



2023-2024 Rhode Island Furbearer Harvest Report

Rhode Island DEM Division of Fish Wildlife



Furbearers are mammals that are harvested primarily for their pelts. In Rhode Island, this includes 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 provides 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.

Historically, Rhode Island has used paper harvest reports to collect seasonal data from each trapper. However, in early 2022, a new system was adopted: Rhode Island Outdoors (RIO). This system for online license purchasing and harvest reporting is still relatively new, with residents and biologists getting used to the ins and outs. While the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and RIO work out the kinks, license sales and harvest data have varied from report to report. We have updated the information now to reflect that change, so these figures may look different from those reported last year.



Photo Credit: Jim Tappero



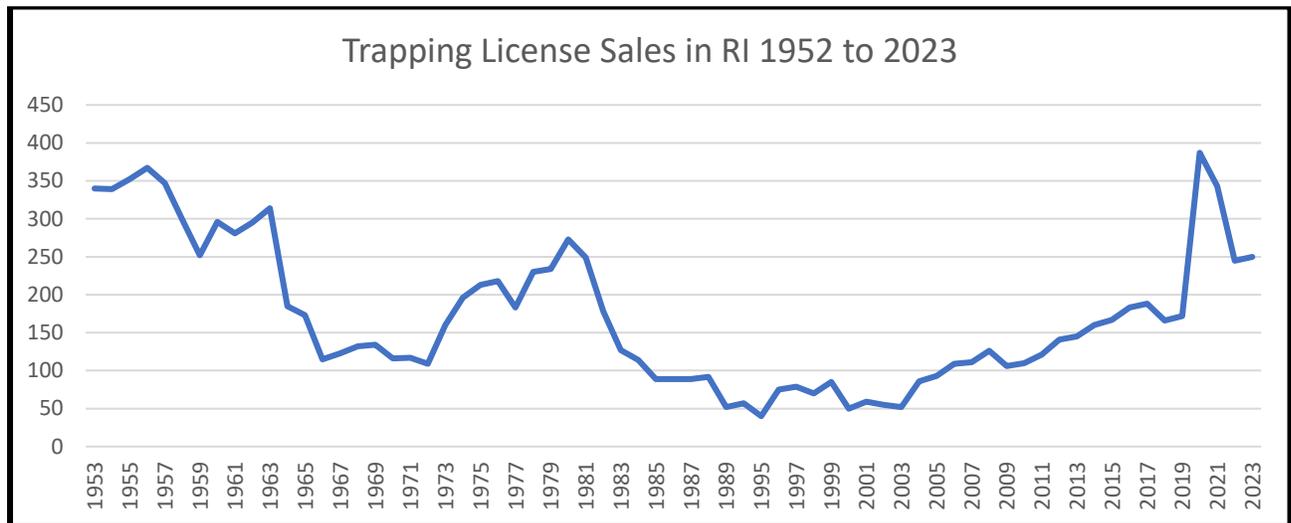
Photo Credit: Larrv Smith

Licensing

Two hundred fifty trapping licenses were sold in Rhode Island during the 2023-2024 season. This represents no significant change from the 245 licenses sold during the 2022-2023 harvest season. These numbers are significantly lower than the previous two seasons, when licenses sold were in the mid-300s. We believe this decline is due to the pandemic and the new online system, which has simplified the process of purchasing a license. If we remove the two-year surge, we can see that overall trapping license sales have been trending upward for the past 20 years.

Despite the general upward trend in trapping license sales, recreational fur harvest is at historically low levels, as seen in previous seasons. Beaver, fisher, and state lands permits are required separately from the trapping license. They can be obtained by calling the Great Swamp Field Headquarters and requesting the paper permits.

Trapping licenses are \$15 for Rhode Island residents and \$50 for out-of-state residents. These prices will increase again in 2025 to \$20 for residents and \$75 for out-of-state trappers. A third increase is scheduled for 2028, at which time trapping licenses will cost Rhode Island residents \$25 and out-of-state trappers \$100.



RI Fur Sale and Pelt Pricing

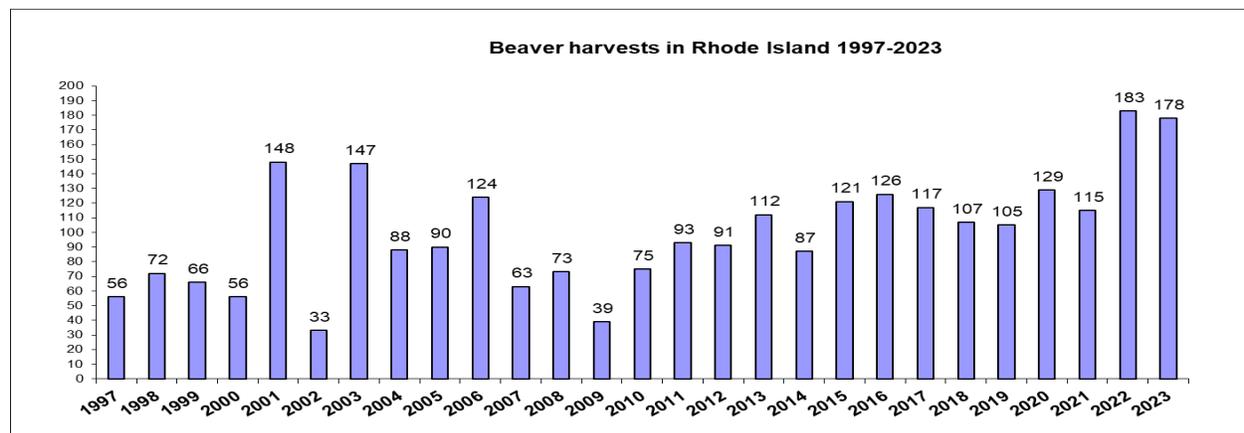
Interest in attending the RI fur sale has continued to shrink year after year. Many trappers opted not to sell their furs at the annual RI sale, preferring to take their lots to other auctions. DFW biologists continue to attend the RI fur sale to assess the changing pelt price trends. Fifty-four pelts were offered for sale, and a total of \$375 changed hands. Pelt prices for mink and muskrat remained roughly the same. The price for raccoon pelts increased by more than a dollar, from \$3 in 2023 to \$4.33 at the 2024 sale. Pelt prices for beaver increased from \$19.58 per round to \$24 at the RI fur sale alone. The division asks trappers to update the biologist regarding fur prices received in other markets to estimate the full value of RI fur. Last year, two trappers were willing to participate in this survey, and the average price for beaver pelts in 2023 reflects a better market in Canada. The price for fisher pelts increased by 60%, going from an average of \$25 per pelt to \$40. The in-person fur sale is a great place to meet other trappers, catch up on each other's seasons, and participate in the RI Trapper Association.

Average Pelt Prices, RI fur sale

Year	Mink	Muskrat	Opossum	Otter	Raccoon	Red Fox	Gray Fox	Beaver	Fisher	Coyote	Skunk	Total Value (\$)*
2000-2001	7.25	2.22	2.01		6.90	16.17	8.54	13.59	19.18	19.67	3.72	6,161.25
2001-2002	7.43	3.89	0.91		10.38	13.03	11.36	16.75	22.10	21.07	4.91	2,812.03
2002-2003	8.17	3.55	2.30		10.35	12.11	17.13	13.31	20.56	32.40	4.99	2,719.92
2003-2004	11.48	2.64	2.29		9.71	20.46	17.04	17.81	29.33	20.80	4.40	2,964.58
2004-2005	15.38	2.25	2.92		6.68	17.25	15.25	16.76	30.83	16.50	4.15	2,146.17
2005-2006	20.62	5.31	2.65		8.42	17.62	21.59	20.32	74.24	27.51	5.43	4,847.19
2006-2007	11.10	4.20	2.26	47.56 ^A	9.97	22.09	41.33	22.95	62.70	34.27	5.88	7,450.03
2007-2008	9.99	2.95	1.53	41.49 ^A	18.48	23.05	30.01	21.27	74.17	25.00	4.43	12,419.41
2008-2009	7.06	2.78	1.09		5.47	8.25	7.00	7.86	31.06	4.00	3.00	5,070.21
2009-2010	10.00	4.73	1.50	38.65 ^A	10.20	7.33	10.50	10.43	38.65	12.70	1.80	4,313.86
2010-2011	14.05	4.84	na	na	7.95	21.25	19.17	15.15	34.56	14.64	2.50	4,952.55
2011-2012	16.64	8.08	2.33	na	7.13	23.89	25.80	25.89	68.19	7.57	2.00	8,748.53
2012-2013	15.55	7.45	1.25	na	16.00	20.33	26.00	17.38	74.44	8.50	3.00	10,845.47
2013-2014	14.66	6.25	1.77	na	8.33	41.67	15.00	14.88	69.23	na	2.33	9,822.62
2014-2015	11.97	5.20	1.75	na	4.87	17.05	8.11	13.48	42.07	14.00	2.50	6,698.60
2015-2016	8.00	3.40	1.50	na	1.75	18.00	na	7.25	34.45	16.00	na	3,624.00
2016-2017	na	4.16	1.00	na	4.30	na	na	11.36	40.78	15.24	2.00	4,306.44
2017-2018	5.80	2.13	1.00	na	2.76	7.00	8.00	8.16	31.07	na	3.00	4,017.08
2018-2019	4.00	na	na	na	3.00	8.00	na	8.50	28.05	na	na	
2019-2020 ¹	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	"
2020-2021	6.10	2.85	2.50	19.20 ^A	5.20	4.20	8.00	10.90	19.42	na	3.00	2,533.48
2021-2022	6.71	3.11	na	na	4.44	na	na	9.63	14.25	na	6.50	1,115.00
2022-2023	8.25	3.70	na	na	3.00	na	12	19.58	25.00	na	na	2048.04
2023-2024	8.53	3.14	na	na	4.33	na	na	24.00	40.00	6.00	na	375.00

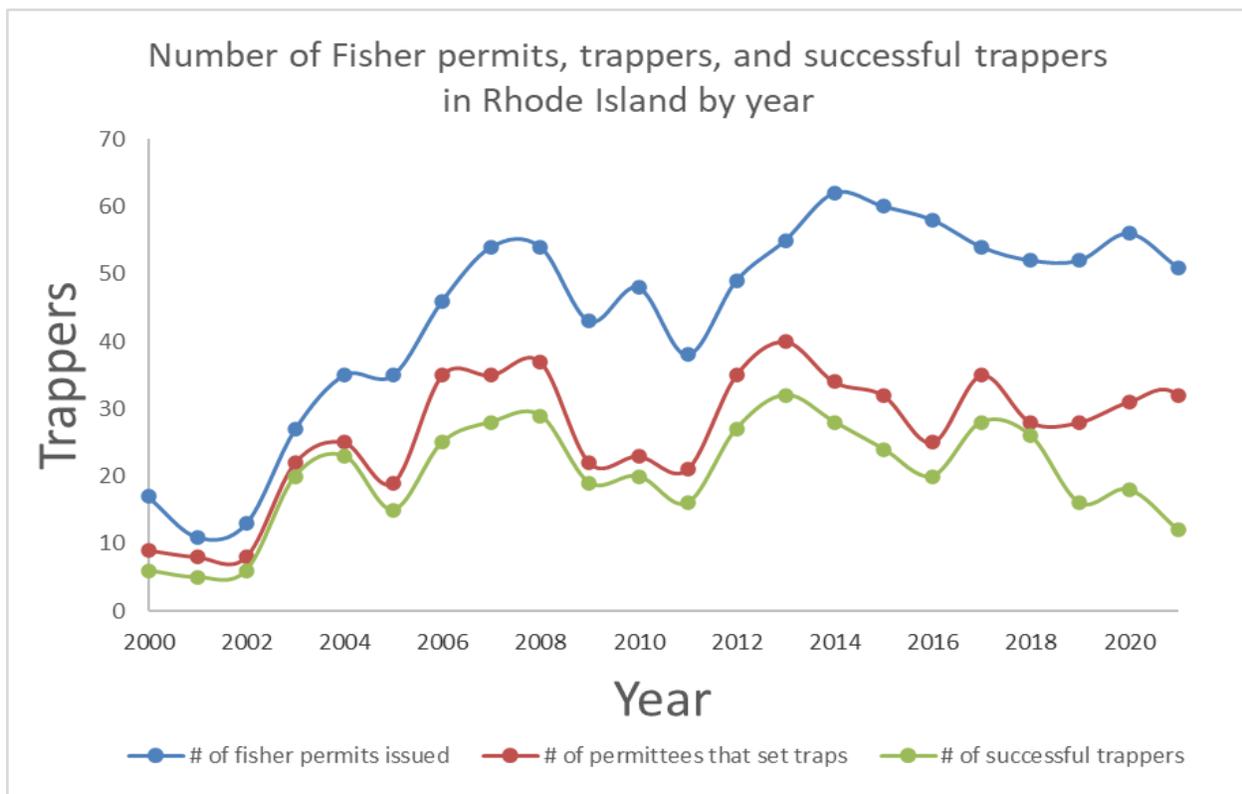
Beaver

Beaver trapping permits are still offered as paper permits and are separate from the regular trapping license. There is no additional cost for this permit, but a current RI trapping license is required. During the 2023-2024 season, we issued 68 beaver permits, significantly more than the previous year. In fact, over the last decade, RI DFW has consistently issued around 50 permits to beaver trappers until last season. We are excited to see more interest in beaver trapping and hope to see more new trappers this year as well. Despite the increase in trappers targeting beaver, roughly the same number of animals were harvested during the season: 178 total. This is likely due to some long-time trappers taking fewer individuals and newer trappers still learning the ropes. Beaver harvest reports are collected both in paper form and online in RIO. Trappers are reminded to please fill out both reports, as they have different functions and allow DFW to collect the most accurate data possible. The beaver trapping season dates were November 1 – March 14 on private land and December 1 – February 29 on state land.



Fisher

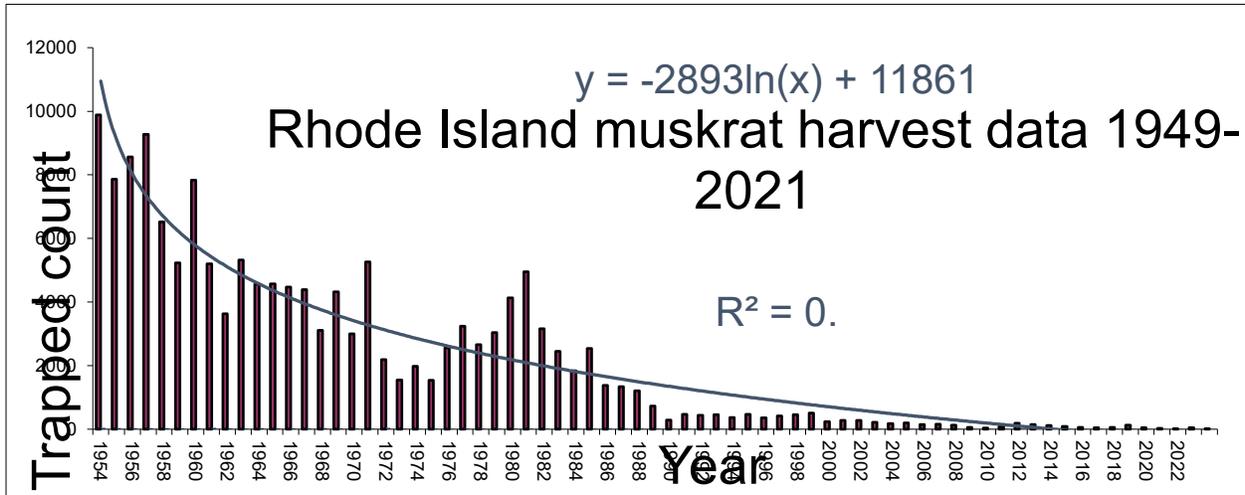
Forty-eight permits to trap fisher were issued in 2023, two more than the 2022 fisher trapping season. Of these 48 permit holders, 18 set traps for fisher, and 5 were successful. Like in 2022, trappers indicated that fewer fisher signs and a mild winter were the main reasons they chose not to set traps. Rhode Island trappers harvested 8 fisher this season, the same number harvested in 2022. According to the trapper effort survey filled out by each permit holder at the end of the season, fisher trappers have experienced declining success since 2018. Additionally, teeth for aging were collected as usual, but we were unable to test our samples this year, so the age of the harvested fisher from 2023 is unknown until our samples can be tested. DFW will continue to require fisher skulls to be submitted when trappers receive their pelt tags, and we hope to send our tooth samples for testing next year. The 2024 fisher trapping season will be December 1 – 24. The bag limit per trapper has been dropped to ONE fisher due to an apparent dip in their population.



Muskrat

Muskrat populations continue to decline across a large geographic region, which is something state wildlife biologists are increasingly concerned about. The reason for the apparent decrease remains unknown, although there are several regional research projects being started that aim to answer that question. Because of this population decline, RI muskrat harvest remains low. Trappers harvested 20 muskrats during the trapping season, a figure obtained from our online

reporting system. This is far fewer than the 49 harvested during the 2022-2023 season. However, last season's harvest was inflated by a single trapper who harvested muskrats in association with an ongoing research project to collect samples. The 2021-2022 season saw 23 muskrats harvested, a number more in line with this season's harvest.



Mink

In the 2023-2024 season, RI trappers harvested ten mink. Mink pelt prices remain quite low, and many trappers are not setting mink traps as a result. The average price of a mink pelt at the March 2024 auction was \$8.53.

Conflict and Sighting Reports

Rhode Island DEM, as part of a wildlife conflict mitigation strategy, has encouraged RI citizens to contact the agency regarding conflicts with wildlife, including several furbearing species. This allows residents to receive technical assistance from biologists on preventing conflicts and to collect reports of rare or secretive species. Simple sighting reports of several carnivore species are collected by agency staff. These include bobcat, coyote, and fisher. For bobcats, photos or other methods of confirmation (sign) are encouraged to assess population-level events. The Division of Fish and Wildlife is particularly interested in bobcat and fisher movement throughout the state. Encouraging these carnivore reports also elicits reports of mountain lions (*Puma concolor*) in Rhode Island. There have been no confirmed mountain lions in Rhode Island for 200 years, but we catalog unconfirmed reports in this database. In August 2024, there were reports of at least one bobcat bite on a person. One bite was reported to the agency directly, which elicited a response from the Division of Law Enforcement, who captured and euthanized the bobcat. This individual cat tested positive for rabies.

Best Management Practices (BMPs)

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. BMPs 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 the distribution of science-based information.

Trapper Education Courses

Rhode Island DFW is working hard to develop more trapper education courses through our Hunter Ed office. For those new to trapping or anyone hoping for a refresher, keep an eye out for courses on the Hunter Ed webpage! We would love to see you all come out and talk about trapping with us.

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