



Fur and Alligator Advisory Council

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Louisiana Furbearers



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Did You Know?

- Trapping is strictly regulated and enforced by the state's department of wildlife and fisheries, which is staffed by professional biologists and conservation officers.
- Only abundant species of wildlife can be legally trapped.
- Only licensed trappers are allowed to participate during a trapping season.
- Trapping is also used to relocate wildlife to areas where they once lived but may no longer be found.
- Regulated trapping is an important way for biologists to collect important ecological information about wildlife, especially wildlife diseases like rabies, which can affect people.
- Trapping is used to control furbearers' damage to property and habitat.



Harvest of Fur Animals in Louisiana 2005-2006

<u>Species</u>	<u>Number of Pelts</u>	<u>Approx. Price</u>	<u>Value</u>
Nutria (Eastern)	1,839	\$1.50	\$2,758.50
Nutria (Western)	<u>3,182</u>	<u>\$1.50</u>	<u>\$4,773.00</u>
	5,021	\$1.50	\$7,531.50
*CNCP	** 168,843	\$4.00	*** \$675,372
Muskrat	145	\$3.00	\$435.00
Raccoon	9,185	\$3.28	\$30,126.80
Mink	2,399	\$8.79	\$21,087.21
Opossum	136	\$0.58	\$78.88
River Otter	4,363	\$91.00	\$397,033.00
Red Fox	32	\$10.98	\$351.36
Gray Fox	356	\$10.80	\$3,844.80
Bobcat	929	\$27.10	\$25,175.90
Beaver	2,481	\$4.67	\$11,586.27
Coyote	<u>110</u>	\$9.02	<u>\$992.20</u>
Total Pelts	25,157	Total Value	\$498,242.92
Total Animals including CNCP	194,000	Total Value	\$1,173,614.92

* Coastwide Nutria Control Program (CNCP) incentive payment \$4 per tail to participating trappers

** CNCP number of animals harvested

*** CNCP Total value of payments

Furbearer and Habitat Management

Louisiana is fortunate to have abundant natural resources. Louisiana supports coastal wetlands, the Mississippi River Basin, vast tracks of agricultural lands, and large tracks of forests. The diversity of Louisiana's natural habitats supports a wide range of wildlife, including furbearers.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries along with biologists, hunters, and trappers work to maintain a balance in nature. Species, which are under-populated, are protected, and species, which are over-populated, are carefully and humanely controlled.

Nature's way of controlling species is often cruel and includes such methods as slow starvation and disease like red mange, distemper, and rabies. These diseases can cause an animal to suffer from internal disorders, blindness, pain and fever. Reducing local densities of furbearer populations through harvests can reduce disease transmission as well as intensity of out-breaks. Entire populations of species are threatened every time a species is not controlled within the supportive level of the habitat.

Good management programs control species so territories do not overlap during the time of year when animals are the most territorial. When territories overlap animals compete for food and denning sites. Fighting becomes common as animals become more stressed.

The greatest risk to furbearer populations is habitat loss. As habitat is lost, animal populations squeeze into smaller territories. Nutria can cause severe marsh damage in the form of eat-outs. These animals kill plants by eating the roots. Thus making the soil vulnerable to erosion. To address this problem, a Coastwide Nutria Control Program began in 2002 and consists of an economic incentive payment of \$4 per nutria tail delivered by registered participants to collection centers established in coastal Louisiana. The incentive payment increased to \$5 for the 2006-2007 trapping season. The goal of the Program is to encourage the harvest of up to 400,000 nutria annually from coastal Louisiana.

Furbearers are annually renewable resources. Most furbearers produce more young than can survive, and good management plans harvest this excess.

Human health is also a concern for wildlife managers. Diseases like tularemia, bubonic plague and rabies can begin as an outbreak in furbearing animals and effect the human population.

The most important furbearer manager is the trapper. The Department of Wildlife and Fisheries set seasons for trapping, but the trapper running a daily line has an even better sense of how much to trap and when to stop. A wise trapper only crops the excess population without damaging the healthy breeding stock.

Furbearer management is paid for through hunting and trapping license fees. We all benefit from the habitat and wildlife protection resulting from good furbearer management.



Marsh damage due to nutria eat-out.

Comparative Take for a Ten Year Average (1996-2006)

<u>Species</u>	<u>No. of Pelts</u>	<u>Approx. Price</u>	<u>Value</u>
<i>Nutria (Eastern)</i>	84,096	\$3.76	316,480.74
<i>Nutria (Western)</i>	<u>20,138</u>	<u>\$3.85</u>	<u>\$ 77,710.00</u>
	104,234	\$3.81	\$394,190.74
<i>Muskrat (Eastern)</i>	1,578	\$1.57	\$2,482.89
<i>Muskrat (Western)</i>	<u>1,282</u>	<u>\$1.67</u>	<u>\$2,144.44</u>
	2,860	\$1.62	\$4,627.33
<i>Raccoon (Upland)</i>	20,820	\$6.84	\$188,900.12
<i>Raccoon (Coastal)</i>	<u>8,182</u>	<u>\$4.30</u>	<u>\$35,372.09</u>
	29,002	\$5.57	\$177,786.23
<i>Mink</i>	2,971	\$8.22	\$24,433.36
<i>Opossum</i>	662	\$0.78	\$517.90
<i>River Otter</i>	4,466	\$53.09	\$237,102.70
<i>Red Fox</i>	60	\$10.60	\$636.11
<i>Gray Fox</i>	395	\$7.82	\$3,089.69
<i>Bobcat</i>	634	\$20.15	\$12,781.00
<i>Beaver</i>	5,024	\$6.64	\$33,365.18
<i>Coyote</i>	101	\$7.37	\$744.93
Total Pelts:	150,409	Total Value :	\$889,275.27

Number of Trappers Licensed by Year in Louisiana

1950-51	7,732	1978-79	11,106
1951-52	6,120	1979-80	12,239
1952-53	4,328	1980-81	11,801
1953-54	4,986	1981-82	10,867
1954-55	5,202	1982-83	10,668
1955-56	5,520	1983-84	8,793
1956-57	4,211	1984-85	10,935
1957-58	3,868	1985-86	9,458
1958-59	3,932	1986-87	6,947
1959-60	3,743	1987-88	5,038
1960-61	3,613	1988-89	2,888
1961-62	3,004	1989-90	1,877
1962-63	3,666	1990-91	1,414
1963-64	3,029	1991-92	1,543
1964-65	3,061	1992-93	1,189
1965-66	3,088	1993-94	1,274
1966-67	3,492	1994-95	1,686
1967-68	2,495	1995-96	1,700
1968-69	3,601	1996-97	2,691
1969-70	4,444	1997-98	2,442
1970-71	3,510	1998-99	1,578
1971-72	2,761	1999-00	1,024
1972-73	4,741	2000-01	987
1973-74	6,295	2001-02	871
1974-75	7,528	2002-03	1,589
1975-76	6,404	2003-04	1,432
1976-77	9,329	2004-05	1,622
1977-78	12,069	2005-06	1,504

Beaver

Distribution: widespread throughout north central Louisiana, lives in every north American state and Canadian Province

Habitat: wooded rivers, streams, lakes, swamps, backwaters.

Appearance: humped back, wide flat tail (11-15 inches long, 6 inches wide), average adult weight is 33 pounds, 35-45 inches, 20 teeth, webbed feet, castor glands on the abdomen, which produces oil that the beaver rubs into its fur to waterproof it, ears and nose has valves which close when submerged, has only a single lower body opening called cloaca (similar to birds and reptiles)

Food habits: strictly vegetarian, eats cambium layer of many woody plants, such as sweetgum, yellow poplar, and willow

Habits: builds dams, constructs conical shaped lodging with sticks and mud above waterline, mark their territory with castor oil and mounds of mud and debris, very territorial, can hold breath for 12-15 minutes and travel mile underwater

Reproduction: sexually mature at 2 years, breeds in winter or early spring, gestation is 115-120 days, average litter is 3, young stay with parents for 2 years

Controls: beavers are prey to wolves, bobcats, bears, coyotes; young are prey to eagle and owls as well

Values: alter the habitat a great deal, dams result in flooding of lowlands, which provides a better habitat for muskrats, many fish, and waterfowl; mink and otter hunt regularly around beaver dams; dams cause property damage to crops and roads; beaver host an internal parasite, giardiasis, which can affect our drinking water.



Bobcat

Distribution: widespread in Louisiana; widely distributed across the U.S., excluding central farming areas and the urban eastern sea coast

Habitat: heavily forested areas, swamps, bottomland hardwoods; dens in thick vegetation

Appearance: between a domestic cat and a cougar in size; average adult length is 25 to 30 inches (tail is 6 inches); weight 15-20 pounds; reddish or yellowish brown streaked and spotted with black

Reproduction: wails and screams during breeding season; breeds in mid to late winter; 2-3 young; gestation of 62 days

Food habits: rabbits, mice, rats, squirrels, small birds, young livestock

Habits: good tree-climbers; curious

Controls: adults rarely preyed upon; juveniles may be vulnerable to male bobcats, coyotes, eagles and fisher; vulnerable to rabies, feline distemper, mange, tapeworms, lice and bubonic plague

Values: help to stabilize rabbit populations



How to Care for Fur Garments

- Hang your fur on a broad-shouldered hanger.
- Allow enough room in the closet that the fur is not crushed.
- Store fur in a cloth garment bag. Plastic does not allow air to circulate.
- If the garment gets wet, shake it out and hang in a well-ventilated room. Do not put it near direct heat. Shake it well again once it has dried. Fur can stand a little snow or rain, but if it gets soaked, take it to a furrier.
- Don't hang it in a bright place.
- Have small rips repaired immediately to prevent them from getting worse.
- Do not dry clean. Have it cleaned annually by a furrier.
- Do not spray perfume or hairspray on fur garments.
- Do not pin jewelry on fur.
- Do not use shoulder straps on a purse on a consistent basis.



Woven coyote jacket

Louisiana Fur and Alligator Advisory Council and Fur Promotions

Trappers help manage Louisiana's valuable habitat and renewable resources. A strong fur market is a great incentive to keep the trappers out in the field. The Fur and Alligator Advisory Council and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries help promote the use of fur to encourage trappers to keep up their management practices. The mission of Louisiana's Fur and Alligator Advisory Council is to promote the conservation and management of the Louisiana fur and alligator resources through public education, marketing, promotion, and legislative action. Fur marketing is an important component of wildlife and habitat management.



Beaver coat

Louisiana currently promotes under the Bayou Furs and Bayou Nutria garment labels. Buying genuine Louisiana furs, particularly beaver or nutria, is an investment in coastal wetland habitat.

Fur garments are luxurious, sensual and lightweight. Choosing Louisiana fur products supports hundreds of Louisiana trappers, who have dedicated their lives to habitat and wildlife management. The fur trade is a responsible, well-regulated industry.



Nutria coat, reversible

Coyote

Distribution: common in northern and central Louisiana, some found in coastal southwest marshes and as far east as the Florida parishes, ranges from Alaska southward through western and southern Canada, through the western 2/3 of the U.S., and southward through southern Mexico

Habitat: prefers open country and idle farmlands adjacent to wooded areas; dens in gulleys under roots, thickets, and dense cover

Appearance: looks like a small German Shepherd, coat color varies, adults weighs 18-30 pounds; 43 teeth

Reproduction: coyotes mate for life; male attends the female and litter; breeding in February; 5-7 pups

Food habits: opportunistic with food; rabbits, birds, plants, insects, carrion, livestock, and poultry
Habits: males roam 30-40 miles; females 5-8 miles

Controls: adults rarely preyed upon; juveniles by eagles, mountain lions, and dogs; prone to parvo, mange, distemper and rabies; parasites include lice, mites, ticks, and fleas

Values: keep other animals' populations in check; carrion habits reduce the population of insects which afflict livestock; host fleas and ticks which carry the bubonic plague, which is fatal to man; significant loss to livestock in some areas.



Gray Fox

Distribution: throughout Louisiana, except extreme coastal plains, through most of US, Mexico, and central America, except mountainous north-western states and portions of the Great Plains

Habitat: prefers mixed woodlands and pastures; dens in hollow trees, logs, thickets, or underground burrows

Appearance: somewhat smaller than the red fox (8-12 lbs./ 30-44 inches), basic gray color; edges of the upper jaw, throat, and abdomen are white

Reproduction: mates for life; breeds from January through May; gestation 51-63 days; one litter per year; 3 -4 pups per litter; raised by both parents

Food habits: rats, mice, rabbits, insects, poultry, berries, fruits, corn, and acorns

Habits: nocturnal, territorial, are known to take naps on sunny tree branches
Controls: prey to dogs; prone to distemper, parvo, rabies,

roundworms, tapeworms, lice, and mites

Values: beneficial to man, because they eat a lot of mice and rats



coastal marshes. Reports of nutria damage declined substantially, and periodic severe weather helped to reduce populations.

Mid-1980s –

The international fur market began to shrink during the mid-1980s, and, as a result, harvest levels substantially declined. Reports of significant nutria damage to the wetlands began coming from coastal land managers during the 1987-88 harvest season, which had been dramatically less productive than previous years due to the declining fur trade and stock market crash of 1987. Aerial surveys in 1988 confirmed damage was occurring, particularly of the southeastern marshes.

1990s –

In the 1990-91 harvest season, only 134,000 nutria were harvested. Aerial wetland damage surveys began in earnest in 1993 and were conducted again in 1995, 1996, 1998-2002. Survey results clearly show that nutria damage in recent years is concentrated in the Deltaic Plain in southeastern Louisiana. This indicates high nutria populations that are exceeding the local carrying capacity.

2000 –

In 2000, the U.S. Congress passed an appropriation to address Brown Marsh Dieback and to provide funds for a number of research studies on nutria. The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act, also known as the Breaux Act, has provided grant funding for coastal restoration and conservation. In 2002, a final report on Nutria Control Methods was completed by Genesis Laboratories under contract by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources. After reviewing a number of possible methods to reduce nutria, the report concludes that the incentive payment program is the best option for coast-wide control. The report confirms the method advocated by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. This program was put in place when the trapping season opened in November 2002.

Nutria Population Dynamics

1930s –

Imported from fur farms, nutria were released, either intentionally or accidentally, in the Louisiana marshes in the 1930s, and soon after, feral populations were established near the Gulf Coast. Nutria continued to expand their range from there as they were trapped and transplanted into marshes from Port Arthur, Texas to the Mississippi River in 1941. Later that year, a hurricane further dispersed nutria populations in southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana.

Late 1940s –

In the late 1940s, nutria were promoted as biological agents for controlling aquatic weeds, primarily water hyacinth, and were transplanted throughout southeastern Louisiana. Rapid population growth followed for several years thereafter. Annual pelt harvest records and damage reports were the primary source of information on population dynamics at that time.

Mid-1950s –

At this time, reports started coming in describing the damage done to marshes, rice and sugarcane fields, and levee systems, as nutria populations soared to 20 million animals. Biologists described areas where nutria had completely denuded natural levees at the mouth of the Mississippi River. The marsh had been weakened by severe over-grazing, and in 1957, Hurricane Audrey hit southwestern Louisiana. Its storm surge further weakened the marsh as a huge wave of seawater pushed thousands of nutria inland, accelerating the rate at which the animals spread. Soon after, reports of agricultural damage increased, and in 1958 nutria were taken off the list of protected wildlife.

1960s to 1980s –

As the state promoted nutria fur as a natural resource, efforts to manage nutria as a pest began to compete with the growing fur industry. In 1965, the nutria was returned to the protected wildlife list. From 1962 to 1982, 1.3 million nutria were harvested annually for their fur from the

Red Fox

Distribution: throughout Louisiana, except extreme southeast parishes; ranges from northern Canada and Alaska to the southern U.S., except Arizona, southern Texas, extreme SE Atlantic coast, the Great Basin, the Great Plains, and coastal western Canada

Habitat: mixed wooded areas with ungrazed pastures, ricefields, canefields, and chenier of the SW coastal marshes; makes a den in stream banks or gullies

Appearance: small dog-like animal, adult weight is 8-14 pounds; total length is 3-4 feet (12-17 inches of which is tail); body is reddish yellow; feet, legs ears and nose pad are black; terminal 4-5 inches of tail are black tipped with white; it has 42 teeth; eyes are yellow with elliptical pupils

Reproduction: breed in late winter or early spring, 53 days gestation, 2-10 per litter, both male and female raise the young, weaned at 2 months

Food habits: small mammals such as rats, mice, and rabbits, insects, wild birds, young livestock, fruits, grasshoppers, snakes

Habits: keen sense of sight, hearing and smell; shy, easily startled; great endurance (can run for miles); playful; they do not chew food, rather tear pieces off and swallow whole; bury their left over food; mark their territory through urination

Controls: vulnerable to diseases such as parvo and mange (which is caused by mites)

Values: contribute to the overall health of prey species by keeping the species controlled; they are vulnerable to rabies, which can then infect pets & men



Mink

Distribution: adaptable to a wide range of climates; throughout Louisiana, from northern Canada and Alaska southward through all of U.S. except the Southwest

Habitat: near water; dens under fallen logs, hollow stumps, or in burrows created by other animals

Appearance: medium sized, long bodied, slender; adult weight about 2 pounds, length about 19 to 23 inches (1/3 of which is tail); long neck, short head, white chin, dark brown fur, 34 teeth

Reproduction: one litter per year, 3 to 4 kits, which are born blind (eyes open at 5 weeks), gestation can be as long as 75 days

Food habits: varies with area in which animal occurs; coastal mink eat aquatic life, such as fish, crabs, frogs, and crayfish; upland mink eat rabbits, rats, and birds

Habits: male minks have much larger territories than females (up to 25 miles)

Controls: prey of owls, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, and dogs; parasites include flukes, roundworms, tapeworms, fleas, ticks, and lice

Values: mink prey heavily on muskrats, improving their genetic pool by preying on the weak and ill



Raccoon

Distribution: across all of Louisiana, most of the US, Mexico, and southern Canada, excluding portions of the Rocky Mountains and the arid SW

Habitat: all habitats types in Louisiana, highest densities in marshes and swamps, dens in trees often 30-40 feet above the ground

Appearance: size of a large beagle dog, adults average 8 pounds, grayish to blackish in color, 5 -6 black and gray to yellowish rings on the tail (the tip of the tail is black), prominent black mask across the face bordered by white above and below the black , 40 teeth (including 4 sharp canine teeth)

Reproduction: mating from early January to early April (occasionally as late as August), gestation of 63 days, 3 per litter; newborns are 2 - 3 oz. and blind (eyes open at 2 weeks)

Food habits: omnivorous, relishing crayfish, crabs, snails, clams, small fish, frogs, earthworms, insects, fruits, berries, and shoots of trees

Habits: good swimmers and tree climbers; front paws are dexterous; they do not hibernate but store layers of fat during the fall to prepare for winter

Controls: prey to coyotes, bobcats, and cougars; juveniles prey to large owls, eagles, and fishers; prone to distemper, rabies, leptospirosis (which can be passed to man); parasites include roundworms, flatworms, tapeworms, mites, lice and fleas

Values: does not compete severely with other species in demand for habitat; damage to sweet corn can be extensive



Otter

Distribution: widespread in Louisiana; widely distributed across Canada and the U.S., excluding portions of the arid southwest and some states along the Mid-Atlantic coast

Habitat: near water; dens in the bank of a canal or stream with the entrance below water level

Appearance: long, slender body ; flattened head; long flat tail, thick at the base and tapering towards the tip; dense, oily underfur; glossy guard hairs; brown; five fully webbed toes on each foot; adults average 15 pounds; 36 teeth

Reproduction: breeds in late winter or early spring; gestation period can be as long as 10 months or more; young born in late winter; 1-3 kits per litter

Food habits: frogs, turtles, snakes, fish (generally non-game), crayfish, crabs, birds, small land mammals like rats and mice

Habits: constantly on the move; young will stay with mother through 1st winter

Controls: adults rarely preyed upon; juveniles may be vulnerable to bobcats and coyotes; relatively free of parasites; suffer from habitat loss, pollution, and poisons

Values: usually help a trout stream by containing populations; can devastate a fish farm



Muskrat

Distribution: throughout south Louisiana, as far north as Avoyelles Parish; throughout most of North America, except for a few western states, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida

Habitat: coastal marshes, bayous, lakes; builds houses out of vegetation and mud or burrows into levees and stream banks to construct dens.

Appearance: vertically flat tail, average adult weight is 2 pounds, total length averages 22 inches (10 of which is the tail), partially webbed hind feet, sharp claws on the front teeth used for digging stems and roots, musk glands on the lower abdomen of males

Food habits: primarily live vegetation, some fish, mussels, insects and snails

Habits: somewhat sociable with other muskrats, but when populations become dense, they will fight to the death; can hold their breath underwater for 10-12 minutes

Reproduction: year round, highest degree of sexual activity in November and March, the lowest in July and August; 5 to 6 litters per year; 3 to 4 young per litter, sexual maturity at 6 to 8 weeks of age

Controls: prey to mink, fox, coyotes, hawks, and owls

Values: uncontrolled muskrat populations cause damage to irrigation canals, dams, and dikes, by digging around these structures. They also cause "eat-outs", by feeding on roots of vegetation. It may take 15-20 years for the habitat to return to its original capacity to serve wildlife species.



Nutria

Distribution: throughout Louisiana, coastal areas of Texas, Mississippi and Florida, N. Carolina, Maryland, Oregon, Washington, Alabama, & Georgia
Habitat: swamps, marshes, rivers, lakes, streams, back waters. They dig burrows for dens in levees and stream banks; in marshes and swamps they rest on platforms of vegetation built above water.

Appearance: looks like a large, brown rat, average adult weight is 12 to 16 pounds, webbed hind feet, 20 teeth (the 4 huge front teeth are orange), whiskers are 4 inches long, oil glands near the mouth, which are used to waterproof the fur, mammary glands on the sides, so infants can nurse while the mother swims

Food habits: vegetarian, eats aquatic plants such as three-cornered grass, cattail, duck-weed, & occasionally water hyacinth

Habits: den is shared by a dominant male and 2 or 3 females and their offspring

Reproduction: sexual maturity at 5 1/2 months, 2 litters per year, average litter size is 5, females are only capable of producing 6 litters in a lifetime

Controls: prey of alligators, cottonmouths, hawks, owls and eagles; parasites include flatworms, roundworms, fleas, and lice

Values: usually have a negative impact on other wildlife species and often over-harvest edible plants resulting in "eat-outs", burrowing causes problems with dams, dikes, and levees; roundworms can infest the water where nutria swim and then be passed on to humans



Opossum

Distribution: across Louisiana, most of Eastern U.S., south into Mexico
habitat: wooded areas with water close by is preferred, also any timbered area, agricultural area, marshes, residential neighborhoods. Dens in a burrow, hollow tree, or a log.

Appearance: size of a domestic house cat, with shorter legs and heavier body. The female has an external fur-lined abdominal pouch for carrying young. Adults average about 4 pounds. It has 50 teeth, more than any other Louisiana land mammal.

Food habits: eats anything, including insects, fruits, berries, small mammals, birds, eggs, carrion. It also raids garbage cans.

Habits: have an ability to feign death, called "playing possum". This condition is induced by fear and stress. They appear unconscious, the mouth opens slightly, drooling occurs, the entire body becomes limp, and the feet clutch together. Opossums are clean animals and groom regularly. They do not hibernate. They have a keen sense of smell.

Reproduction: mates in December and January, again in April, and sometime mid-summer. After 12-13 days, 15 or more premature embryos leave the womb and crawl to the pouch. Average litter size in Louisiana is seven. The young are extremely tiny, blind, and incomplete in development. It takes 22- 24 newborns to equal the weight of a penny. They are weaned in 75-80 days. As they grow, they cling to the mother's fur and ride on her back.

Controls: prey to dogs and horned owls; relatively free of parasites; afflicted by tapeworms and flatworms

