiliations: Geriann Albers and John Olson

Abstract: Initial concerns from Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) Law Enforcement staff resulted in Wildlife Management initiating a trap incident report form with the primary purpose of documenting key information of incidents of domestic dogs in traps. The report was developed with input from key user groups and has been in use since 1997. The report is completed by field conservation wardens, reviewed by an administrative warden, and then databased and summarized annually by furbearer program staff. The report allows the collections of a variety of information surrounding the incident including property type, type of animal involved, trap type, set location, bait used, final disposition of caught animal (e.g., released unharmed, died as a result of trap injuries), level of control of animal caught (e.g., uncontrolled, leashed) and potential violations. Summary information will be presented on various data collected from 1997–2014. The report and data collected is useful to WDNR staff and user groups with interest in regulated trapping by monitoring domestic non-target captures, and identifying areas that have the potential to cause conflict between trappers and other outdoor users, while noting the few incidents compared to overall trap nights.

Appendix 5. Host States of Midwest Furbearer Workshops.

Year	State
1979	Kansas
1983	Wisconsin
1984	Illinois
1985	Iowa
1987	Minnesota
1988	Indiana
1989	Missouri
1990	Nebraska
1991	South Dakota
1992	Ohio
1993	Oklahoma
1994	North Dakota
1995	West Virginia
1996	Michigan
1997	Illinois
1998	Kansas
1999	Wisconsin
2000	Missouri
2001	Ohio
2002	Iowa
2003	Minnesota
2004	Illinois
2005	North Dakota
2006	Michigan
2007	Nebraska
2008	Kansas
2009	Kentucky
2010	South Dakota
2011	Wisconsin
2012	Missouri
2013	Illinois
2014	Ohio
2015	Indiana

