

2023 FURBEARER SEASON FORECAST

Peter Eades/USFWS



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Wisconsin is home to an assortment of furbearer species, many of which have been historically hunted or trapped for their fur. Of the 20 total furbearer species in Wisconsin, 18 maintain breeding populations in the state, with the exception of an occasional nomadic lynx or rare spotted skunk. Today, many of these species maintain populations abundant enough for sustainable harvest by outdoorsmen and women through hunting and trapping.

Raccoons, coyotes, foxes and bobcats can be hunted and trapped, while others such as fishers, minks, muskrats, beavers and river otters may only be trapped. See the 2023 trapping regulations for a full list of which species can be hunted or trapped.

Those hoping to trap fisher or hunt/trap bobcats must receive a permit through an annual application process. In the past, this system had been in place for otters as well, but the DNR shifted to a bag limit/quota system, which continues for the 2023-2024 river otter trapping season. For more information, see the river otter page of this year's fall forecast. The chart below reflects changes made in recent seasons.

SEASON STRUCTURES WITH RECENT CHANGES HIGHLIGHTED

	APPLICATION BY AUG. 1	PHYSICAL PERMIT	ATTACH PELT TAG IN THE FIELD	REGISTRATION IN GAMEREG	IN-PERSON CERTIFICATION	TAG SENT BY MAIL
OTTER	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES
FISHER	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
BOBCAT	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO

2023 SEASON DATES

COYOTE HUNTING | Year-round

COYOTE TRAPPING | Oct. 14 to Feb. 15, 2024

FOX (RED AND GRAY) | Oct. 14 to Feb. 15, 2024

BOBCAT PERIOD 1 | Oct. 14 to Dec. 25

BOBCAT PERIOD 2 | Dec. 26 to Jan. 31, 2024

RACCOON RESIDENT | Oct. 14 to Feb. 15, 2024

RACCOON NON-RESIDENT | Oct. 28 to Feb. 15, 2024

FISHER | Oct. 14 to Jan. 7, 2024

OTTER NORTH ZONE | Nov. 4 to April 30, 2024

OTTER SOUTH ZONE | Nov. 4 to March 31, 2024

BEAVER ZONES A & B | Nov. 4 to April 30, 2024

BEAVER ZONE C | Nov. 4 to March 31, 2024

BEAVER ZONE D | Day after duck season closes to
March 15, 2024

MINK/MUSKRAT NORTH ZONE | Oct. 21 to April 15, 2024

MINK/MUSKRAT CENTRAL ZONE | Oct. 28 to March 22,
2024

MINK/MUSKRAT SOUTH ZONE | Nov. 4 to March 15, 2024

MINK/MUSKRAT MISS. RIVER | Nov. 13 to March 10,
2024

OTTER FORECAST

Keenan Abrams/USFWS



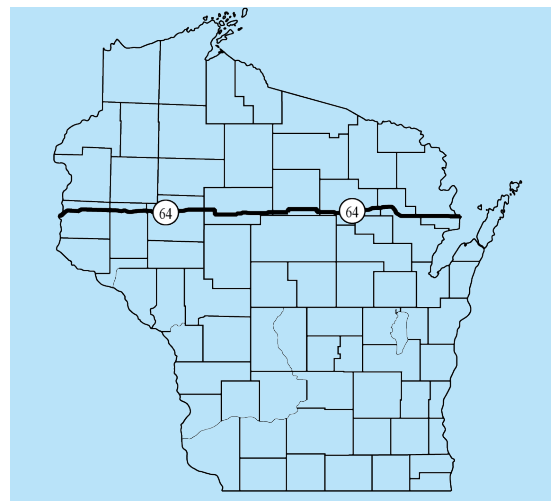
Harvest data and information from the department's river otter bridge survey indicate a robust river otter population throughout Wisconsin. Otters are monitored through a variety of data sources, including harvest distribution, success rates and surveys.

River otters can be found on all Wisconsin waterways. Their presence is an indication of a healthy aquatic ecosystem, and seeing them in our urban waterways is a good sign. Otters may travel many miles of stream and are occasionally seen traveling great distances over dry land. Contact your local DNR wildlife biologist if you are experiencing nuisance issues with river otters.

In 2020, the otter harvest shifted from an application system to a quota system in which two otter harvest authorizations were issued with each trapping license. The first three years of the new system have been very successful. We hope for continued success in the 2023-24 season.

Winter is the best time to look for otter signs. Their distinctive dot-dot-dash tracking pattern is easily identifiable in the snow. Local populations will vary but across the state, but the otter population looks healthy. We expect harvest to be similar to last year.

2022-23 STATE-ISSUED OTTER HARVEST	
NORTHERN ZONE	668
SOUTHERN ZONE	1,246
TOTAL	1,914



FISHER FORECAST



THE FISHER PELT TAG REQUIREMENT HAS BEEN ELIMINATED

There will no longer be a physical pelt tag mailed to applicants who are successful in the annual drawing for fisher.

2022-23 HARVEST REVIEW

Wisconsin manages fisher using a limited draw and harvest quota system.

Fisher trapping is divided into a northern and a southern zone with separate permit and quota levels for each zone.

HEALTHY, SHIFTING FISHER POPULATION

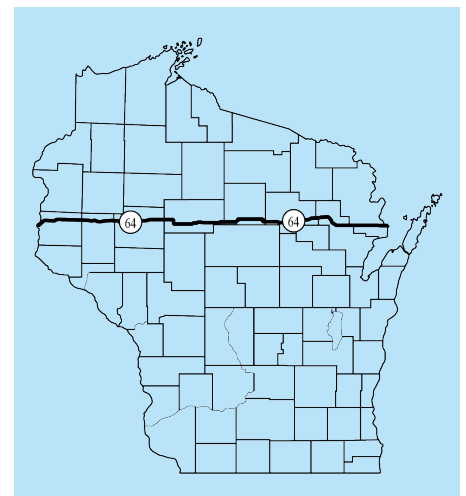
STATEWIDE	9,795 permit applications	13,165 preference point applications	7,895 permits issued
NORTHERN ZONE	172 harvest quota	3 points needed to draw	1,230 permits issued
SOUTHERN ZONE	600 harvest quota	1 point needed to draw	6,665 permits issued

Fishers were reintroduced to Wisconsin in the 1950s. By the 1980s, their population had rebounded enough to have a limited harvest. The population fluctuated after reintroduction but has remained stable over the past several years.

Historically, most of the fisher harvest occurred in the northernmost counties of Wisconsin. Over the past couple decades, however, the harvest distribution has shifted slightly southward. In the 2022 season, Marathon, Dunn and Clark counties experienced the highest harvest of fisher with 62, 49 and 36 animals harvested. Similarly, the annual deer hunter observation survey reported the highest number of fisher sightings in the central farmland region of the state.

The shift in the distribution of the fisher population is not unique to Wisconsin. Surrounding states have also seen population declines in some of the northern areas while simultaneously seeing population increases in the central forests, agriculture land and even southward expansion.

High numbers of rabbit and hare reports indicate a benefit to fishers.



BOBCAT FORECAST

Carol Gray



This year, the department will collect a section of the lower jaw from all bobcat harvested during time period 1. Prior to certification, the lower jaw must be removed and placed in a plastic bag with the jaw tag. The remainder of the carcass can be used for personal use or properly discarded.

Bobcats are widespread and maintain a healthy breeding population throughout the state of Wisconsin. However, due to their secretive nature, bobcats are difficult to monitor. The DNR has concluded work on a bobcat collaring project to monitor these cats in the state. The location and survival data from this effort will improve the state's bobcat population management strategy. This will inform and guide management decisions moving forward. With the inclusion of a southwestern Wisconsin study area, the department gains a better understanding about the population structure in the southern zone. Hunters can expect increased opportunity in the southern zone.

Interest in harvesting a bobcat has increased over the last five years. A record number of hunters and trappers (30,129) applied for a bobcat permit or preference points during the 2023 application period. Bobcats are managed using a limited draw and harvest quota system, like fishers.

2023 Permits

STATEWIDE		12,569 permit applications	17,560 preference point applications	4,030 permits issued
NORTHERN ZONE	PERIOD 1	HARVEST QUOTA	POINTS NEEDED TO DRAW	PERMITS ISSUED
		317	3	985
	PERIOD 2	317	4	685
	PERIOD 1	275	1	1,380
SOUTHERN ZONE	PERIOD 2	275	2	980