



2019-2020 Rhode Island Furbearer Harvest Report Rhode Island DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife



Furbearers are those mammals that are harvested primarily for their pelts. In Rhode Island this would include muskrat, beaver, mink, raccoon, skunk, opossum, red and gray fox, coyote, weasels, and fisher. The collection of data through examination of trapper-caught carcasses, pelt tagging, and harvest questionnaires provide the primary basis for our management decisions. The attached furbearer harvest figures reflect only those furbearers harvested recreationally, (i.e. during the open season) and not those taken outside the open season by Nuisance Wildlife Control Specialists. Animals taken under those permits are reported separately. Fur harvest numbers are based on mandatory fur harvest reports which, by state law, all trappers (i.e. anyone purchasing a trapping license) must return at the end of the trapping season.

Trapping license sales have been generally trending upwards for the past 15 years. One hundred seventy-two trapping license were sold for the 2019-20 season, up slightly from the 2018-19 season (166). Despite a general increase in trapping license sales, recreational fur harvests continue to remain at historically low levels. In the 2018-19 season, of trappers who submitted their mandatory fur harvest report, only 47 reported any captures or indicated that they set traps during the season. That would represent only 28% of the total number of license holders. This number is similar to 2017-18, with 46 trappers, representing 24% of license holders, reporting any captures or recreational trapping effort. Fur prices, which have never really recovered since the world-wide economic downturn that occurred in 2008, likely are affecting trapping activity. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rhode Island Trappers Association annual fur auction scheduled for March 2020 and from which I obtain pelt price information was not held, so I do not have any pelt price data to share with you in this report.

Beaver

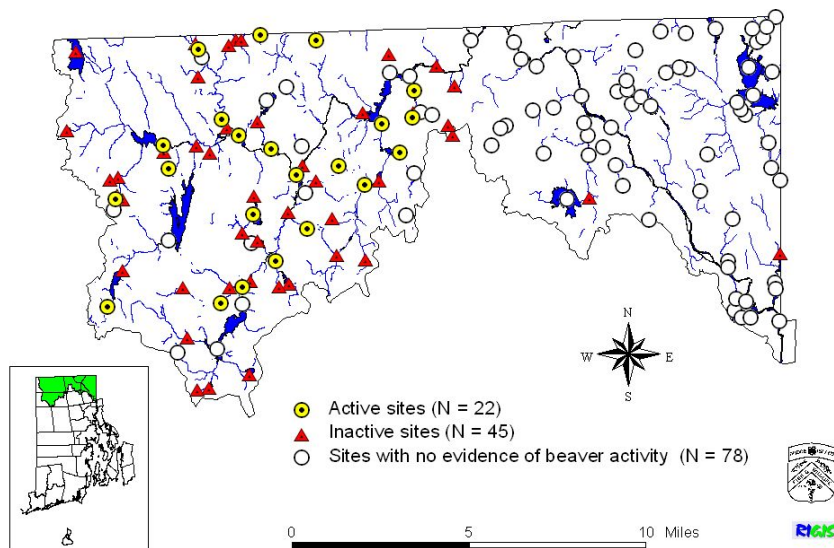


Forty-nine permits were issued to harvest beaver for the 2019-20 season, slightly more than the previous season (45). Interest in beaver trapping has remained fairly consistent over the past ten years, between forty and fifty permits issued in any given year. The harvest total of 105 beaver was just slightly below the previous season total of 107. Eighteen beaver were taken on state management area lands and statewide, beavers were harvested in 14 different townships and from five of the state's major watersheds.

Researchers at the University of Rhode Island, with funding provided by the R.I. Division of Fish and Wildlife, will begin surveys this fall to determine the spatial distribution of beavers in the state, on a watershed basis. John Crockett, a master's degree candidate,

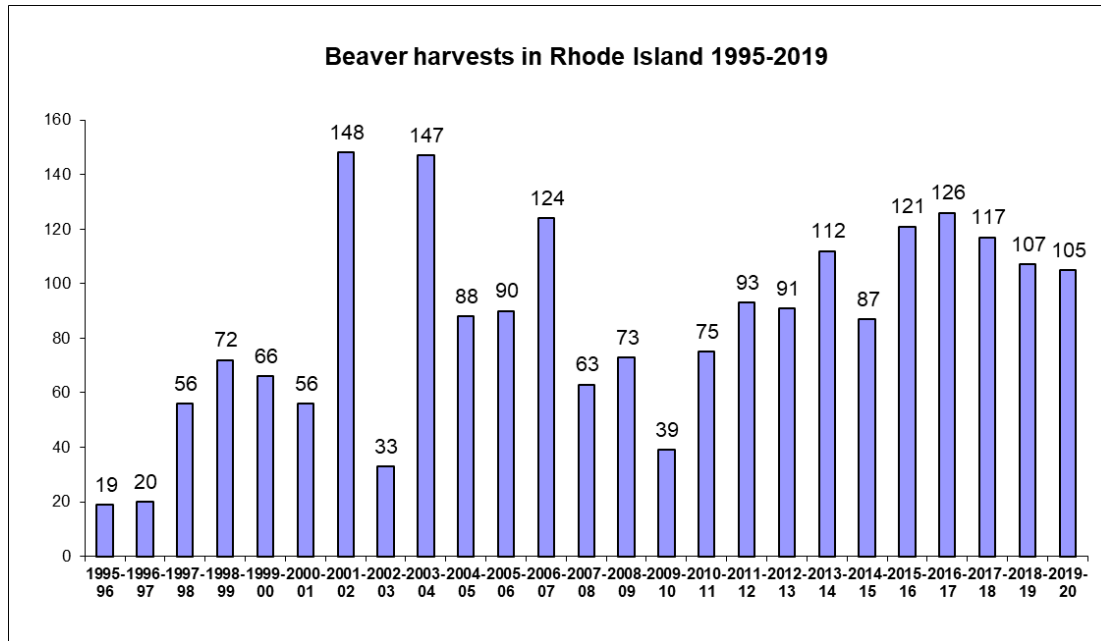
will be doing the field work and data analysis. The five-year project will build upon surveys that I conducted starting in 2001. Beaver populations have seemingly remained stable or possibly declined in some watersheds, while as some of you already know, have continued to expand into new areas of the state, particularly the lower portions of the Blackstone watershed, the Pawtuxet watershed, as well as watersheds such as the Moshassuck or Woonasquatucket, where previously little or no beaver activity was documented. In addition to beaver occupancy, John will also be systematically documenting presence or absence of river otters, again building on a data set that has been accumulated over the past 20 years. He is also going to be devoting effort to systematically documenting the presence or absence of muskrat, something I regretfully did not do during my survey work, but very timely given the obvious declines of muskrat populations.

RHODE ISLAND DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE 2007-2008
WINTER SURVEY OF BEAVER COLONIES IN THE BLACKSTONE WATERSHED



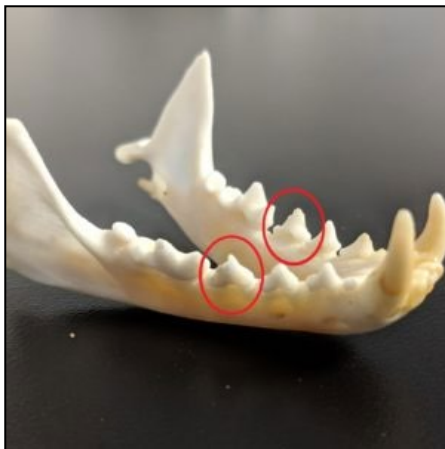
Many trappers are using this down time in the fur market to have their beaver pelts turned into tanned pelts for hanging on the wall or for sale, or into various garments. Also, the current value of castor, from \$30.00 to as much as \$40.00 per pound frozen, helps make up for the low price offered for fur. And do not forget skulls. Cleaned properly, there is a potential market for skulls of beaver and other furbearers for display or educational purposes.

The season dates for 2020-21 will be: November 1, 2021 through March 14, 2021 (134 days) on private lands and December 1, 2020 through February 28, 2021 (90 days) on state management areas. A beaver trapping permit, in addition to a R.I. trapping license is required to harvest beaver and is available at no charge at the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Great Swamp Field Headquarters in West Kingston. Beaver pelts must be affixed with a Division issued pelt tag prior to export or sale.



Fisher

A total of 52 permits to trap fisher were issued in 2019, the same number of permits issued in 2018. Trappers harvested 33 fishers during the 24-day season, a decrease of 44% from the 2018 total of 59. Twenty-eight (54%) permittees set traps for fisher, with 16 (57%) successfully harvesting at least one fisher. This represents the lowest success rate for fisher trappers in the past twenty years. Catch per unit effort declined to 1.1 fisher harvested per 100 trap nights of effort based on the mandatory survey provided to fisher trappers as a condition of their permit to trap fisher. This is the lowest reported rate in the twenty years we have allowed a trapping season for fisher in Rhode Island.

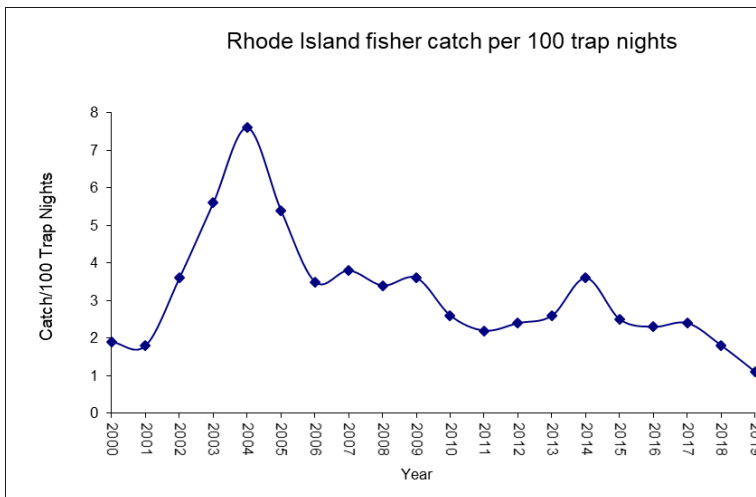


All fisher trappers are provided with a survey card and asked to record number of traps set, the number of nights traps were set, towns where trapping was conducted, and type of trap (cage or body-grip) used. This provides the Division with valuable data on trapper effort. In addition to the survey and mandatory pelt tagging, trappers are required to submit the heads of harvested fisher to the Division for removal of a tooth for cementum aging analysis. Teeth from trapper harvested fisher were removed and prepared for cementum aging analysis. For fisher, the standard tooth-type for aging is the fourth premolar in the lower jaw, shown in the adjacent

photo. This aging process, which involves sectioning of the teeth, is done by an independent laboratory. The process provides an accurate age of animal at the time it was harvested. We can assume that the harvested population is a representative sample of the entire population.

Juveniles comprised 50% of the harvest, an increase from the juvenile component of 44% in 2018. The ratio of juveniles to adult females (≥ 2 years old), increased from 2.8/1 in 2018 to 4.2/1 in 2019. The ratio of juveniles to adult females greater than two years old in the harvest has been used as an indicator of trapping pressure. Some studies have indicated that in some parts of their range, harvest ratios of less than 6:1 result in population declines. Catch per unit effort (CPUE) declined to 1.1 per 100 trap nights, down from 1.8 per 100 trap nights in 2018, and as stated earlier the lowest rate reported rate in the twenty years we have had a fisher trapping season.

CPUE can be viewed as a relative measure of abundance. We ask trappers to record the number of traps set and how many nights the traps were set. From this, and the number of fisher captured, we can determine the catch per given unit of time, in this case 100 trap nights. One trap set for one-night equals one trap night. Fishers can be vulnerable to over-harvest and when pelt prices are high it can foster an increase in trapper interest and effort.



The season dates for the 2020 season will remain unchanged, December 1, through December 24 inclusive. **The season bag limit has been reduced from four to two fishers.** All fisher pelts must be tagged by the Division of Fish and Wildlife before being sold, exported or shipped for tanning or taxidermy. We will again only be requiring trappers to

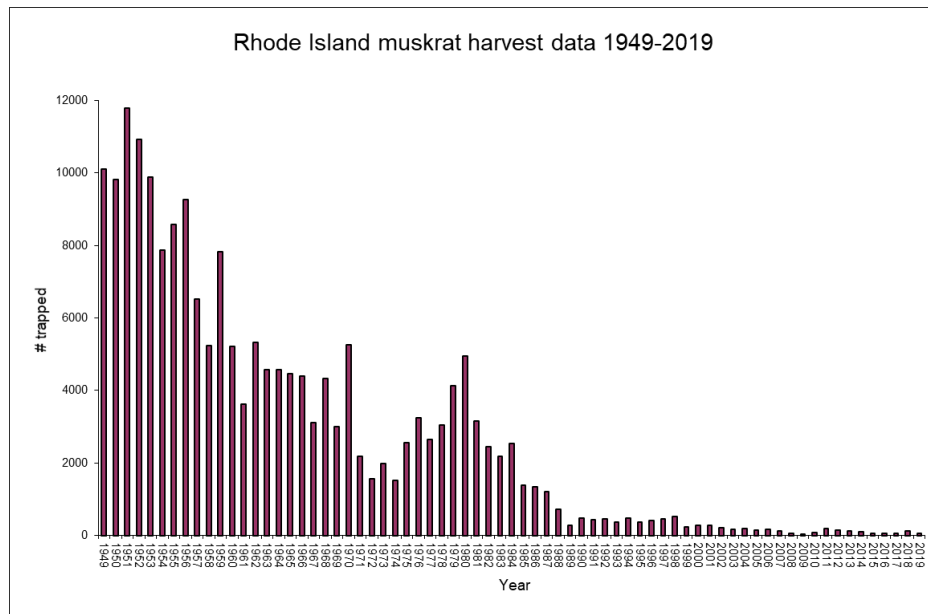
submit the head of all fishers that they harvest. Bags will be provided to trappers when they receive their permits. Trappers will be required to include date of capture, town in which the animal was captured, and sex of the animal in order to receive a pelt tag. This year, fisher trappers can voluntarily submit the entire carcass of fishers they harvest. We have been asked to participate in a regional study of the presence of rodenticides in fisher. We will collect liver tissue samples which will be shipped to researchers at the Pennsylvania Game Commission who are conducting the research. If you plan to submit an entire carcass, you do not have to remove the head. Please keep carcasses frozen until such time as delivery or pick up can be arranged.

Fisher trapping permits, which are required in addition to a current trapping license, are available at the Great Swamp Field Headquarters. A fisher trapper survey, included with the permit must be completed by each trapper whether they were successful or not, and whether or not they set traps for fisher during the open season.

Muskrat

Trappers reported harvesting 47 muskrats last season, a big decline from the 2018-19 total of 128. The statewide beaver harvest has exceeded the total muskrat harvest for four of the last five seasons.

As mentioned earlier, a URI project is being initiated this fall to assess the current spatial distribution of muskrats across Rhode Island, hopefully providing us with a better understanding of what the status of our muskrat populations currently are in the state.



Mink

Rhode Island trappers reported harvesting 32 mink in 2019-20, an improvement from 2018-19, for which only 14 mink were harvested, the lowest recorded total since 1949. As with muskrat, many trappers are not making sets for mink when pelt prices remain at very low levels.

Legislation

There were no legislative proposals introduced during the COVID-19 shortened 2019-20 legislative session that would directly affect trapping or furbearer management.

Rabies

Care should be taken when handling or skinning furbearers; particularly target species such as raccoons, skunks and foxes. Wear rubber gloves when skinning and do not skin animals that appeared sick or were behaving abnormally.

For the period of January 1 to June 30, 2019, for which the most recent information is available, a total of 250 mammals were tested for rabies in R.I. Approximately 3.6% of all specimens tested positive for the virus during that period. The highest rate of positive tests was in foxes (16.7%), followed by skunks (15.4%), raccoons (5.4%), and bats (4.7%).

Best Management Practices (BMP's)

The total number of BMP documents released to date is 22 and represents the culmination of the largest national trap testing effort ever conducted. The research was the result of collaboration between state and federal fish and wildlife agencies in the U.S. and Canada and state and national trappers associations. BMP's are meant to serve as a

guide to various agencies responsible for the management of furbearers. The goals of the BMP process are to:

- Promote regulated trapping as a modern wildlife management tool
- Identify practical traps and trapping techniques that continue to improve efficiency, selectivity, and welfare of trapped animals
- Provide specifications for traps that meet BMP criteria for individual species in various regions of the U.S.
- Provide wildlife professionals with information to evaluate trapping systems
- Instill public confidence in, and maintain public support for, wildlife management and trapping through distribution of science-based information

On-line licensing

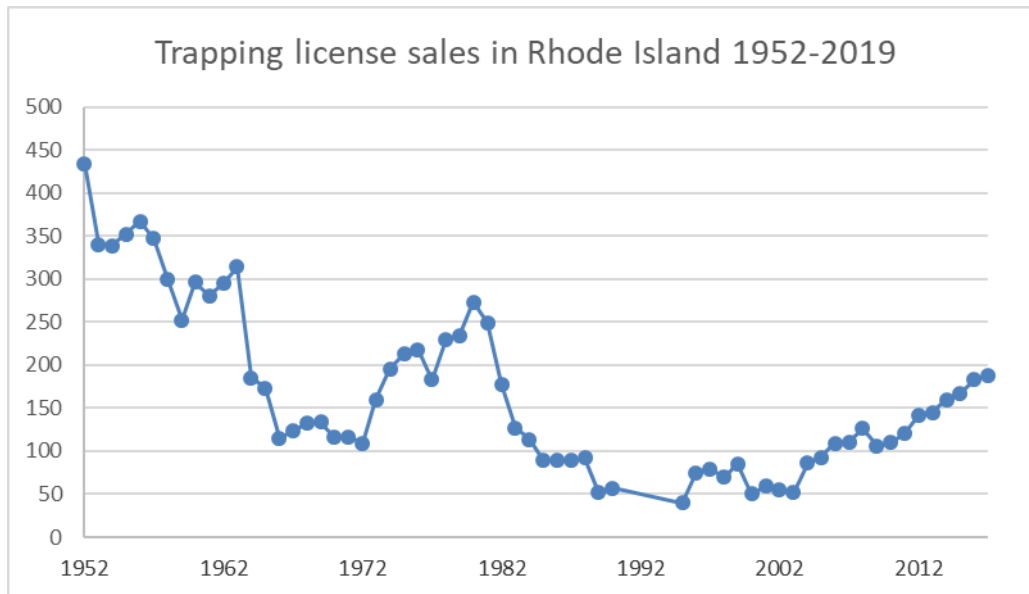
The Department has been working for some time to make hunting fishing and trapping license sales and reporting of harvests available on-line. You can now purchase your Rhode Island trapping license on-line and also report your harvests electronically in accordance with state law. If you currently have a trapping license, your trapping license number will not change. If you have previously had a trapping license but have not renewed in recent years and would like to get your old license number, you will need to contact the DEM Office of Boat Registration and Licensing in Providence. Otherwise you will be assigned a new number when you enter the online system. For the time, you will still be required to obtain your fisher, beaver, and state land permits only from the Great Swamp field office in West Kingston as you have always done.

Miscellaneous

Rhode Island trappers have in the past been very helpful in providing sighting reports and specimens of furbearing and non-furbearing mammals in the state. Over the past several years I have collected valuable specimens of long-tail weasels, southern flying squirrels, star-nosed moles and other species from local trappers. Voucher specimens provide valuable information on distribution of some of our lesser-known mammals. I would be interested in collecting whole specimens of weasels, flying squirrels, moles, bats, shrews or other small mammals whenever possible.

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beaver photo courtesy Michael C. Thomas
fisher jaw photo: Matson's Laboratory. LLC



2019-20 Reported furbearer harvest by county

Species	Providence County	Kent County	Washington County	Newport County	Bristol County	Total of Species
Coyote	3	1	3	1	0	8
Muskrat	24	5	18	0	0	47
Raccoon	19	3	34	28	1	85
Red Fox	1	0	6	1	0	8
Gray Fox	0	0	2	0	0	2
Skunk	10	2	3	7	1	23
Fisher	3	4	17	9	0	33
Mink	2	4	10	0	0	16
Weasel	0	0	1	0	0	1
Opossum	25	0	9	15	0	49
Other*	41	10	0	0	0	51
Beaver	54	7	44	0	0	105
Total:^	182	36	147	61	2	428
* includes: gray squirrel (<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>), red squirrel (<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>), woodchuck (<i>Marmota monax</i>), rabbit (<i>Sylvilagus sp.</i>), bobcat						
^does not include those animals reported taken under nuisance wildlife control permit outside the open season						

Furbearer harvest in Rhode Island 1978-2019

Year	Red Fox	Gray Fox	Mink	Muskrat	Opossum	Otter	Raccoon	Skunk	Coyote	Weasel	Fisher	Beaver	Total
1978	86	21	80	3045	62	23	286	82	0	7		0	3692
1979	62	42	100	4130	255	2	379	140	2	21			5133
1980	47	42	161	4952	279	3	542	98	1	35		1	6161
1981	65	36	165	3163	322		591	106		11			4459
1982	53	48	69	2448	322		503	67		11			3521
1983	40	12	42	2189	152		243	13		1			2692
1984	61	17	63	2543	204		255	30		4			3177
1985	40	15	48	1375	190		213	50		7			1938
1986	55	10	76	1337	171		253	34		8			1944
1987	34	17	67	1211	166		331	29		12			1867
1988	23	9	58	728	62		120	13		2			1015
1989	12	11	63	284	32		42	6		0			450
1990	9	6	65	473	35		78	8	2	0		12	688
1991	3	4	109	442	25		74	6		3		7	673
1992	0	3	65	461	82		306	67		4		0	988
1993	2	3	69	367	39		294	83		2		0	859
1994	5	0	56	472	57		342	90		0		6	1028
1995	2	3	71	356	64		347	112		2		19	976
1996	2	0	85	417	55		232	63	1	0		20	875
1997	1	6	79	454	73		158	246	0	0		56	1073
1998	8	2	54	512	123	4*	230	309	2	0		72	1316
1999	8	11	49	243	125	4*	173	381	0	4		66	1064
2000	18	2	47	275	172	3*	232	512	4	0	11	56	1329
2001	4	4	46	283	122	0	207	518	2	1	10	148	1345
2002	5	8	46	216	302	1*	322	719	1	1	11	33	1664
2003 ^a	3	6	57	177	28	2*	69	94	12	2	52	147	743
2004 ^a	0	5	80	197	10	4*	26	10	1	2	55	88	474
2005 ^a	4	5	86	152	13	2*	67	7	1	3	49	90	476
2006 ^a	1	8	82	161	8	6*	62	4	1	2	83	124	536
2007 ^a	12	10	114	126	39	0	82	30	6	0	97	63	579
2008 ^a	13	20	63	58	18	1*	82	19	3	14	100	73	463
2009 ^a	11	9	34	42	12	0	47	10	10	0	66	39	280
2010 ^a	3	8	49	83	18	1*	70	12	2	3	54	75	377
2011 ^a	15	13	59	184	24	0	86	16	21	3	34	93	548
2012 ^a	4	9	62	153	36	0	68	33	21	4	73	91	554
2013 ^a	4	10	76	115	30	0	82	17	10	0	90	112	546
2014 ^a	7	4	44	92	29	0	55	16	13	2	91	87	440
2015 ^a	4	3	38	54	38	1*	86	21	1	1	57	121	424
2016 ^a	10	7	32	53	31	1*	64	18	2	2	57	126	402
2017 ^a	6	9	26	57	46	1*	104	23	7	4	73	117	472
2018 ^a	2	0	28	128	52	0	113	35	14	3	59	107	541
2019 ^{ab}	8	2	16	47	49	1*	85	23	8	1	33	105	377

Beaver and fisher harvest numbers based on mandatory pelt tagging

*Incidentals to beaver trapping

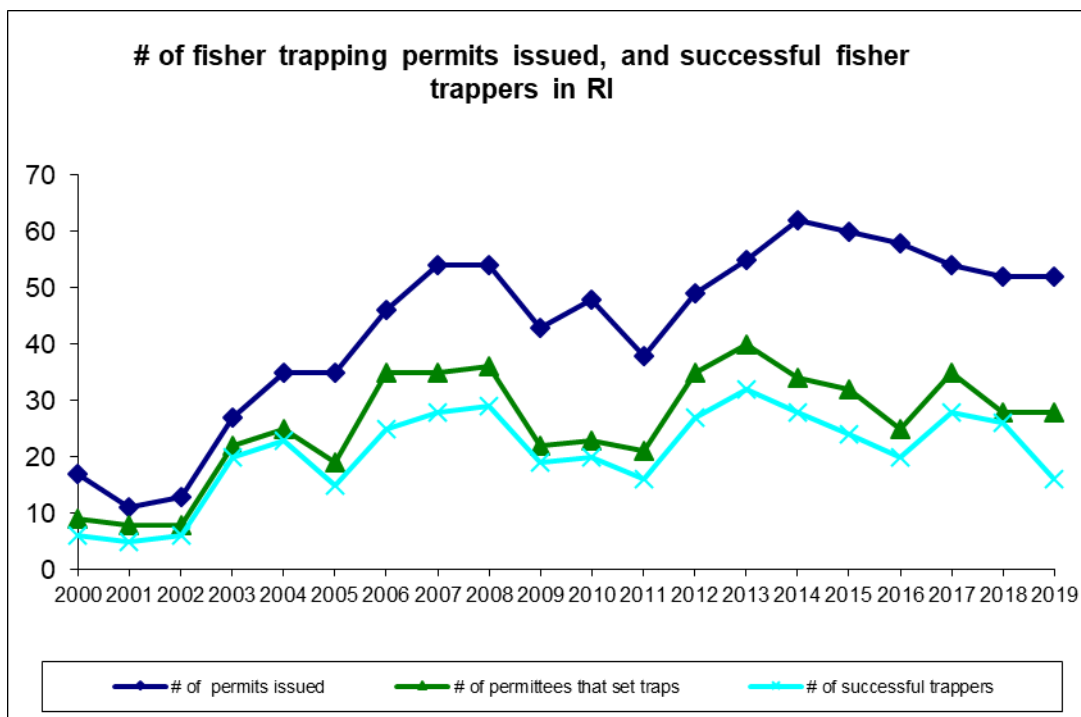
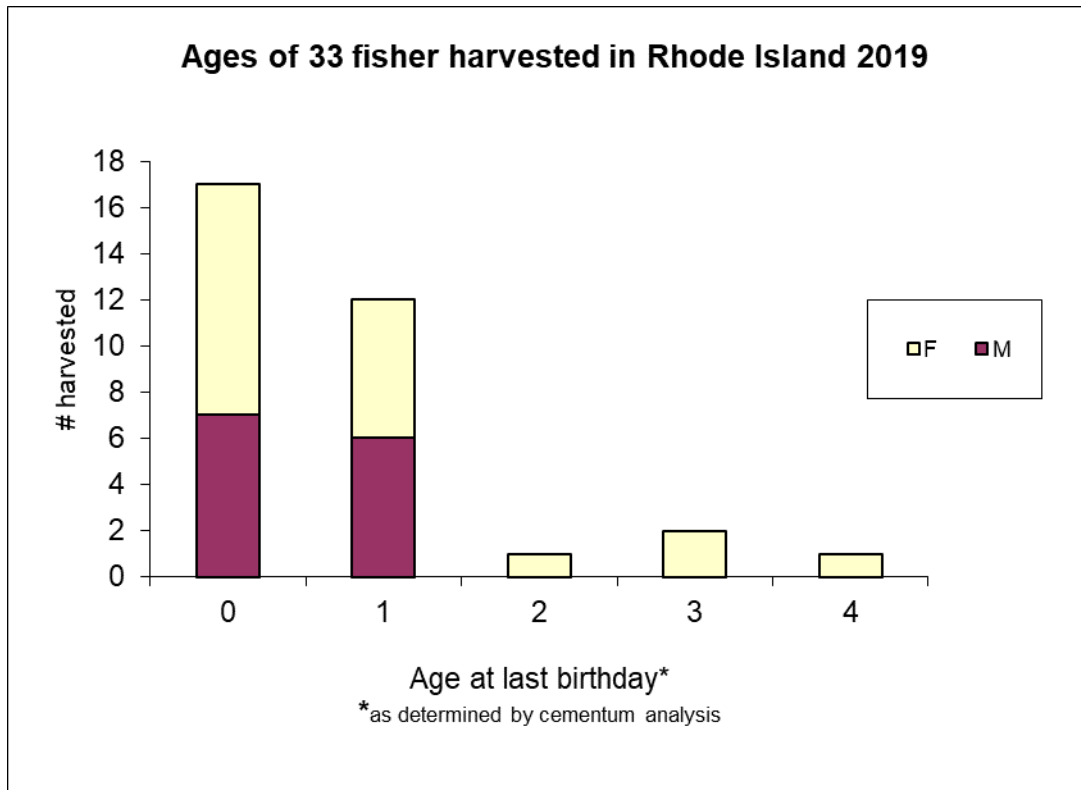
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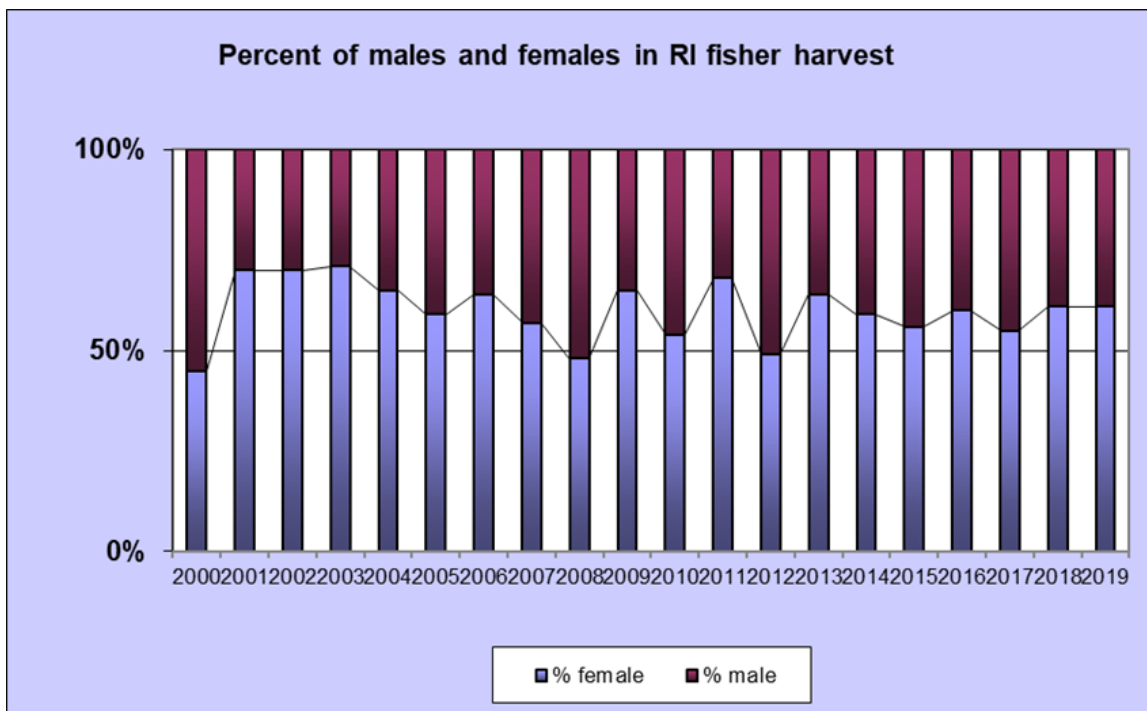
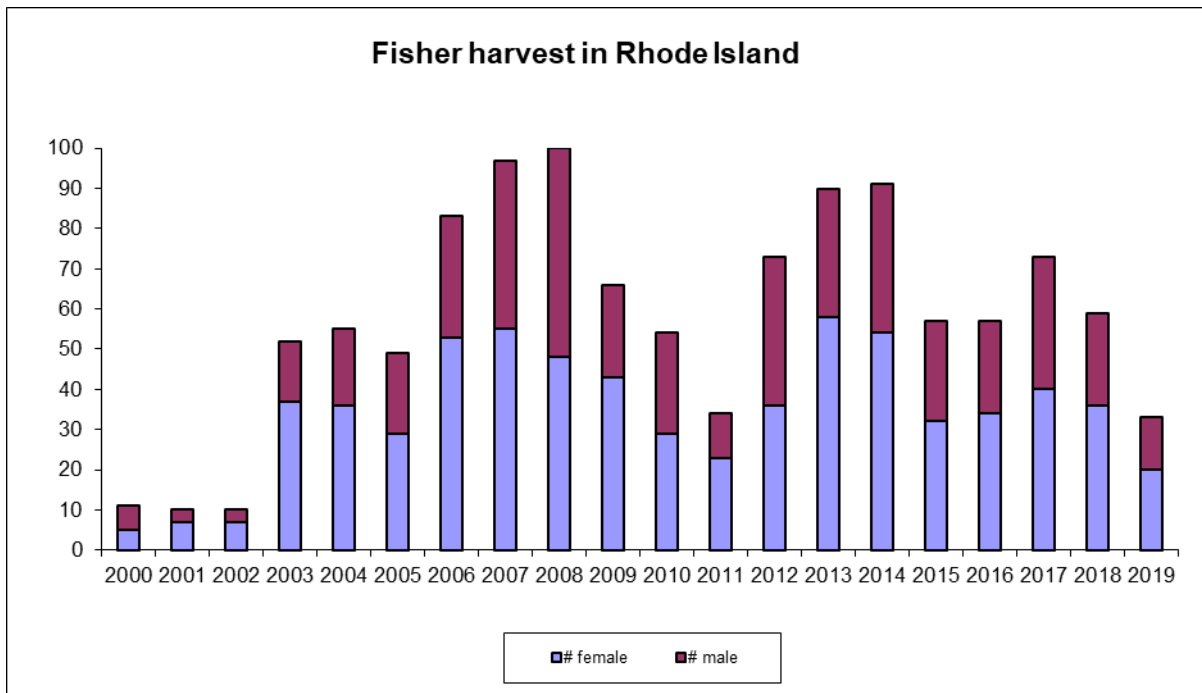
^bbased on on-line reporting system

Average pelt prices* received by Rhode Island trappers 1977-2019

Year	Mink	Muskrat	Opossum	Otter	Raccoon	Red Fox	Gray Fox	Beaver	Fisher	Coyote	Skunk	Total Value (\$)*
1977	20.00	5.25	2.00	40.00	30.00	60.00	37.00					23,976.00
1978	21.33	5.43	4.90	45.57	29.98	76.02	50.03					35,642.00
1979	30.66	7.35	4.36	61.62	29.11	57.56	54.06					52,096.00
1980	21.05	6.86	3.91	51.46	23.71	56.86	45.22					58,610.00
1981	20.94	5.21	1.38		20.75	48.20	32.46					36,944.00
1982	21.70	3.49	1.07		17.17	40.26	33.76					22,803.00
1983	23.23	4.77	1.10		12.52	34.88	33.55					16,425.00
1984	27.85	4.42	2.59		15.12	29.81	30.76					19,735.00
1985	17.61	3.33	1.62		13.24	13.71	15.44					9,445.00
1986	26.47	4.87	2.10		21.26	32.16	36.23				1.90	16,456.00
1987	34.48	5.33	1.93		15.80	17.00	31.71				na	14,414.00
1988	31.42	3.32	1.26		5.95	20.48	17.20				1.35	5,263.00
1989	23.32	1.30	0.85		3.74	7.37	8.23				na	2,202.00
1990	23.56	1.05	1.14		5.45	9.83	5.00				na	2,267.00
1991	27.50	2.40	1.78		7.16	15.38	10.50				na	4,720.00
1992	16.65	1.73	0.72		6.60	10.19	8.56				2.59	4,157.00
1993	16.60	2.42	0.91		8.08	na	11.07				1.40	3,409.00
1994	10.68	2.93	1.22		11.26	16.15	9.92				2.39	6,197.35
1995	11.96	2.81	1.46		8.90	na	11.24	na			2.10	5,606.46
1996	19.37	5.52	1.75		16.73	14.37	10.04	na			na	4,667.67
1997	10.87	3.57	0.70		13.60	15.06	10.65	22.96		na	2.51	5,166.42
1998	9.62	1.44	0.75		6.61	6.89	5.46	15.65		na	2.28	5,030.23
1999	7.99	2.49	0.69		3.35	13.39	6.45	12.95		10.79	1.98	3,471.11
2000	7.25	2.22	2.01		6.90	16.17	8.54	13.59	19.18	19.67	3.72	6,161.25
2001	7.43	3.89	0.91		10.38	13.03	11.36	16.75	22.10	21.07	4.91	2,812.03
2002	8.17	3.55	2.30		10.35	12.11	17.13	13.31	20.56	32.40	4.99	2,719.92
2003	11.48	2.64	2.29		9.71	20.46	17.04	17.81	29.33	20.80	4.40	2,964.58
2004	15.38	2.25	2.92		6.68	17.25	15.25	16.76	30.83	16.50	4.15	2,146.17
2005	20.62	5.31	2.65		8.42	17.62	21.59	20.32	74.24	27.51	5.43	4,847.19
2006	11.10	4.20	2.26	47.56^	9.97	22.09	41.33	22.95	62.70	34.27	5.88	7,450.03
2007	9.99	2.95	1.53	41.49^	18.48	23.05	30.01	21.27	74.17	25.00	4.43	12,419.41
2008	7.06	2.78	1.09		5.47	8.25	7.00	7.86	31.06	4.00	3.00	5,070.21
2009	10.00	4.73	1.50	38.65^	10.20	7.33	10.50	10.43	38.65	12.70	1.80	4,313.86
2010	14.05	4.84	na	na	7.95	21.25	19.17	15.15	34.56	14.64	2.50	4,952.55
2011	16.64	8.08	2.33	na	7.13	23.89	25.80	25.89	68.19	7.57	2.00	8,748.53
2012	15.55	7.45	1.25	na	16.00	20.33	26.00	17.38	74.44	8.50	3.00	10,845.47
2013	14.66	6.25	1.77	na	8.33	41.67	15.00	14.88	69.23	na	2.33	9,822.62
2014	11.97	5.20	1.75	na	4.87	17.05	8.11	13.48	42.07	14.00	2.50	6,698.60
2015	8.00	3.40	1.50	na	1.75	18.00	na	7.25	34.45	16.00	na	3,624.00
2016	na	4.16	1.00	na	4.30	na	na	11.36	40.78	15.24	2.00	4,306.44
2017	5.80	2.13	1.00	na	2.76	7.00	8.00	8.16	31.07	na	3.00	4,017.08
2018	4.00	na	na	na	3.00	8.00	na	8.50	28.05	na	na	
2019"	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	

* based on Rhode Island Trappers Association (RITA) fur auction sale prices
^ tagged in other states
na - no pelts offered for sale or sold at auction
" - no RITA auction held in 2019-20 due to COVID-19





2020-21 RHODE ISLAND ABSTRACT OF TRAPPING REGULATIONS

<u>Species</u>	<u>Open season (dates inclusive)</u>	<u>Pelt Tagging</u>	<u>Bag Limit</u>
Mink, Muskrat, Skunk, Raccoon, Opossum, Weasel, Red Fox, Gray Fox, Rabbit	November 1, 2020 - January 31, 2021	NO	NO
Coyote	Private land - No closed season State land – November 1 – January 31	NO	NO
Beaver* State land:	December 1, 2020 – February 28, 2021	YES	20
Private land:	November 1, 2020 – March 14, 2021		
Fisher*	December 1-24, 2020	YES	2

* Special permit required in addition to RI trapping license and may be obtained at Fish and Wildlife's Great Swamp Field Headquarters (401)789-0281

General Regulations

- No person shall set, maintain or tend any trap without first obtaining a trapping license from the Department of Environmental Management. A resident of this state may set traps on property which they own and on which they are domiciled without obtaining a trapping license. (20-16-7)
- Every holder of a trapping license will be provided with a trapping harvest report card that must be returned to the Division of Fish and Wildlife within 30 days of the end of the trapping season. Failure to return the card will result in denial of trapping license renewal. (20-16-12)
- Traps may not be set, staked, or placed prior to 8:00 AM opening day.
- All traps must have at a minimum the trapper's current RI trapping license number attached by a metal tag or embedded or cut into the trap. (20-6-7)
- Written landowner permission is required to trap on private land. (20-16-9)
- All traps must be checked at least once in every 24-hour period. (20-6-9)
- There is no open season on bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) or river otter (*Lontra canadensis*).

Types of traps permitted

Furbearers for which there is an open season may taken in: box (a.k.a. "cage") traps, body-grip (a.k.a. "conibear") traps, or species specific traps, with the following restrictions:

- **Private land:** Body-grip (a.k.a. smooth wire or "conibear") type traps up to 6 ½" jaw spread (i.e. "110, 120, 160" or equivalent) are permitted on land or in water on private land. Body-grip type traps greater than 6 ½" but not exceeding 8" jaw spread ("220") may only be set if completely submerged in water or set no less than six (6) feet above the surface of the ground. Body-grip traps greater than 8" but not exceeding 10" jaw spread ("330") may only be set completely submerged in water.
- **State land:** Body-grip traps up to 6 ½" jaw spread are only permitted in water sets (i.e. all or a portion of the trap in water) or if placed six (6) feet above the ground. Body-grip traps with a jaw spread greater than 6 ½" but not exceeding 10" ("220-330") may only be set if completely submerged in water.
- The use of box traps is permitted on private and state lands.
- The use of species specific traps is permitted on private and state land

Trapping on state management areas

- All trappers harvesting furbearers from state management areas must obtain a special permit (no fee), issued by the Division of Fish and Wildlife, Great Swamp Field Headquarters in addition to their current RI trapping license.

Prohibitions

- The use of poisons or snares. (20-16-6).
- The use of steel-jawed leghold traps (20-16-8).
- No person shall disturb, tend, or possess a trap of another, or take a furbearer animal from the traps of another unless specifically authorized to do so. (20-16-12).
- The setting of traps within ten feet of a beaver lodge or bank den or within eight feet of a muskrat lodge unless authorized by special permit.
- The taking or possession of a road-killed furbearer (20-16-1), unless with a current RI trapping license and during the open season for that species or as provided for under a current RI Scientific Collectors Permit (20-1-18) or otherwise permitted by the Division.
- The relocation of beaver.
- The use of deadfalls, pitfalls, fishhooks, treble hooks or similarly sharpened instruments to catch or injure furbearers.

Definitions

Species specific trap: Is characterized by all of the following:

1. Triggering and restraining mechanisms are enclosed within a housing;
2. Triggering and restraining mechanisms are only accessible through a single opening when set;
3. The access opening does not exceed 2 inches in diameter;
4. The triggering mechanism can only be activated by a pulling force;
5. Has a swivel mounted anchoring system.

2020-2021 Dates

November 1st – Trapping season for muskrat, mink, raccoon, skunk, opossum, rabbit, foxes, weasels, and beaver (private land) begins.

December 1st – Beaver (state land) and fisher trapping season begins.

December 24th – Fisher trapping season ends.

January 10, 2021 – Last day to present fisher pelts for tagging and to submit heads.

January 31, 2021 – Trapping season for all species except beaver ends.

February 28, 2021 – Beaver trapping season on state land ends.

March 14, 2021 – Beaver season on private land ends.

April 30, 2021 – Last day to submit your furbearer harvest report via the on-line licensing system.