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Date: October 23, 2013
To: Natural Resources Board
Subject: Board Order WM-33-13

Board Order WM-33-13 relating to muskrat and mink trapping seasons is a derivative of Question 37 on the 2013 Spring Hearing Questionnaire. The question asked that the Northern, Southern, and Winnebago zones all open on the third Saturday in October. Currently, the Winnebago and Southern Zones open on the Saturday nearest October 28. The Northern Zone opens on the Saturday nearest October 17. The question would have opened the entire state on the same date, except the Mississippi Zone, which would have continued to open on the second Monday in November.

The question was presented as a rule simplification. However, the real goal of the question was to end the practice of "zone jumping". Allegedly, many trappers begin their season with the northern opener, and then move south when the southern zones open. The situation reportedly creates crowding, poor behavior, and violating on public marshes in the northern zone.

The question passed 2947 voting yes, 1283 voting no. It carried in 62 counties, failed in 9, and a tie vote in one county. However, the Wisconsin Trappers Association (WTA) met a few weeks before the hearings and voted to oppose the question. One of their concerns was that the early opener in the south would result in smaller rats. Since most rats harvested are rats of the year, two weeks can allow significant growth for the later litters. They were also concerned about fur primness. The department advises us that season dates are set for furbearers without regard for fur primness, but mink fur is prime within just a few days, during the first or second week in November. Many of those in attendance at the WTA meeting were concerned about taking early, un-prime southern rats when there is historically plenty of open water trapping left in that part of the state.

Given the disapproval of the Trappers Association the Department decided to withhold action on the rule until an agreement could be reached. The Conservation Congress Fur Harvest Committee took up the question this past summer. Those representing southern interests did not want a radically early opener. Those representing northern interests wanted their traditional opener, but mostly wanted to end the southern invasion. The Fur Harvest Committee was sympathetic to the zone jumping issue; however, it did not feel that it was fair to sacrifice the much superior southern rat resource to such a great extent as was proposed. The single opener on the Saturday nearest October 25 compromise was the result of a great deal of discussion, and debate. WM-33-13 is a good representation of the Fur Harvest Committee's final agreement. We ask that it be adopted.

Sincerely,

Ed Harvey, Chair
Conservation Congress' Fur Harvest Committee
Wisconsin Conservation Congress