

MIDWEST FURBEARER GROUP

Annual Report

May 2023

MEETING TIME AND PLACE

The 2023 Midwest Furbearer Workshop was held April 17-20, 2023 at Rock Springs Ranch near Junction City, Kansas.

ATTENDANCE

Thirty-one individuals attended the 2023 meeting including furbearer biologists from 11 Midwest member states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and Wisconsin). Contact information for all Midwest furbearer biologists can be found in Appendix 1. Attendees also included 2 furbearer biologists from outside the Midwest, additional state agency biologists, university researchers, and students. The meeting agenda including a complete list of presentations and presenters can be found in Appendix 2.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Midwest Furbearer Workshop provides a valuable opportunity for state furbearer biologists to exchange information and ideas related to furbearer management and research. Participants benefit greatly from the experiences of their peers and from the combined efforts of the group and can often apply subjects from this meeting to their duties in their home state, greatly enhancing their efficiency and effectiveness as a furbearer biologist or researcher.

The 2023 workshop included 17 presentations related to furbearer and carnivore management and included a field trip through the tallgrass prairie to the Flint Hills Discovery Center in Manhattan, Kansas. State reports were given, and a variety of additional subjects were discussed during the business meeting.

In addition to the formal meeting, the group engaged in discussions and exchanged ideas on a variety of subjects informally during the evening hours. In sum, this workshop provides an excellent venue for discussing new ideas, management challenges, research projects, and generally gathering broad expertise on furbearer-related issues affecting multiple states.

The work group had no Director Action Items for discussion but did have several Information Items which were discussed at the business meeting.

DIRECTOR ACTION ITEMS

None

DIRECTOR INFORMATION ITEMS

1. Support for BearWise – The group supports the engagement and participation of states in the BearWise program. BearWise is a nationwide interagency supported program that provides consistent messaging that state and federal agencies can use to inform people who live, work, or travel in areas with bears on how to live responsibly with them. The collaborative program provides a source of pooled resources for states to leverage at their discretion to meet their needs. This is especially important for states that are only beginning to experience bear activity in their state. The resources available through BearWise can help stretch tight budgets and save staff time to meet state's needs when communicating about living with bears. The group sees value for states to join BearWise and appreciates the Directors and states who have already engaged with the initiative.
2. Support for BMPs – The group continues to support the AFWA Best Management Practices for Trapping program. Additional research on trapping devices and techniques as well as the continued development and delivery of trapping outreach and education is needed for our agencies to maintain the highest standards of furbearer management and the informed consent of the public to sustain agency regulated trapping activities. Results of the trap-testing efforts are published in a *Wildlife Monograph* entitled "Best Management Practices for Trapping Furbearers in the United States." This landmark publication on trapping is a culmination of over two decades of scientific research representing by far the largest trap testing study ever conducted.
3. Spotted Skunk ESA Review – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is currently evaluating whether the plains spotted skunk is warranted for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The status review is scheduled to be completed by September 2023 (end of fy 2022). A listing could seriously impact trapping in Midwestern states.
4. Large Carnivore Status – As instructed by the Directors, an annual update of large carnivore status within individual Midwest states is provided in Appendix 3.
5. Many of the Directors are aware that with concerns (real or perceived) over declines in some game populations (e.g., deer, turkey, upland birds, etc.), there has been a lot of discussion and in some cases, pressure for various forms of enhanced furbearer harvest or "predator control." It is true that harvest of some key predatory furbearers like raccoon has declined substantially in many states, and that the incentive for a lot of the current furbearer harvest of some species has more to do with predator or damage control than traditional acquisition of fur. To the

Directors, we would like to emphasize the importance of maintaining support for science-based decisions about management even in the face of pressures from either direction related to predator control. We also want to note the potential for a lot of new, non-traditional furharvesters motivated by damage prevention and control rather than fur, to be recruited into the field. With these new furharvesters and their different motives comes an increased potential for trapping conflict and non-compliance due to inexperience, as well as public concerns about wanton waste or harvest seasons that may overlap reproductive seasons. As such, it is imperative for states to maintain effective trapper or furharvester education programs and for agencies to carefully consider messaging related to wanton waste or timing of harvest seasons. We do support this new recruitment opportunity, but also recognize some challenges could come along with it.

6. Wildlife testimony – Several states in the U.S. have had legal challenges on wildlife issues related to furbearer and large carnivore harvest and management. In these cases, the state wildlife agency and perhaps specifically the state furbearer biologist should be an expert witness in informing the public and decision makers about the consequences of the action. However, in some instances, a gag order has been placed on state wildlife agency personnel from that state. Our group would like the Directors to entertain the possibility of allowing an expert from a neighboring state come in to testify or otherwise inform the process in situations where such a presence may be needed but lacking. This process could be facilitated by MAFWA or an NGO such as the state trapper association.

The group thanks state Directors for their continued support of travel for state furbearer biologists to the annual Midwest Furbearer Workshop. The 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.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources will host the 2024 Midwest Furbearer Workshop. An exact time and location are yet to be determined. A complete list of previous host states is available in Appendix 4.

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APPENDIX 1. Midwest Furbearer Biologists – contact information.

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Appendix 2. Agenda for the 2023 Midwest Furbearer Workshop.



Midwest Furbearer Workshop

April 17-20, 2023 | Rock Springs Ranch
1168 Highway K157, Junction City, KS 66441

AGENDA

Monday April 17

6:00 – 9:00 PM Travel Day; Check-in & Social (Leadership Lodge)

Tuesday April 18

7:30 – 8:30 Breakfast (provided; Williams Dining Hall)

8:30 – 12:00 Business Meeting (State Furbearer Biologists Only)

12:00 – 1:00 Lunch (provided)

1:00 – 1:15 Registration (Riley-Wallace Education Center)

1:15 – 1:30 Opening Remarks – Matt Peek, KDWP

Wildlife Surveys Session

1:30 – 1:55 Comparing the effectiveness of environmental DNA and camera trapping for surveying American mink (*Neogale vison*) occupancy in Northeastern Indiana - Elle DiGirolamo

1:55 – 2:20 Advancements in monitoring of Wisconsin furbearer species using trail cameras - Lydia Margenau

2:20 – 2:45 Montana furbearer monitoring: a cyclical approach to track species occupancy and spatial distribution - Nathan Kluge

2:45 – 3:10 Break

Human Dimensions Session

3:10 – 3:35 Value of a statistical furbearer - Emily Forsythe

3:35 – 4:00 Summary of knowledge about predator hunting contests - Geriann Albers

4:00 – 4:25 Willingness-to-pay for bobcat harvest permits in Indiana - Carson Reeling

4:25 – 4:50 Bearwise update – Nate Bowersock

6:00 Dinner and social (provided)

Wednesday April 19

7:30 – 8:30	Breakfast (provided)
8:30 – 9:25	Business meeting (continued)

Ecology Session

9:25 – 9:50	Using field methods and citizen science to assess urban canid space-use patterns - Jon Beckman
9:50 – 10:15	Detection of <i>Echinococcus spp.</i> in coyotes in the Midwest United States – Kamilyah Miller
10:15 – 10:30	Break
10:30 – 10:55	Pilot Coyote Study of Heartworm and Internal Parasites – Vince Evelsizer
10:55 – 11:20	Assessing occupancy and distribution patterns of plains spotted skunk and prairie gray fox in the Missouri Ozarks - Nate Bowersock
11:20 – 11:55	Assessing muskrat population responses following widespread drought - Adam Ahlers
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch (provided)
1:00 – 5:00	Field trip/Flint Hills Discovery Center – Manhattan, KS
5:30	Dinner on own in Manhattan

Thursday May 5th

7:30 – 8:30	Breakfast (provided)
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Harvest Session

9:00 – 9:25	Furbearer Conservation Technical Work Group (FRTWG) 2023 update - John Erb
9:25 – 9:50	BMP raccoon bodygrip trap efficiency test – Matt Peek
9:50 – 10:15	A shifting approach to furbearer registration, tagging and sampling – The Wisconsin experience – Shawn Rossler and Lydia Margenau
10:15 – 10:30	Break
10:30 – 10:55	Nebraska's second regulated river otter harvest season - Sam Wilson
10:55 – 11:20	Upland Bird Populations, Predators, and Furharvest –Jeff Prendergast and Matt Peek
11:20 – 11:30	Closing remarks
11:30 AM	Adjourn – (Lunch on your own)

Appendix 3. Large carnivore status in Midwest states.

MOUNTAIN LIONS				
	Protected (Y/N)¹	Estimated population	Harvest (Y/N/NA)²	Recent changes in distribution
Illinois	Y	No breeding population	NA	Rare visitor
Indiana	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
Iowa	N	<5	NA	Occasional visitor
Kansas	Y	0	NA	None, occasional dispersers
Kentucky	Y	0	NA	
Michigan	Y	No breeding population	NA	A few transients each year, 95 confirmed sightings since 2008. All but 1 in Upper Peninsula.
Minnesota	Y	No breeding population	NA	Decline in transients apparent from 2014 – 2017 compared to 2010 – 2013, and then recent uptick in confirmations from 2018 - 2021.
Missouri	Y	No breeding population	NA	Several transients confirmed each year; 115 confirmations since 1994
Nebraska	Y	No statewide estimate; Pine Ridge Unit: 33 (2021 survey)	Y	3 populations formed since mid-2000s
North Dakota	Y	None available	Y	No
Ohio	N	0	NA	
South Dakota	Y	Approximately 260 in Black Hills, no statewide estimate	Y	No
Wisconsin	Y	No breeding population	NA	Rare transients; Average ~15 verified per year since 2017.

¹Yes indicates the species is protected by state or provincial laws (e.g. listed as a game animal with an open or closed season).

²NA indicates the question is not applicable because no known breeding populations exist with the state or province.

BLACK BEARS

	Protected (Y/N) ¹	Estimated population	Harvest (Y/N/NA) ²	Recent changes in distribution
Illinois	Y	No breeding population	NA	Occasional visitor
Indiana	Y	0	N	Occasional visitor
Iowa	N	<5	NA	Occasional visitor
Kansas	Y	0	NA	None, occasional dispersers
Kentucky	Y	800-1,000 in core area	Y	Expanding population
Michigan	Y	~12,500	Y	Stable population in Upper Peninsula (80% of MI bear population), expanding population in Lower Peninsula
Minnesota	Y	13,000-17,000	Y	Population peak in 2001 with ~25,000; bottomed out in 2012 with 10,000; slow increase the last 8-10 years
Missouri	Y	~900	Y	Growing and expanding population; First bear hunting season held in October 2021.
Nebraska	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
North Dakota	Y	No breeding population	N	Regular visitor, with some individual bears overwintering
Ohio	Y	5-10	N	50-100 transients confirmed each year (increasing trend); <5 confirmed reproducing females
South Dakota	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
Wisconsin	Y	~25,000	Y	Stable population across northern Wisconsin, expanding southward

¹Yes indicates the species is protected by state or provincial laws (e.g. listed as a game animal with an open or closed season).

²NA indicates the question is not applicable because no known breeding populations exist with the state or province.

WOLVES

	Protected (Y/N) ¹	Estimated population	Harvest (Y/N/NA) ²	Recent changes in distribution
Illinois	Y	No breeding population	NA	Rare visitor
Indiana	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
Iowa	Y	<5	NA	Occasional visitor
Kansas	Y	0	NA	None, have only confirmed 2
Kentucky	Y	0	NA	N/A
Michigan	Y	631 (2022)	N	UP fully occupied. Minimum population estimate.
Minnesota	Y	~2700 (in winter 2019-20)	N	Slight expansion, most suitable habitat occupied
Missouri	Y	0	NA	Occasional visitor, 7 confirmations since 2001
Nebraska	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
North Dakota	Y	0	NA	Occasional visitor
Ohio	N	0	NA	
South Dakota	Y	0	NA	Rare occurrence
Wisconsin	Y	~972 (95% C.I. 812-1,193; overwinter 2021-22)	Y	Distribution stable, most suitable habitat likely occupied
¹ Yes indicates the species is protected by state or provincial laws (e.g. listed as a game animal with an open or closed season).				
² NA indicates the question is not applicable because no known breeding populations exist with the state or province.				

Appendix 4. Host states for Midwest Furbearer Workshops, 1979-2023.

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
2016	Minnesota

Year	State
2017	Iowa
2018	North Dakota
2019	Oklahoma
2020	Michigan (virtual business meeting)
2021	Michigan (virtual)
2022	Nebraska
2023	Kansas