

Otter Harvest 2014-15

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Abstract

Wisconsin trappers and citizens reported 1,204 otters during the 2014-15 season, including 863 taken with DNR issued permits, 76 taken off reservation by native trappers, 5 taken on reservations, and 260 turned in as incidentals, this includes road kills, but are primarily the result of beaver trapping efforts by citizen trappers or government agents. This was a total increase of 33% from the otter reported in 2013-14. The counties of highest harvest were Burnett (63), Oneida (52), Sawyer (51) and Price (46).

Background

Bluett (1985) described the procedures for obtaining otter tags, and registering/tagging otters in Wisconsin. Dhuey, et al. (2014) described the results of the 2013-14 otter trapping season. Otter harvest goals are set annually for each otter management zone based upon population size in relation to management goals. The number of harvest permits issued are based on the highest trapper success rate during the previous three years in each respective zone. Negotiated amounts of the harvest in each zone within the ceded territory are allotted to Native American (Chippewa) trappers.

Methods

Non-Chippewa trappers are required to obtain an otter trapping permit before pursuing otter in Wisconsin. The application fee for an otter permit is \$3.00, (included in the Patron license fee). Trappers were required to register all harvested otters with the DNR.

The 2014-15 otter season ran from 1 November 2014 - 30 April 2015 in the Northern Zone and 1 November 2014 - 31 March 2015 in the Central and Southern Zones (Fig. 1). Trappers were required to register all otters with DNR personnel. The area of harvest (county and game management unit), date of harvest, sex of the animal, type of trap used, type of animal (fur farm or wild), and the name and address of the trapper were recorded for each otter registered. Reported data were entered into the DNR production server by district personnel and summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). Otters trapped by Native Americans on ceded lands were included in the harvest summary. Data on off-reservation treaty otter harvest was provided by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (Jonathan Gilbert; pers. comm.).

Results

A total of 15,806 applicants (10,282 applied for a harvest permit and 5,524 applied for a preference point) applied for the 3,985 otter tags issued in 2014-15 season (Table 1). The average number of tags per harvest permit applicant was 0.39. There were 4% fewer applicants for permits and 34% more permits available than in 2013-14 season. In addition, a Chippewa allocation of 70 otters for the North Zone was agreed to for their use during the Chippewa off-reservation trapping season (1 November 2014 to 31 March 2015) on ceded lands. A threshold agreement was developed for tribal harvest of 15% of the non-native harvest for each respective zone in the ceded territory. If or when tribal harvest exceeds the 15% threshold for a

specific zone, a declaration is required in that zone for the following harvest season. No declarations were required for otters in 2014-15.

A total of 1,204 otters were registered by tribal and non-tribal trappers or reported as incidentals during the 2014-15 season. This was an increase of 33% from last year and the 22nd highest total take since the state started registering otter in 1976. Permit success for the 2014-15 season (21.7%) was more than last year (19.1%) (Table 1). Chippewa trappers took 76 otters on ceded lands; 33 more than were taken in the 2013-14 season (these data were provided by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, P.O. Box 9, Odanah, WI, 54861). A total of 5 otter were registered with harvest locations on Wisconsin's reservations. A total of 260 otters were registered as incidental, these were taken accidentally to other trapping activity, found dead, or road kills. All of these kill types are included in the statewide totals.

Weather during the otter season was average for temperature and snowfall. This encouraged mid-winter trapping activity and lengthened the open-water spring season. The average price paid for otter pelts by fur buyers was \$30.86 in 2014-15. This was less than the \$63.98 paid for otter pelts in 2013-14, and below the long-term average of \$44.27 (Table 2).

Burnett county had the highest number of otters harvested 63, Oneida (52), Sawyer (51), and Price (46) counties followed (Fig. 1). Game management Unit 11 was the leading unit of harvest with 30 otters registered (Fig. 2). More males (699; or 58.1%) were trapped than females (433; or 41.9%). Seventy-two (6.0%) registration forms did not report the sex of the otter or reported the sex as unknown.

Body-grip traps accounted for 80% of the otters harvested in 2014-15, and foothold traps accounted for 20% of the otter trapped. Less than one percent of otters trapped were caught in water snares or a cage.

Twenty-two percent of the otters registered this season were reported as being incidentally taken. These include otter taken while trapping for other species, found dead, or road kill. The regular beaver season ran concurrent with the otter season in each respective zone. The WDNR Furbearer Advisory Committee recommended a statewide harvest goal of 1,700 otter in the 2015-16 season, proportioned at 40% in the Northern Otter Zone, and 30% in the each of the Central and Southern Otter Zones.

Literature Cited

Bluett, R.1985. The 1983-84 Otter Tagging Report. Wis. Dep. Nat. Resour. 7 pp.

Dhuey B. and J. Olson. 2014. Otter Harvest, 2013-14. IN: The Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys Report. August 2014. Document on file at the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources, Bureau of Science Services, Madison, WI. 53716.

Table 1. 2014-15 Wisconsin state otter harvest goal and applicant results.

Zone	State Harvest Goal	Permits Issued	Applicants for Harvest Tag	Applicants for Preference Point	Tags/Applicant	State Harvest*	Percent Success
North	450	1,400	4,367	NA	0.32	365	26.1%
Central	390	1,025	3,393	NA	0.30	247	24.1%
South	390	1,560	2,522	NA	0.62	251	16.1%
Total	1,230	3,985	10,282	5,524	0.39	863	21.7%

* Does not include incidental or tribal otter harvest

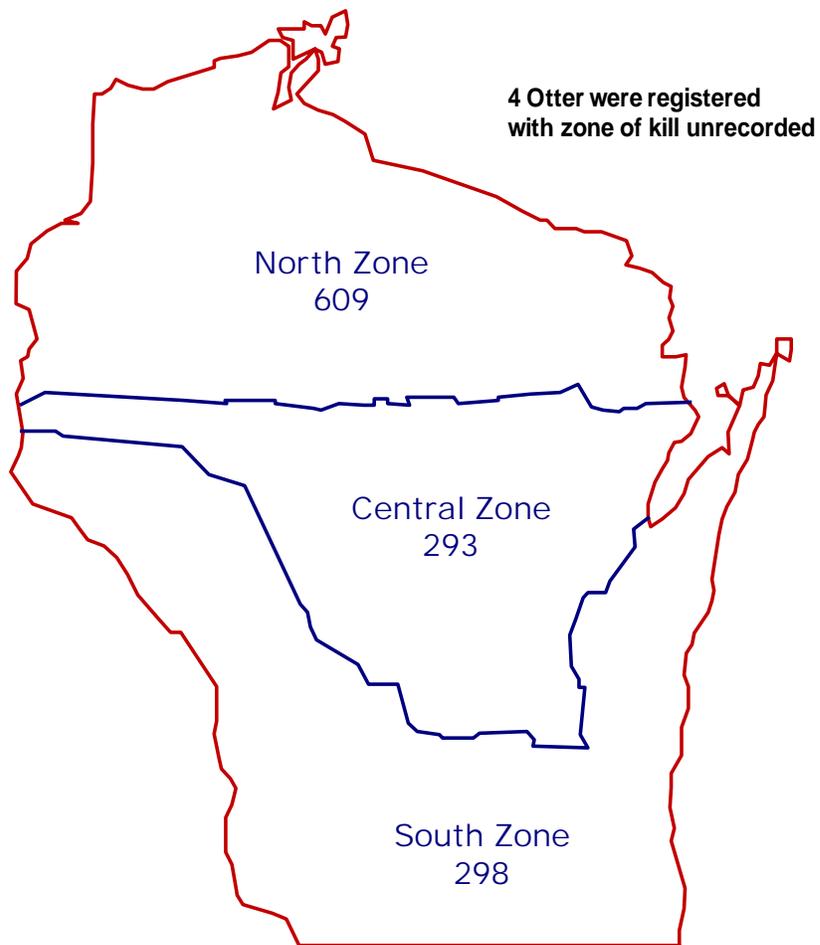


Figure 1. 2014-15 Otter harvest by Zone.

Table 2. *The annual number of otter permits mailed to Wisconsin trappers, total registered otter harvest, and average pelt price, 1976-2014.*

Year	Number of Permits Mailed	Total Registered Harvest	Average Pelt Price (\$)
1976-77	5,050	1,271	
1977-78	5,218	1,113	47.83
1978-79	4,914	962	82.15
1979-80	5,754	1,448	60.05
1980-81	7,269	1,122	33.79
1981-82	8,256	1,024	26.89
1982-83	7,403	960	24.70
1983-84	8,294	995	25.68
1984-85	7,516	1,213	24.41
1985-86	7,104	960	22.84
1986-87	6,599	1,588	29.62
1987-88	9,360	1,724	23.87
1988-89	7,838	1,127	20.14
1989-90	6,360	1,213	24.11
1990-91	4,613	744	14.39
1991-92	2,799	762	12.50
1992-93	3,201	969	33.24
1993-94	5,531	1,130	57.30
1994-95	9,282	1,816	48.76
1995-96	14,800	1,517	44.47
1996-97	16,457	2,443	45.66
1997-98	15,429	2,704	43.70
1998-99	10,898	1,530	37.05
1999-2000	12,510	2,178	46.48
2000-01	11,180	1,844	54.01
2001-02	12,119	2,601	56.00
2002-03	8,370	2,053	77.12
2003-04	4,810	1,588	89.49
2004-05	4,240	1,322	78.03
2005-06	4,180	1,518	101.32
2006-07	4,335	1,458	44.28
2007-08	4,625	990	35.18
2008-09	2,410	710	33.04
2009-10	2,420	753	34.70
2010-11	3,770	913	46.05
2011-12	4,260	1,487	70.54
2012-13	3,335	1,445	85.18
2013-14	2,980	907	63.98
2014-15	3,985	1,204	30.86

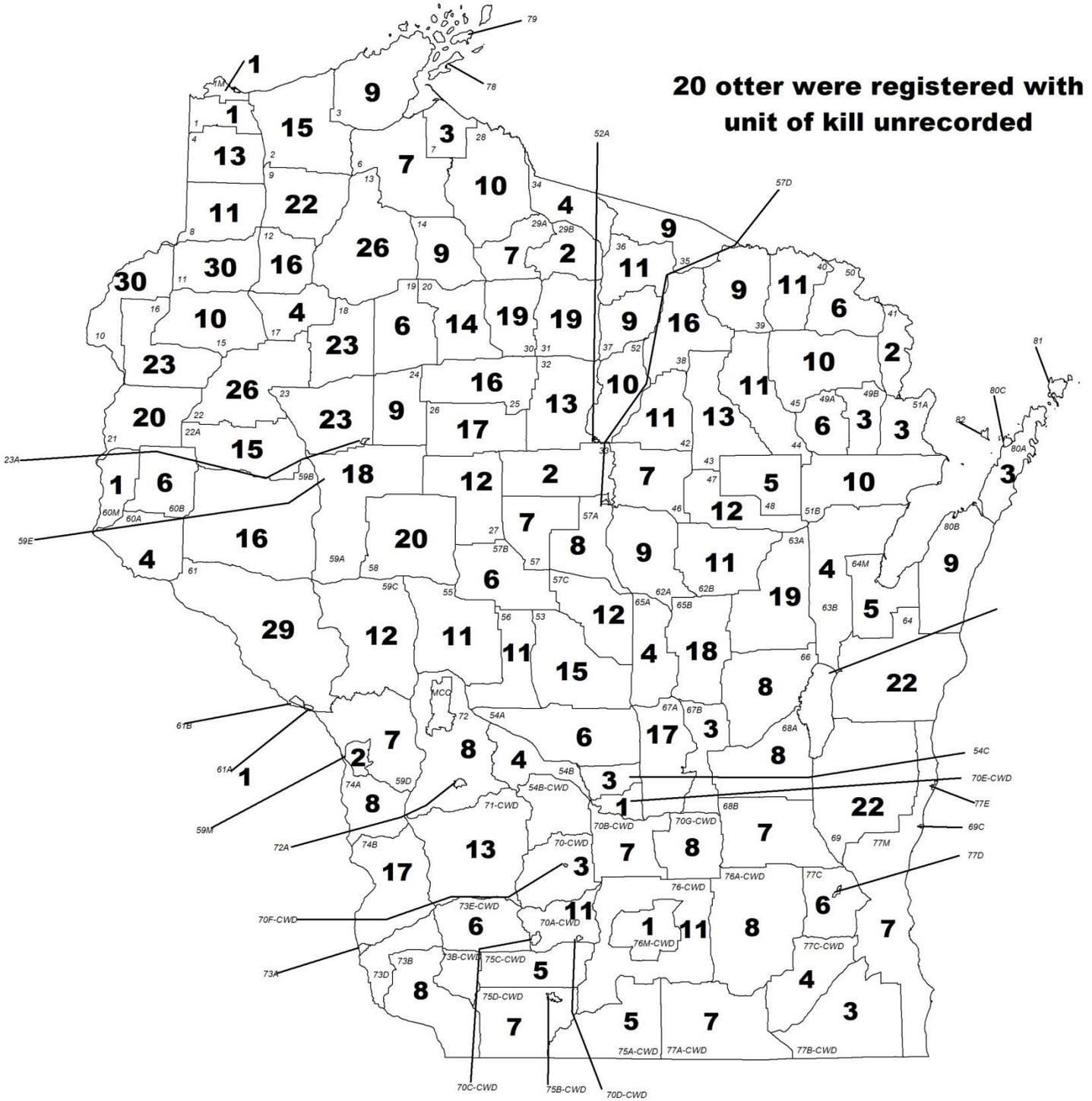


Figure 3. The 2014-15 otter harvest by game management unit.