

Louisiana Furbearers

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Furbearer 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, such as 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 to the benefit of the entire habitat.

Nature's way of controlling species is often cruel and includes such methods as slow starvation and disease like red mange, distemper, and rabies. Reducing local densities of furbearer populations through harvests can reduce disease transmission as well as the intensity of such out-breaks.

These furbearers are an-

nually 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.

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.



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 im-

portant ecological information about wildlife, especially wildlife diseases like rabies, which can affect people.

- Trapping is used to control furbearers' damage to property and habitat.

Beaver



Largest North American Rodent

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

Bobcats are rarely seen in the wild due to their keen eyesight and hearing.

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



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.

Coyotes are clever, have keen senses, and thrive in wilderness and suburban 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 par-

ents

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



These foxes are skilled tree climbers.

Red Fox



Red foxes are curious and intelligent animals.

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 (as carrion), fruits, berries, 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 oc-

curs; 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



Wild mink are more common than most people realize.

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.



The name comes from the musky odor secreted from glands on the abdomen.

Nutria

Distribution: throughout Louisiana, coastal areas of Texas, Mississippi and Florida, 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



This rodent is native to South America and was recently introduced to Louisiana.

Otter



Otters are highly skilled swimmers and love to play.

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



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

Raccoons thrive in both wilderness and urban areas.

Education

The Fur Advisory Council's education program coordinates with other educators around the state, and presents at schools, libraries, teacher workshops and public events., such as La Fete De L'Ecologie, Ocean Commotion, and Earthfest at the Audubon Zoo.

Most formal presentations are about an hour long and involve an interactive show and tell with pelts and other biofacts, such as skulls and teeth. School children learn about what is required to maintain a

healthy habitat and stable wildlife populations. They discuss the role of hunting and trapping in habitat management. They also learn biology and discuss the interdependence of Louisiana species.

Educational materials are provided free of charge to teachers state-wide. The Council has commissioned several educational books based on state and national benchmarks and grade level expectations.

The Council values education and has made it a big part of their program.



A council member shows a group of teachers some raccoon tracks during a teacher workshop.

Why Buy Fur?

- **Comfort:** Fur is soft, sensual, and luxurious. It feels good to wear fur.
- **Fashion:** Fur is stylish and elegant.
- **Warmth:** According to a recent poll of fur buyers, warmth is the number one reason to wear fur.
- **Supporting Livelihoods, Habitats, and Cultures:** When you buy fur, you support entire communities that live on the land and have a direct interest in protecting the wildlife habitat, which supports them. The economic incentive to the hunter and trapper encourages them to actively protect the natural habitats. According the the National Trappers Association, for every tax dollar spent on conservation, sportsmen spend \$12.
- **Wildlife Conservation:** Furs used in trade are abundant. Government controls regulate the season and harvest to ensure that healthy habitats and populations are maintained. The natural survival rates of animals are low, due to "carrying capacity" (sufficient food, water, & shelter). Nature's way of controlling population is often cruel, including slow starvation and diseases. Hunting and trapping in an overpopulated area can decrease the frequency and severity of diseases, such as red mange, distemper, and rabies.
- **Environmentally Friendly:** Fur is biodegradable and a natural, renewable resource.
- **Long-Lasting:** Fur is durable. It lasts for many, many years. Fur makes wonderful heirlooms and can be passed down to the next generation.
- **Versatile:** Fur can be worn with jeans and evening gowns. Now with lighter weight fur, it can be used through three seasons.
- **Re-Styleable:** Fur can be restyled to reflect the changing fashions.

Different Furs; Different Qualities

Beaver Sheared: Soft, velvety texture, evenly sheared. Often dyed in new fashion colors. Very durable. Natural: Long, lustrous guard hairs over thick underfur.

Coyote A long-haired fur, often pale gray or tan in color, with thick, soft underfur. Very durable.

Fox The widest range of natural colors of any fur except mink. Long, lustrous guard hairs with thick, soft underfur. Fox varieties include silver, cross, crystal, blue, red, gray and white. Can also be dyed in a wide variety of colors.

Mink Soft and lightweight with lustrous guard hairs and dense, soft underfur. Primarily farm raised, mink remains the most popular fur. Female pelts are smaller in size and have a softer, silkier feel than the larger male pelts. Mink can be dyed a wide range of colors and may be sheared for a sporty, casual look. Very durable fur.

Muskrat Fur is full and thick with a black stripe and pale beige sides. Often sheared for a sporty, lightweight feel. New Jersey: lighter in weight with contrasting colors. Northern: Strong, longer guard hairs and heavy, thick underfur. Often worked skin-on-skin. Southern: Flatter with little underfur, usually pale in color.

Nutria Similar to beaver, it is often sheared for a sporty, more lightweight feel. Underfur is very soft and plush. A popular fur for linings and trims. It is frequently dyed in a variety of colors.

Opossum American: Long, silvery black-tipped guard hairs with thick underfur, Australian: Short, dense, plush-like fur, with colors ranging from yellow- gray to natural brown.

Rabbit Generally medium length guard hairs in a variety of natural colors. Often sheared or grooved. Not very durable, sheds easily.

Raccoon Long gray/blackguard hairs with silvery tips over a woolly, dense underfur. Very durable fur.