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FURBEARER MANAGEMENT PLAN, 1986-1990

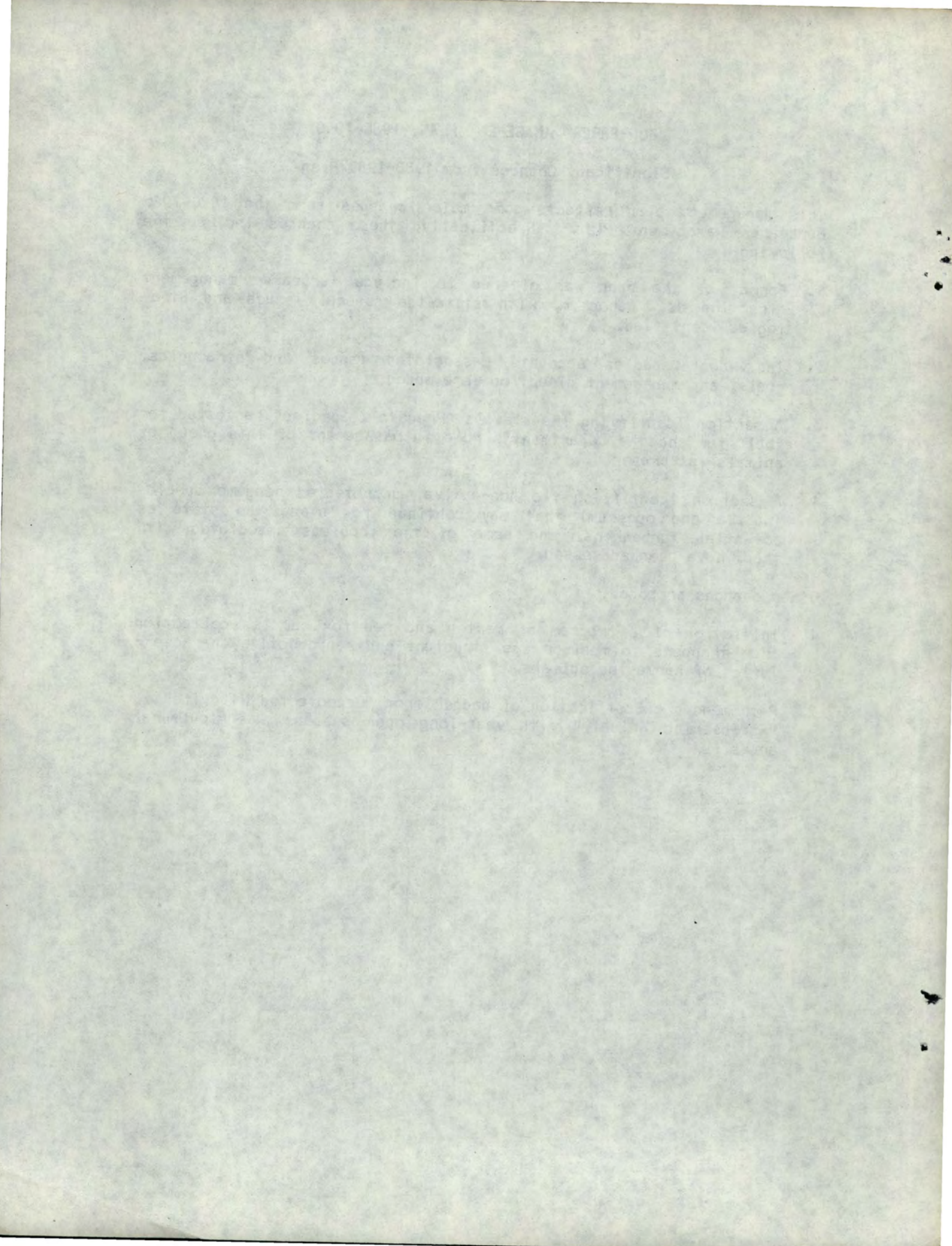
Significant Changes from 1980-1985 Plan

This management plan reflects some major changes from the 1980-1985 Furbearer Management Plan. Specifically, these changes include the following:

1. Format of the plan was altered to include furbearer management direction as a program, with statewide general issues and Strategies identified;
2. Individual species accounts, associated issues and strategies, goals, and management direction were added.
3. A section identifying the state's "Predatory Species" harvested for their fur and the Department's role in management of this group of animals was prepared.
4. A section identifying two non-native, unprotected nongame species (nutria and opossum) that may continue to invade the state as potential furbearers, and some of the problems associated with them, have been addressed.

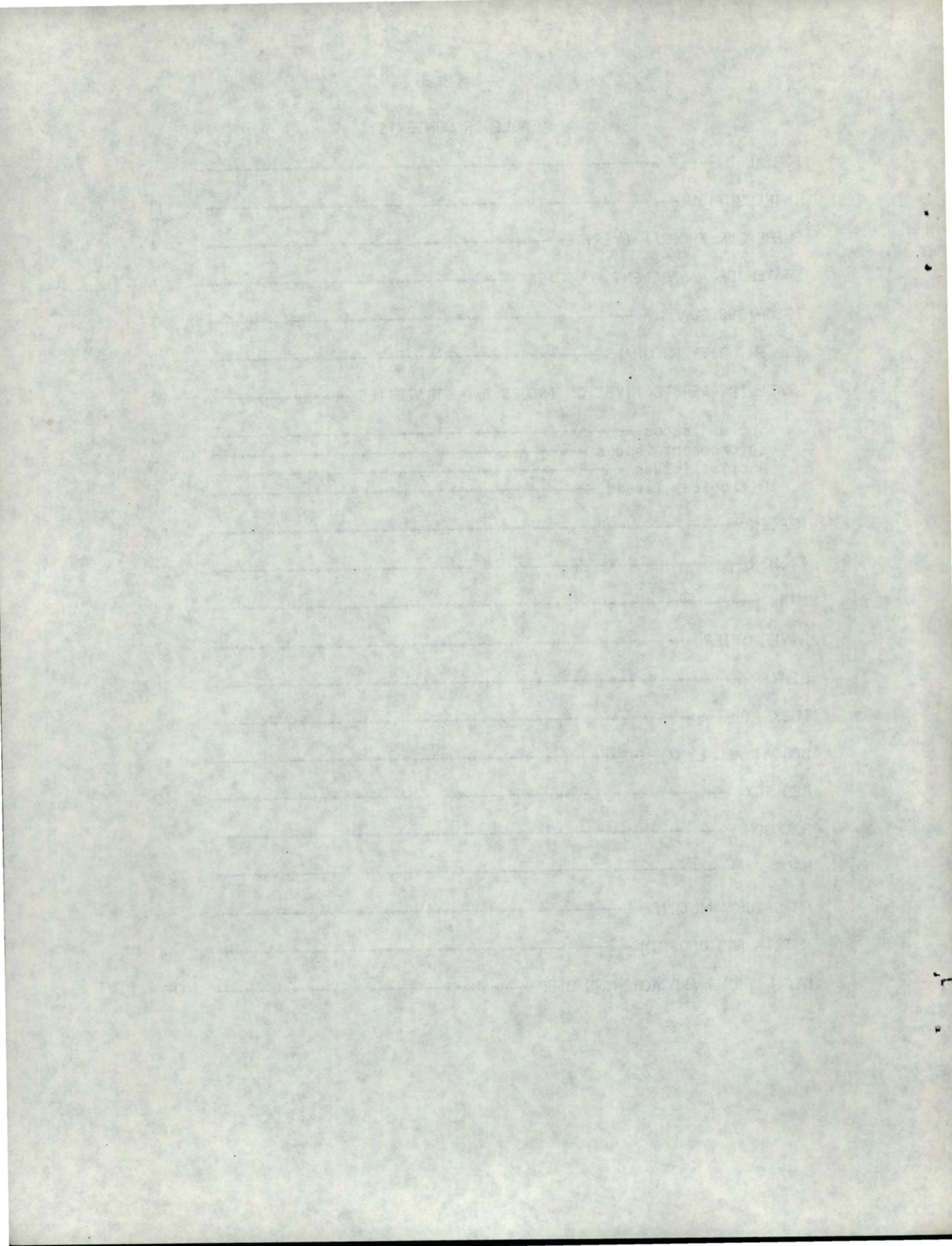
Other changes proposed:

1. Initiation of a program of marten and red fox carcass collection from trappers to monitor age structure and reproductive characteristics of harvested animals.
2. Recommend reclassification of badger from "Unprotected Wildlife" to "Fur-bearing Animal," with year-long open season in agricultural areas.



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## FOREWORD

The Management Plan contained herein supplements our Policy Plan. These plans chart the course of our efforts during 1986-1990 to manage Idaho's valuable wildlife resources for their own benefit and to provide aesthetic, recreational and physical products to man.

Many persons provided input during development of these plans. Chief among them were field and staff management and research personnel. Input during the review process from Department personnel, other agencies and the general public was invaluable. We acknowledge the assistance of these many concerned and dedicated individuals. We appreciate the support of Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration of this project. This management plan was reviewed and approved by the director and was adopted by the Fish and Game Commission on \_\_\_\_\_.

Data used in these plans were those available in early 1985. Some changes will likely be necessary before the end of the planning period (1990) as new data from the resource and its users become available.

You should obtain a good understanding of the Department's philosophy and direction by reading these plans. In addition, we have spelled out what we see as the major challenges (issues, if you prefer) facing us in our efforts to discharge our statutory, professional and moral responsibilities to manage these valuable resources for their perpetuation and for the benefits which they provide to man. Idaho's "quality

of life" is for many, if not most of her residents, inseparably tied to the fate of her wildlife resources. We will do our best to preserve these resources and necessary habitats for the enjoyment of present and future Idahoans and visitors to our great State.

As you will note, preserving our wildlife heritage will require the cooperation, concern and unselfish efforts of many agencies and individuals. With your support and help, the Department of Fish and Game can conserve a large share of our valuable wildlife resources. We look forward to working with you to ensure a bright future for wildlife in Idaho.

## INTRODUCTION

Although this document is called a furbearer management plan, it is really the plan of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (hereafter called the Department) for managing the many and varied impacts of people upon wildlife and wildlife habitats. There will be many places where changes can be made and we would appreciate your comments regarding improvements to incorporate in our 1991-1995 plans.

The basic statutory responsibility of the Department to preserve, protect, perpetuate and manage all wildlife within Idaho is clearly stated in Section 36-103 of the Idaho Code

Department personnel have a professional, as well as statutory, responsibility to be the chief advocates for wildlife in Idaho. Others may choose to sacrifice some wildlife values to achieve other goals, but the Department cannot make such decisions and must advise those who do of the tradeoffs they are making.

The basic reason for most management efforts is to ensure long-term annual returns from the wildlife resource to the human population. Most such management efforts benefit the wildlife populations. A gamut of "products", including direct consumption (harvest), recreational opportunity, appreciative use, scientific value, social and cultural value, genetic value, etc., can accrue from any wildlife population. These varied products are not always compatible nor easily reduced to a

common denominator (e.g., economic value) so decisions regarding their relative importance are often subjective, thus open to challenge. The Department believes the greatest return to society from the wildlife resource occurs when the maximum variety of products is provided and that maximizing a single product (e.g., harvest) is not necessarily desirable. We will encourage and promote nonconsumptive use of wildlife. We also recognize that the people of Idaho "own" the wildlife resource and are, therefore, the ones who ultimately decide which mix of products is most desirable.

Throughout this plan we have attempted to be reasonable, but aggressive, about what is possible within biological, economic, manpower and social constraints. If problems exist which we think are impossible to correct, we have so stated and pointed out the consequences of adjusting to these intractable problems. If problems exist which could be corrected by more manpower or money being devoted to them, we have so recommended. If problems exist which can be solved by action of other agencies, we have pointed this out. If we can correct a problem, we have outlined our proposed course of action.

We have constantly reminded ourselves, and stress to you now, that all animals have the basic needs of food, water, shelter, space, security and social contact. No wildlife population can be sustained unless the components of habitat, the first four basic needs listed above, exist in suitable proximity to each other.



## FURBEARER PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Idaho has 21 species of mammals that may be considered as "fur-bearers." A diverse group including everything from weasels to wolves, they are classified into five different categories under the Idaho legal code.

The largest group of these, ten species including marten, fisher, mink, river otter, beaver, muskrat, bobcat, lynx, red fox, and raccoon, are classified by the Department as "fur-bearing animals." As such, they fall under the jurisdiction of the Department, which regulates the harvest season. The kit fox and wolverine are classified as "Protected Nongame species" while the badger is included in the group of "Unprotected Wildlife" in Idaho. The gray wolf is classified as an Endangered Species under the Federal Endangered Species act, and therefore comes under regulation of both the state of Idaho and the federal government. Another five species, including the coyote, spotted skunk, striped skunk, long-tailed weasel, and ermine are classed by the Idaho Legislature as "predatory wildlife," and as such the Department has no legal authority to limit season of harvest of these species. Two species, the nutria and opossum, are a non-native (and undesirable). Nutria populations in the northwest resulted from escapees from fur-farm operations. They are common in parts of Oregon and Washington. Opossums likewise were introduced and have flourished in Oregon and Washington. Both species are considered feral, and neither is protected under Idaho's game code.

The Department can reclassify all species except those designated as "predatory wildlife" by the Idaho Legislature.

In this management plan we will deal with each of Idaho's ten "fur-bearing animals" and the badger individually. In addition, a summary of harvest and management for Idaho's five species of "Predatory Wildlife" that can be harvested for fur will be presented from a furbearer management perspective; these five species plus the wolf, kit fox and wolverine are also discussed in the "Carnivorous Mammal Management Program" in the Department's Nongame Species Management Plan. Department policy concerning nutria and opossum, two non-native, unprotected nongame species that have been reported from Idaho, is also discussed.

Idaho's Department of Fish and Game is legally charged with protecting, preserving, perpetuating, and managing the wildlife resources of the state for all citizens. Management of wildlife species involves insuring the continued existence of populations at desired levels as a public good, while attempting to minimize the potential for depredations to private property. The Furbearer Management Plan deals with maintaining species population information (including harvest), sociological problems with trapping, and depredation issues. The Department recognizes the high nonconsumptive value of some of these species, but such values are often related directly to the rarity of observations of animals in this group (which are usually highly

secretive even in areas where they are abundant). Nonconsumptive values are very difficult to assess compared with market values of the pelts or depredation losses.

Market values, on the other hand, are relatively easy to estimate. Although the Department realizes that market value received for pelts represents only a portion of the total value of this group of species to Idaho citizens, it does require an annual harvest report from each trapper which includes price obtained for each species. Estimated market value for the approximately 144,000 Idaho pelts from the 1983-1984 fur harvest was nearly \$820,000.

Three major problems affect the management of furbearers. The first is that, unlike game animals, all are harvested primarily as a commercial enterprise. As the value of a pelt of any particular species changes according to prevailing market conditions, harvest pressure either intensifies or is reduced. Related to the first problem is the fact that the trapper is rarely after only one species. More commonly, the individual trapper seeks a mix of species based on availability and prevailing (perceived) price of each species. The effect of this is that pressure can be maintained at artificially high levels for a rare or unusual species when it occurs in habitats shared by other furbearers. Finally, basic management information is extremely difficult to obtain for most furbearers. Muskrat houses or active beaver colonies can be counted, but no techniques currently exist to allow accurate estimates

of population levels of most other furbearers over a large management area. Historic harvest levels are generally available and can show trends in populations if the assumption is made that harvest pressure is relatively constant. However, harvest pressure is recognized to be more a function of current market conditions and trends than of furbearer population levels, and is also influenced by other factors including likelihood of capture, weather, and ease of pelt preparation. Historic harvest data must be analyzed very carefully to have predictive value in establishing seasons and acceptable harvest levels.

Furbearer management must consider trends in historic harvests and market values as the first line of consistent information on furbearer populations. A plot of these two interacting factors will be presented for each of the individual species (where available) in the sections that follow. Beyond that, the Department must (1) strive for consistent fur harvest seasons (to aid in allowing harvest data from successive years to be comparable and to allow the trapper to plan his trapping activities); (2) schedule seasons during the period of peak pelt value; (3) allow sufficient time to allow biologically reasonable harvests given the vagaries of seasonal weather, while keeping the seasons short enough that overharvest of individual species does not occur; and (4) consider individual species harvests in context of the matrix of all species available to the trapper.

Periodic collection of biological information obtainable from harvested animals is critical to develop data bases for management. These programs will be prioritized and regularly reviewed.

The Department will continue to allow harvest of furbearers where such harvests do not damage the potential of the population and where such harvests are deemed in the best interest of Idaho citizens. Depredation problems will be resolved on a complaint basis, with activities directed at specific problem areas or situations. Seasons for particular species may be closed whenever it is believed necessary for the protection of the animal population or in the interest of Idaho citizens to do so.

## STATEWIDE MANAGEMENT POLICIES

These species will be managed primarily for their recreational and commercial value as furbearers, using long-term trends and not yearly fluctuations in pelt prices or harvest.

General seasons will be used to harvest furbearers wherever possible. Controlled seasons will be eliminated wherever possible.

Take seasons will be structured to maximize opportunity and to include the period of pelt primeness.

Payment of bounties will not be used as a means of controlling furbearers. Trapping methods which cause the least amount of trauma and maintain efficiency will be promoted.

Non-native, nongame species will not be introduced into the state of Idaho.

Programs to control predation on wildlife populations and domestic livestock will be carried out by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service upon request of and/or under agreement with the Department and according to Department direction whenever possible.

Programs for control of predation on wildlife species will be directed at specific problem areas or particular situations involving individual animals or groups of animals.

## 1986-1990 GOALS

Continue fur harvest seasons for marten, mink, beaver, muskrat, bobcat, lynx, red fox, and raccoon. Continue to obtain harvest data for all furbearers mentioned above, the badger, and Idaho's five predatory animals regularly harvested for their fur: coyote, spotted skunk, striped skunk, long-tailed weasel, and ermine. Obtain additional biological data on harvested bobcats; initiate a similar study to obtain biological data on harvested red foxes and marten. Cooperate in research study on fisher ecology. Biological data obtained on river otter populations will be evaluated in this planning period. Seek reclassification of the badger from "unprotected wildlife" to "fur-bearing animal".

## TOP PRIORITY PROGRAMS, 1986-1990

ISSUE - Bobcat pelts have been valued at very high levels over the past five years, and trapping pressure on this species has been disproportionately high.

STRATEGY - Continue collection of bobcat carcasses from Idaho trappers for at least one more season. Evaluate benefits of continuing this program.

ISSUE - Fisher, native to Idaho but nearly extirpated from the state, have been reintroduced in several locations. Baseline ecological and management information on these populations is not available for Idaho.

STRATEGY - The Department will continue to cooperate in a study of fisher ecology in Idaho, and will evaluate data obtained relative to the management of this species and relative to forestry practices..

ISSUE - Population data of red foxes in Idaho are not available.

STRATEGY - A study of red fox age and sex structure will be instituted using lower jaws obtained from cooperating trappers.

ISSUE - Effects of timber harvest and high pelt prices on marten populations are unknown.



STRATEGY - The Department will institute a study on marten populations to assess age structure in the harvest.

ISSUE - The badger, although a valued furbearer, is currently classified as "unprotected wildlife" and is unprotected at all seasons of the year.

STRATEGY - The Department will seek to have the badger reclassified as a "fur-bearing animal," to allow management of this species in areas away from agricultural development.

## STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVES ON ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

### SOCIAL ISSUES

ISSUE - The demand for, and harvest of, all furbearers are influenced by anticipated pelt price, weather, economic conditions, ease of trapping and handling, furbearer populations and other factors.

STRATEGY - The Department expects year-to-year fluctuations in harvest of furbearers and will manage for average conditions; that is, regulations will generally be changed in response to trends, not year-to-year changes.

ISSUE - Some groups advocate use of quick kill devices (power snares, conibear-type traps, etc.), but such devices do not allow release of non-target animals, such as protected wildlife or domestic pets.

STRATEGY - The Department will consider a jointly-sponsored trapper education program with the Idaho Trappers Association.

ISSUE - The commercial values of our furbearers are established by demand for furs and their aesthetic values by public opinion, but their nonconsumptive values are not widely recognized.

STRATEGY - The Department will initiate programs to inform the public of all the values of Idaho's wildlife.

ISSUE - Many people have a negative attitude toward harvest of furbearers because of commercial sale of pelts.

STRATEGY - The Department (1) recognizes that the primary use of harvested furbearers is for commercial sale and will support this use through our Information and Education programs and news releases to fur harvesters and other segments of the public; and (2) will continue to monitor this problem and to advocate devices and techniques that are humane, and yet facilitate release of non-target animals.

ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

ISSUE - Laws and regulations regarding possession of live wildlife are unclear.

STRATEGY - The Department will work with the Department of Agriculture and the legislature to examine and recodify laws to license and regulate the possession of live wildlife in Idaho.

## HABITAT ISSUES

ISSUE - The effects of habitat alterations on furbearers and the management of habitats to influence furbearer populations are poorly know.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) continue to employ a furbearer specialist; (2) undertake surveys and/or studies to increase our understanding of the habitat-furbearer interaction; and (3) cooperate with Federal and other land managers to implement habitat management programs deemed appropriate to help meet furbearer goals and objectives.

ISSUE - Access to some wildlife habitats is denied because they are in private ownership or access is across private lands.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) encourage private landowners to allow access to their property; (2) identify public lands where access is blocked by private land and work toward providing access where desirable by easement or purchase; (3) pursue trespass cases more vigorously; and (4) stress in our information to fur harvesters that access to private land is a privilege that should not be abused, that permission for access should be requested, and that access without permission constitutes trespass.

ISSUE - Leghold traps can cause injury and suffering to target and non-target species captured.

STRATEGY - The Department recognizes that, when used improperly, traps may cause injury to animals. However, leghold traps are considered a valid tool in wildlife management that cannot currently be replaced with other tools. To minimize unnecessary injury of wildlife, the Department will (1) continue to require that traps be checked at least every 72 hours; (2) urge trappers to use the minimal trap required to hold the target species; (3) advocate use of selective "kill" traps (conibears) or sets (drowning sets for water species) whenever possible; and (4) continue to evaluate trap improvements.

## BIOLOGICAL ISSUES

ISSUE - Population estimates and dynamics data for most populations are incomplete and/or inadequate for intensive management.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) maintain a furbearer specialist; (2) attempt to obtain indices to furbearer populations that are independent of harvest statistics (examples are scent-post lines for bobcat, coyote, fisher and otter; aerial census for otter sign during March and sightings of furbearers by Department personnel); (3) increase and rely more heavily upon license holder questionnaires to get data on harvest and sex of harvested animals; (4) increase data-gathering efforts where deficiencies are identified; (5) require fur harvesters to report and/or specified check harvested animals, or parts thereof, to provide new data or allow us to collect data more efficiently; (6) evaluate current data-gathering programs to determine whether they are needed, and whether there are better techniques to accomplish the same goal; (7) investigate ways of generating more revenue for the fur program; and (8) assess the advantages and disadvantages of implementing a fur harvester's license and/or stamp so that a single user group can be sampled.

ISSUE - Data on harvest of nearly all furbearers are inadequate. Such data need to be collected annually. Many furbearer species are essentially impossible to census so population status must be inferred from age and sex structure in the harvest and population trend.

STRATEGY - The Department will continue to require hunters and trappers to report on harvest of furbearers and to present hides, skulls, and/or carcasses of some species for tagging and/or collection of biological data.

ISSUE - It is difficult, and sometimes impossible to control the species of animal caught.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) discourage dry-land trapping near residential areas; (2) continue to prohibit use of exposed baits at traps; (3) encourage trappers to release non-target species caught accidentally; and (4) develop a mechanism to allow trappers to deliver protected species accidentally captured by Department personnel.

ISSUE - Statistics on numbers, activity and other parameters regarding houndsmen who pursue bobcat, lynx, red fox, and raccoon in Idaho are scarce.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) continue to require a permit to pursue bobcat, lynx, red fox, and raccoon with dogs; and (2) require an annual report of pursuit activities from permittees

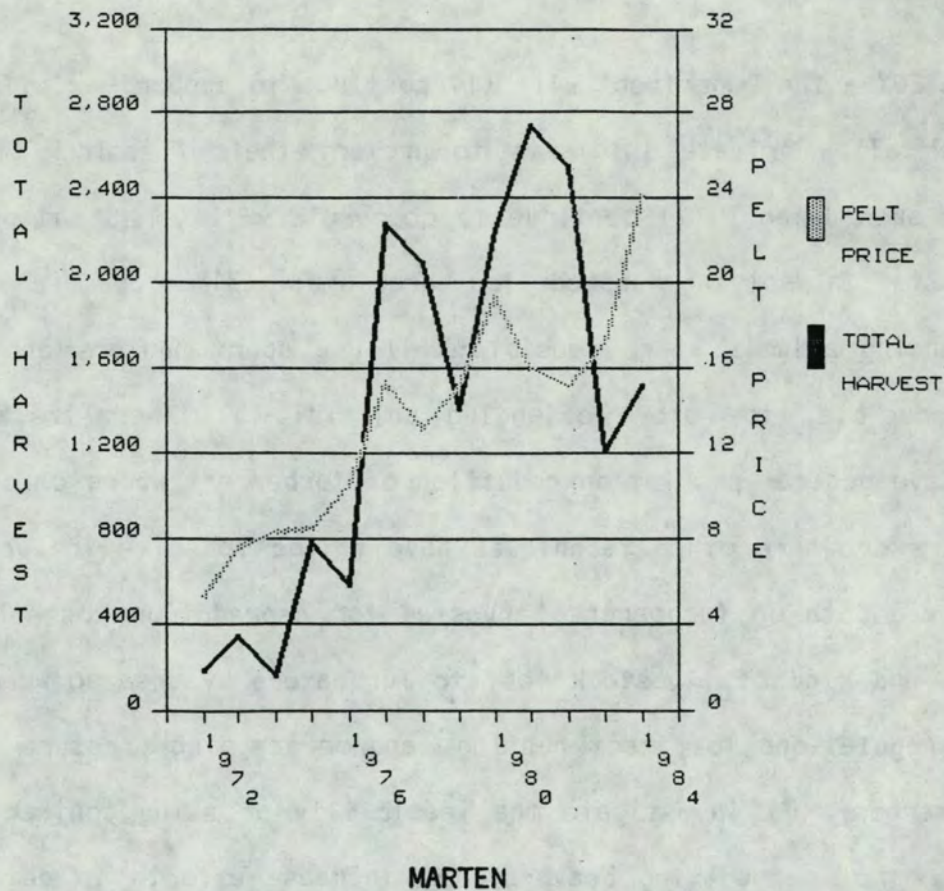
ISSUE - Furbearers can damage private property and livestock.



STRATEGY - The Department will (1) continue to support existing statutes which allow private interests to protect their livestock or property from such damage; (2) continue to cooperate with USFWS and private interests in solving depredation problems; (3) trap and transplant offending animals where feasible; (4) use sport hunters and trappers, if possible, to remove offending animals; (5) liberalize seasons to achieve general population reduction of furbearers where chronic damage occurs or where other techniques have failed to solve the problem; (6) analyze data on furbearers harvested for depredation control and numbers and kind of livestock lost to furbearers by area so we can adjust our regulations to direct hunting and/or trapping pressure into problem areas; (7) investigate the feasibility of using contract trappers to control depredating beavers; (8) increase efforts to determine the most efficient and effective methods of solving depredation complaints; (9) develop a "Depredation Plan" to provide guidance to Department personnel servicing depredations and information to others; and (10) consider publishing, possibly jointly with USFWS and/or others, a "Depredation newsletter" to provide a vehicle for exchange of ideas and information pertinent to resolving depredation problems be circulated among Department personnel, county agents, and those suffering depredations.

ISSUE - Some habitats are unoccupied by some species of furbearers.

STRATEGY - The Department will consider transplanting some furbearers, especially fisher and otter into unoccupied habitats.



Marten are found in most of the forested mountainous habitats in central, northern, and eastern Idaho. Members of the weasel family, marten typically travel squirrel-like in mature timber stands, where they feed on small mammals (especially mice), birds, insects, and fruits. Home ranges vary from one-half to over one square mile. Like most members of the weasel family, marten are generally solitary except during the mid-summer (July or August) breeding season. Young marten (generally 2 or 3) are born in mid-March to mid-April, and remain with their mother until the summer breeding period. Although marten can live to an age of 13 years in the wild, few live beyond 4 years of age

due to natural mortality (primarily predation and accidents) and human-related mortality, including trapping and habitat loss. Removal of mature timber stands can cause complete losses of local populations.

Marten ranked sixth in importance of animals harvested for fur in Idaho in the 1983-1984 trapping season, when an estimated harvest of just over 1,500 pelts sold for about \$37,000. Average pelt price was just over \$24 (Fig. 1).

The Department has cooperated with the Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit in a study of marten ecology relative to forest management practices in Idaho. In an effort to monitor changes in marten populations in Idaho, the Department will begin to document the age structure of marten harvested in Idaho during this planning period. Lower jaws of marten harvested by cooperating Idaho trappers will be used to obtain information on age of the animals.

#### GOALS

Continue annual harvest of marten. Develop and implement a voluntary program with cooperating trappers to monitor age structure of marten harvested in Idaho, to begin 1987-88.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE - Marten population data is not available at the present time.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) establish a program to monitor age structure of marten harvested in Idaho, using lower jaws of marten taken by trappers; and (2) encourage and/or cooperate in studies to obtain additional management information.

## MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Continue annual harvest of marten through trapping. Develop and implement a voluntary program to monitor age structure of marten harvested in Idaho, beginning in 1987-88.

## RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

Season open November 1 through January 31 statewide.

## FISHER

Fishers are considered rare in Idaho. Although classified as a furbearer, there is no open season on fishers at present in Idaho.

Fishers spend much of their time in trees, and are most active at night, although daytime activity is not uncommon. Porcupines, snowshoe hares, and small rodents comprise the bulk of the diet. Fishers are restricted largely to forested habitat in Idaho north of Boise, home ranges generally are thought to include about one square mile. Fishers are usually solitary except in the early spring, when mating occurs. Young fishers, generally 3, are typically born in March or April and remain with their mother until late summer or fall. In the wild, fishers can live as long as 14 years, although few fishers live beyond three or four years of age. Natural mortality factors include deaths from porcupine quills penetrating vital organs and predation by raptorial birds; in Idaho, some fishers are also killed by cars and in traps set for other species, such as marten.

The Department transplanted fishers from Canada into Idaho in the early 1960's. In 1984, the Department began a cooperative study on the ecology of a reintroduced population of fisher in north-central Idaho to provide information useful in the management of this furbearer.

## GOALS

Develop a data base on fisher ecology and distribution in Idaho. Consider establishing new populations through transplant of fisher into suitable habitats that are presently unoccupied. Evaluate biological data on fisher relative to management.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

**ISSUE** - Fisher may be captured accidentally in traps set for other furbearers. These animals are commonly not reported.

**STRATEGY** - The Department realizes that accidental catches of fisher will occur. To minimize impacts on the fisher population, the Department will (1) continue to require that trappers check traps at least every 72 hours and release, if possible, non-target animals accidentally trapped; (2) aid in release of fisher if necessary; (3) evaluate biological data on fisher relative to management; and (4) develop a mechanism to allow trappers to deliver fisher accidentally captured to Department personnel.

**ISSUE** - Little data exists with which to manage fisher in Idaho.

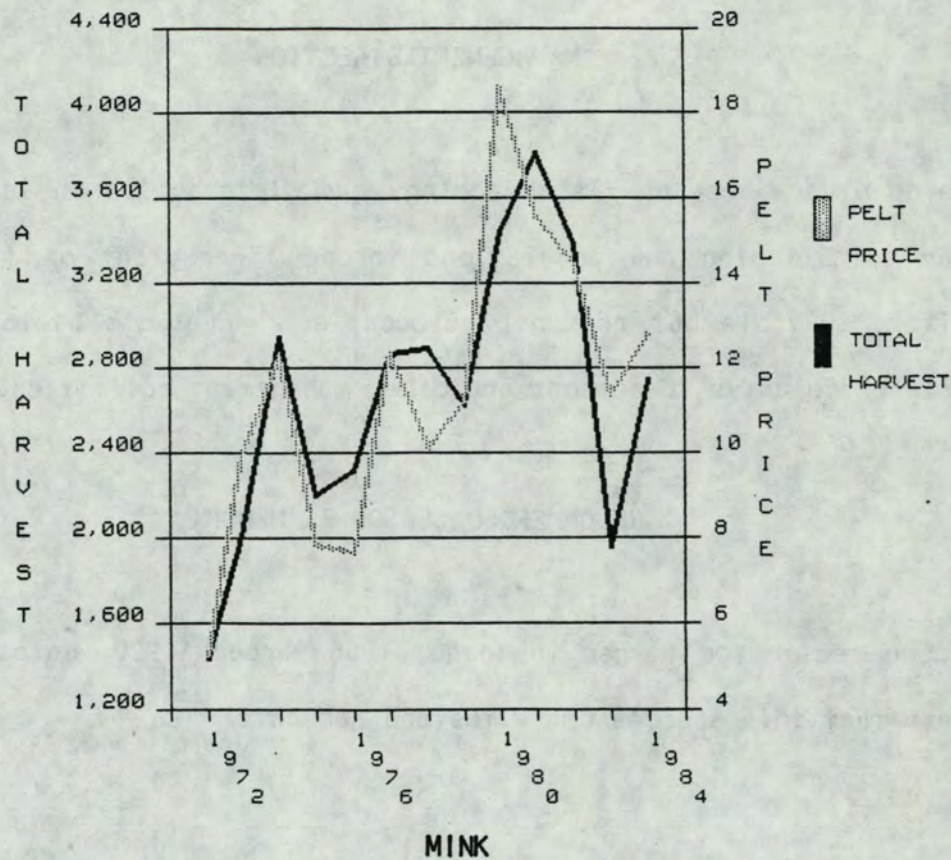
**STRATEGY** - The Department will (1) continue to cooperate in a study of fisher ecology in Idaho; (2) develop a data base on fisher ecology; and (3) use available information to identify habitat components of critical importance and to make management agency recommendations.

## MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Develop a data base on fisher ecology and distribution in Idaho. Consider establishing new populations through transplant of fisher into habitats suitable but presently unoccupied. Evaluate biological data on fisher relative to seasons and other management activities.

## RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

No open season for fisher in Idaho, 1986 through 1990, unless data indicate that this species can withstand harvest.



Mink occur along waterways throughout Idaho, from arid desert-like country to high mountain ranges. Mink are members of the weasel family, like marten, fisher, river otters, badgers, and skunks. They feed primarily on fish, frogs, small rodents, and crayfish, but will eat a wide variety of foods. Primarily solitary except during the February and March breeding season, mink typically occupy one to three miles of waterways or shorelines in their home range. Young mink (usually four per litter) are typically born in late April or May and disperse in the fall. Although subject to some natural mortality from predators, diseases, trapping, and insufficient food supply.



Mink ranked seventh in importance of animals harvested for fur in Idaho in the 1983-1984 trapping season, when an estimated harvest of less than 3,000 mink pelts sold for about \$35,000. Average pelt price in 1983-1984 was just under \$13 (Fig. 2).

The Department cooperated with the Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit in a study of mink ecology in central Idaho, 1976-1979.

### GOALS

Maintain an annual harvest of mink.

### ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE - Traps set for mink often catch muskrat, and vice versa.

STRATEGY - The Department will generally authorize concurrent seasons for these two species.

### MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Continue annual harvest seasons for mink. Authorize concurrent seasons for mink and muskrats.

## RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

Open season for mink concurrent with muskrat seasons statewide, November 1 through March 31, except in some restricted areas.

## RIVER OTTER

River otters are classified as furbearers in Idaho, although seasons are currently closed. Historic reports indicate that river otters were common along most of the streams and lakes in Idaho early in this century, but numbers were significantly reduced by the 1940's and 1950's. During the period from 1960 to 1970, reported river otter harvests in Idaho averaged only 76 animals per year, with a high during that period of 131 river otters reported in the 1965-66 trapping season. Only 40 otters were reported taken during the 1970-71 season, and river otter seasons were closed the following year due to concerns about declining population levels. The river otter season has not been reopened since 1972.

One of the problems associated with river otter management is the fact that, since they spend much of their time in the water and range widely up and down waterways (and sometimes cross from one drainage to another over land), they are very difficult to study. Little research on river otter ecology had been done until the Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, in cooperation with the Department, began a research project on river otter ecology in Idaho in 1976. This project continued through 1981, and provided detailed management information.

River otters occur in most of Idaho's major rivers and streams, and populations have increased considerably since 1970. Most active in the mornings and evenings, river otters commonly feed on slow-moving large fish (species commonly referred to as trash fish) and crayfish. River otters commonly travel alone except for females with young. Young otters (usually 2 or 3) are usually born about March or April in Idaho and leave their mothers 12 to 13 months later. Although river otters may live 14 years in the wild, few live to be older than 3 in heavily trapped populations, or older than 6 in unexploited populations. Principal causes of mortality, even without legal trapping seasons, are apparently human related. Otters are run over by cars, caught accidentally in traps set for other species, or killed by dogs. Natural mortality may be caused by other predators (great horned owls may capture young otters, for example) or by accidents (such as falling rocks).

River otters can cause depredations at state, federal or private fish hatcheries, and female river otters protecting their young have severely bitten some boaters or fishermen. However, such problems are not common, and can usually be corrected by capturing the offending animal.

In Idaho, perhaps the greatest value of the river otter lies within the realm of aesthetics. River otters are active and entertaining to watch, and they provide an added dimension to fishermen, recreational boaters, and others using Idaho's waterways.

## GOALS

Maintain river otter populations and distribution. Encourage nonconsumptive enjoyment of river otters and improve the data base on river otter populations.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

**ISSUE** - River otters may be caught accidentally in traps set for other furbearers. These animals are commonly not reported.

**STRATEGY** - The Department realizes that accidental catches of river otters will occur. To minimize impacts on the river otter population, the Department will (1) require that trappers check traps at least every 72 hours and release, if possible, non-target animals accidentally trapped; (2) aid in release of otters if necessary; (3) develop a mechanism to allow trappers to deliver river otters accidentally captured to Department personnel.

**ISSUE** - No system for monitoring river otter population fluctuations currently exists in Idaho.

**STRATEGY** - Develop and implement a statewide data collection system for monitoring river otter distribution and populations.

**ISSUE** - Idaho may have some unoccupied habitat suitable for river otters.

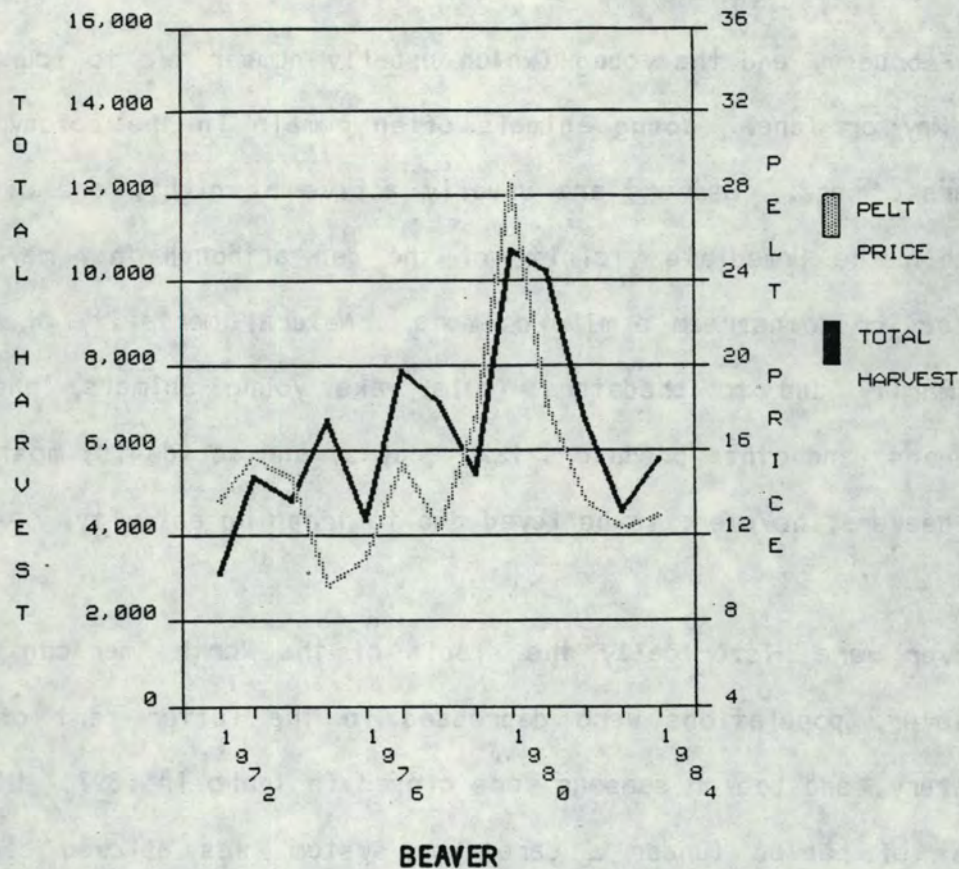
**STRATEGY** - The Department will (1) inventory of unoccupied suitable river otter habitat; (2) determine relative priorities for introducing river otters into identified areas; and (3) stock these areas as river otters and funds become available through capture at fish hatchery depredation sites.

#### **MANAGEMENT DIRECTION**

Maintain river otters populations and distribution. Encourage nonconsumptive enjoyment of river otters and improve the data base on river otter populations.

#### **RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK**

No open season, 1986 through 1990.



Beaver were the fourth most important furbearer in Idaho during the 1983-1984 trapping season, when nearly 6,000 animals were harvested - more than any other furbearer except muskrat. At an average price per pelt of just over \$13 (Fig. 3) these animals contributed over \$76,000 to Idaho's economy that year, and accounted for 9 percent of the value of all furs combined.

Beavers are currently found in almost all suitable habitats in Idaho, from desert streams to high mountain rivers. Beavers are rodents and, unlike most other species of furbearers, live in colonies that typically number from two to nine animals. Breeding occurs in late January

or February, and the young (which usually number two to four) are born in May or June. Young animals often remain in the colony until two years of age. Beavers are usually active at night, and often remain within the immediate vicinity of the den although they may range upstream or downstream a mile or more. Natural mortality of beavers is primarily due to predators (owls take young animals, and coyotes, cougars, and other predators take adults) and accidents; most mortality of beavers, however, is believed due to trapping activity.

Beaver were historically the staple of the North American fur trade. However, populations were depressed in the latter part of the last century, and beaver seasons were closed in Idaho in 1897. Limited harvest of beaver (under a caretaker system) was allowed beginning in 1945, and general seasons were reinstated in 1957. Market prices of beaver have been depressed in recent years, and trapping pressure has been relatively low. As a result, beaver populations and the number of beaver damage complaints received annually have been high. Beaver damage complaints regularly constitute one-third to one-half of all wildlife damage complaints received by the Department. Typical concerns involve beavers damming irrigation canals, blocking culverts, cutting trees in residential areas near waterways, and weakening earthen dams and canal walls by digging associated with den construction. Conversely, many of these same activities also yield benefits to man and to other wildlife. Beaver dams and other "sign" are evident to most people, and many people derive satisfaction and nonconsumptive enjoyment locating such evidence of wildlife activity. The beaver was so



influential in settling of the west that preservation of the species has historic and cultural significance. On a solely practical level, impoundments created by beaver dams may result in control of stream-bank erosion, raise the local ground-water level, provide high-quality habitat for fisheries, increase the availability of water to nesting birds, waterfowl, other furbearers, and develop into drinking sources for numerous species of wildlife. The associated flooding and girdling of trees creates snags that are extremely valuable to a large number of cavity-nesting birds and mammals. Perhaps most importantly, creation of ponds as a result of beaver dam construction alters the immediate environment, sometimes dramatically, creating a diversity of local fisheries and wildlife habitats that might otherwise be completely unavailable.

Beaver ecology in Idaho and throughout the western United States is perhaps better understood than that of any other furbearer. In addition to research, the Department has worked to return beavers to all suitable habitats in Idaho. Seasons are currently liberal, although because of the visibility of beaver "sign" these animals are susceptible to overharvest when demand for pelts is high.

#### GOALS

Maintain annual beaver and increase harvest season. Encourage nonconsumptive use and enjoyment of beaver and their habitats.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

**ISSUE** - Beaver activities may create problems for private landowners and highway departments, including flooding, blocking of irrigation canals and culverts, and loss of streamside trees.

**STRATEGY** - The Department will (1) direct trappers into chronic beaver damage areas; (2) continue to handle beaver damage complaints on private lands on a complaint basis; (3) continue a program of landowner education stressing means of preventing beaver damage and correcting problem situations; and (4) encourage landowners to use beavers to control erosion, raise local groundwater levels, and create ponds whenever appropriate.

**ISSUE** - Beaver activities create valuable fish and wildlife habitat. In some areas, these benefits may be outweighed by blockage of upstream fish passage in other areas.

**STRATEGY** - The Department will consider positive and negative impacts of beaver dams on fish and wildlife habitat on public lands when establishing goals, objectives and regulations for beaver management.

**ISSUE** - Beaver are vulnerable to over-harvest when demand for beaver pelts is high.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) adjust general season length as necessary to increase or decrease harvest; and (2) use controlled beaver trapping units only as necessary on a local basis.

ISSUE - The beneficial aspects of beaver construction of dams and ponds to human activities, fisheries, and wildlife are seldom fully appreciated.

STRATEGY - The Department will develop an educational pamphlet for public distribution stressing these benefits.

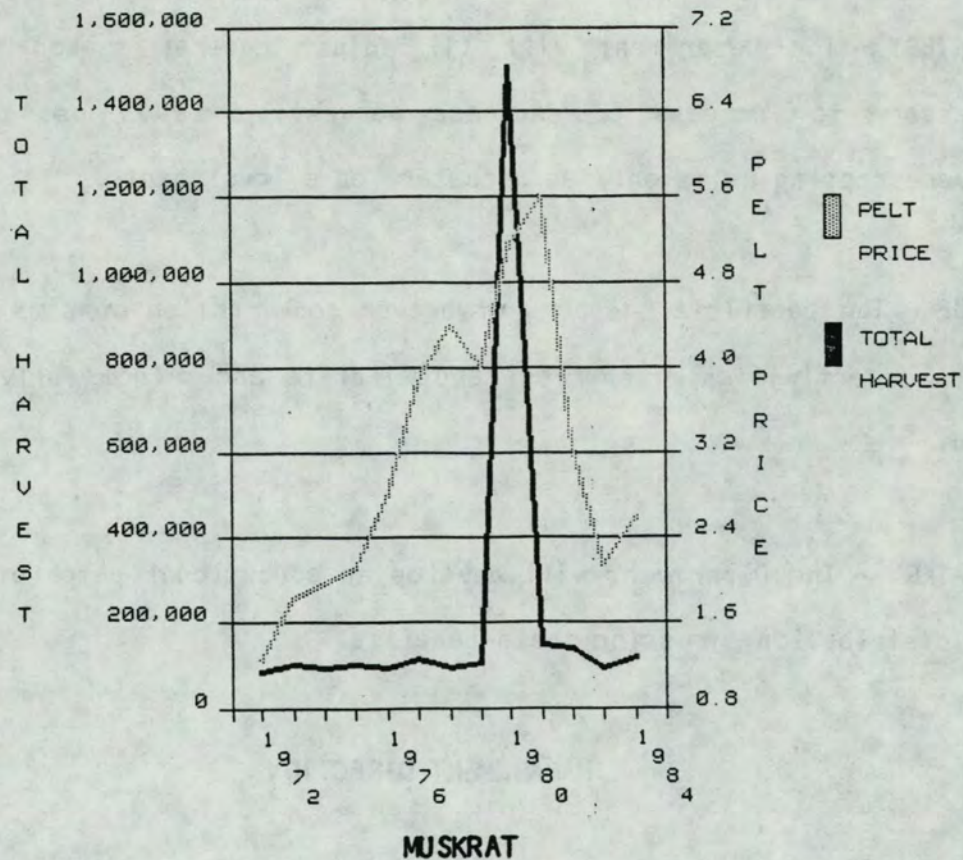
#### MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Maintain annual beaver trapping seasons and increase harvest. Continue to handle beaver damage on a complaint basis.

#### RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

Maintain annual beaver trapping seasons as follows:

REGION	DATES
Regions 1, 2, and 3 (except as noted in regulations)	November 1 - March 31
Regions 4, 5, and 6 (except as noted in regulations)	November 1 - April 30



Muskrats are found throughout Idaho except in high mountain areas. They live in streams, ponds, and other waterways, where they feed primarily on aquatic vegetation. In still water, they often construct "houses" of cattails that can provide an index to population levels. Extremely prolific, muskrats begin breeding in late winter and typically produce two or more litters, each averaging 5 or 6 kits, per year. As might be expected, such a prolific animal is also subject to high annual losses, from predation, starvation, disease, and other factors. Harvest of muskrats by trappers can benefit the population by reducing muskrat numbers in a limited area before and during the winter period of food shortage, thus preventing the potential for a population

to "eat out" the available food and "crash". Muskrat populations have the ability to recover from "population crashes" rapidly if suitable habitat is available, however, habitat damage resulting from the activities of high numbers of muskrats in a limited area may be so severe that the area will not recover as muskrat habitat for several years. Unlike most other furbearers in Idaho, muskrats are probably not subject to overharvest by trappers.

The muskrat is the most important furbearer in Idaho in terms of total number of animals harvested (well over 124,000 muskrats harvested in the 1983-1984 trapping season, or over twenty times as many as the second most frequently taken furbearer) and in terms of income to Idaho's trappers (\$322,000 in the 1983-1984 trapping season, or 39% of the total value of all pelts harvested that year). Harvest of muskrats is related to average pelt price (Fig. 4), but due to their abundance, ease of capture, and ease of pelt preparation, this factor is probably less important than most other furbearers.

Muskrats often damage to earthen dams and canals by digging burrows. This damage is somewhat offset by the benefits derived from muskrats through control of aquatic plant growth that might otherwise clog drainage ditches and canals. Removal of aquatic growth also benefits fish and wildlife populations, and muskrat "houses" are regularly used as nesting platforms by a number of species of aquatic birds.

## GOALS

Maintain annual trapping seasons for muskrats. Encourage muskrat populations, where desirable, for fish and wildlife benefits.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

**ISSUE** - Muskrat activities (cutting of aquatic vegetation, construction of houses) may benefit some wildlife populations.

**STRATEGY** - The Department may control water levels on some WMA's to maintain muskrat populations at desired levels.

**ISSUE** - Muskrats can cause significant damage to man-made water structures.

**STRATEGY** - In areas of chronic muskrat damage, the Department will (1) establish muskrat harvest seasons to maximize harvest potential; and (2) provide information on methods to reduce or eliminate potential damage from muskrats.

**ISSUE** - Muskrat and mink may be captured in traps set for either species.

**STRATEGY** - The Department will generally authorize concurrent seasons for muskrats and mink.

**ISSUE** - Harvest levels desirable on Department WMA's may not be attained because trapping seasons are frequently short and limited to selected permittees (to avoid conflict with other uses of the area), and permittees may not have sufficient experience, skill, or equipment to achieve harvest potential.

**STRATEGY** - Because of the importance of desirable population levels of muskrats to a habitat management program, the Department may attempt to achieve desired harvest levels of muskrats by (1) allowing the maximum season length compatible with other uses of the area; (2) require that trappers competing for permits live in proximity to the region for which the permit is issued; (3) eliminating the current two-year minimum wait period between permits; (4) issuing permits on a competitive bid system if necessary; and (5) soliciting additional or alternate trappers if desired harvest levels are not being attained.

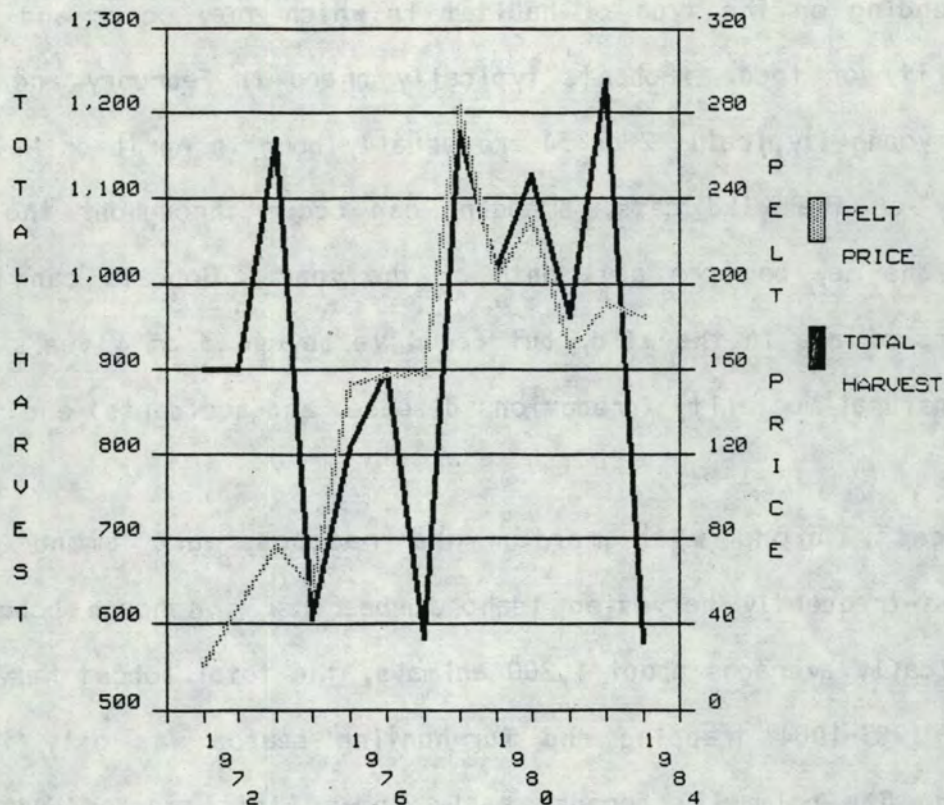
#### **MANAGEMENT DIRECTION**

Maintain annual trapping seasons for muskrats. Authorize concurrent muskrat and mink seasons. Attempt to reduce muskrat damage to man-made structures. Encourage maintenance of muskrat populations where desirable for benefit to fish and wildlife habitats.

## RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

Open season for muskrat concurrent with mink seasons as follows state-wide, November 1 through March 31 except in some restricted areas.





BOBCAT AND LYNX

Lynx occur only incidentally in Idaho. The common nomenclature of the fur trade, "lynx cat", refers to pale bobcats; in reality, harvest of lynx is limited to less than five animals per year. Because of similarities to the bobcat in physical appearance and habits, lynx are not differentiated from bobcats in terms of management.

Bobcats occur throughout the state of Idaho. The staples in the bobcat diet wherever they occur, hares, are rabbits, mice, and squirrels. Other small mammals, birds, and even deer are also eaten. They are

normally solitary, and the size of their home range varies greatly, depending on the type of habitat in which they occur and the availability of food. Bobcats typically breed in February and March, and the young (typically 2 or 3) are usually born in April or May. As with many of the wild cats, breeding can occur throughout the year, and kittens may be born any month of the year. Bobcats can live to 15 years of age in the wild, but few live beyond 3 or 4 years of age due to natural mortality (predation, disease, and accidents) and trapping.

Bobcats, along with marten and raccoon, are among the three least-frequently harvested Idaho furbearers. Although bobcat harvest typically averages about 1,200 animals, the total bobcat harvest during the 1983-1984 trapping and fur-hunting season was only 582 animals (Fig. 5), primarily because early snows limit trapper/hunter access. Despite the low levels of harvest, high prices paid per pelt caused the bobcat to be the third most important fur-bearing animal in Idaho in the 1983-1984 season. Bobcat pelts brought over \$108,000 to trappers in 1983-1984, or 13% of the total value of all animals harvested for their fur that season.

Bobcats can cause depredation problems to private landowners but such problems are uncommon. Concern over the effect of bobcat predation on game bird and game animal populations in a number of areas have prompted studies to evaluate the effects of bobcat predation. Almost without exception, the results of such studies have indicated that the effects of bobcat predation on game animal populations was minimal.

Management of bobcats is affected by the high interest in the bobcat resource by a number of groups, including trappers, houndsmen, predator hunters, incidental hunters, and a number of groups that advocate complete protection. Each group has a different (and sometimes conflicting) interest in bobcat management.

Because of concern over the welfare of bobcats nationwide, prompted in part by the high value of bobcat pelts and in part by the difficulties in assessing bobcat populations, regulations requiring states to collect management data on bobcats were imposed by the federal government on all states allowing bobcat pelts to enter international trade. Tagging of pelts was required. The Department has cooperated with the Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit in a number of studies on bobcat ecology in Idaho (see Appendix 1 for a list of some of the publications resulting from this work). Two additional projects on bobcat ecology are ongoing (one in the Middle Fork of the Salmon River drainage and another on the INEL site). In addition, the Department has instituted a program to collect carcasses of bobcats from trappers to determine the age structure of the harvested population and reproductive characteristics of females. This project has been ongoing for two years and will continue at least one more year, enabling the Department to monitor changes in the population through time.

## GOALS

Maintain annual trapping for bobcats. Maintain pursuit and harvest seasons for bobcats featuring use of trailing hounds.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

**ISSUE** - Controversy continues over the timing and length of the bobcat season.

**STRATEGY** - The Department will (1) evaluate a third year of reproductive tract and age structure data from bobcat carcasses; (2) consider reproductive and harvest rates to assess suitable season length; and (3) adopt a uniform season framework in 1987-88.

**ISSUE** - Potential exists for accidental death and/or illegal harvest of bobcats during pursuit-only seasons.

**STRATEGY** - To limit the potential for accidental and/or illegal losses of bobcats during pursuit-only seasons, the Department will (1) continue to allow pursuit seasons for bobcats only during January, February, and/or March in those game management units that have an open mountain lion harvest or pursuit season during that period; (2) not establish pursuit seasons for bobcats during the kitten-rearing period,

April through November; (3) not allow night-hunting of bobcats; and (4) require that all persons participating in bobcat pursuit seasons obtain and have in their possession a "Hound Hunter's Permit."

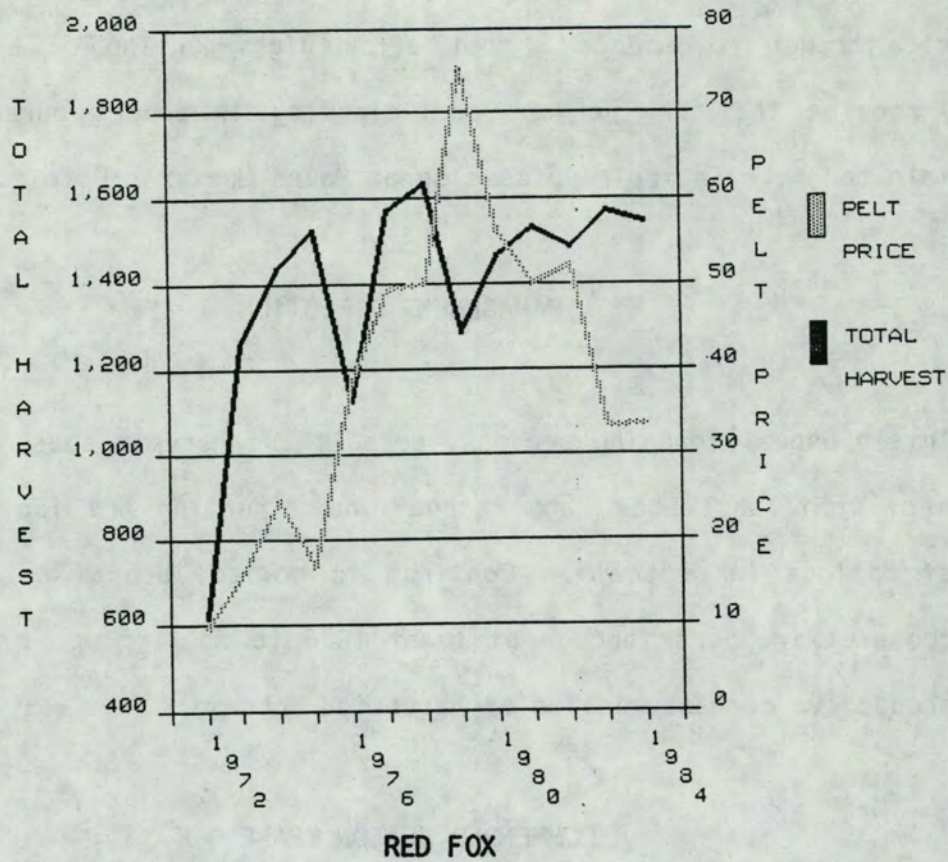
#### MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Maintain annual trapping seasons, pursuit and harvest seasons featuring use of trailing hounds, and recreational hunting and incidental harvest options for bobcats. Continue to collect bobcat carcasses from successful trappers through at least 1986 to monitor age structure and reproductive characteristics of harvested bobcats.

#### RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

SEASON TYPE	OPENING DATE	CLOSING DATE	NO. OF DAYS
Trapping	December 1	December 31	31
Fur-hunting and Incidental	December 1	December 31	31
Pursuit	Variable, to coincide with mountain lion harvest or pursuit seasons in January, February, or March only.		

<sup>a</sup> Season length and timing may be adjusted in 1987-88.



Red fox may occur throughout Idaho, although the largest populations are found in irrigated lowland areas, particularly along the Snake River Plain. These animals prefer a diverse mixture of croplands, pasture, brush, and scattered timber; home ranges typically include about two square miles of suitable habitat. They feed primarily on small mammals, birds, fruit, and insects. Breeding typically occurs in February and March, and the red fox pups (1 to 8 per litter) are born in April or May. They begin to disperse from their mother at about 5 or 6 months of age. The most frequent causes of mortality among red foxes are disease, road-kills, trapping, and hunting.

Just over 1,500 red foxes were harvested in Idaho in the 1983-1984 trapping season (Fig. 6). Pelts of these animals brought over \$52,000 to Idaho's trappers (6% of the total value of the fur harvest that year), resulting in the red fox ranking fifth in monetary importance among Idaho furbearers.

Red foxes may occasionally cause depredations, particularly on small domestic animals and truck crops, but such problems are rare and local in Idaho.

In addition to harvest by trappers, red foxes are regularly hunted for fur in some areas of the state by predator callers, and a number of animals are taken incidentally each year by hunters.

#### GOALS

Maintain annual trapping and hunting seasons for red fox. Initiate a voluntary collection of red fox lower jaws to develop a data base to aid in management, beginning 1987-88.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE - Red foxes can cause depredation problems on private lands.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) respond to complaints of red fox depredation on a problem-animal basis; (2) use licensed trappers to remove offending animals if the complaint occurs within the legal harvest period; (3) either remove the animal if the complaint occurs outside of the legal harvest period, or designate an experienced trapper to do so if available locally; and (4) provide the landowner with information on avoiding or minimizing potentials for future fox depredation problems.

ISSUE - Little management data is available on red fox populations in Idaho.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) obtain a sample of lower jaws of red foxes harvested by trappers in Idaho on a voluntary basis beginning in 1987-88; and (2) use fox population age structure data obtained from this sample to monitor population trends among harvested red foxes.

## MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

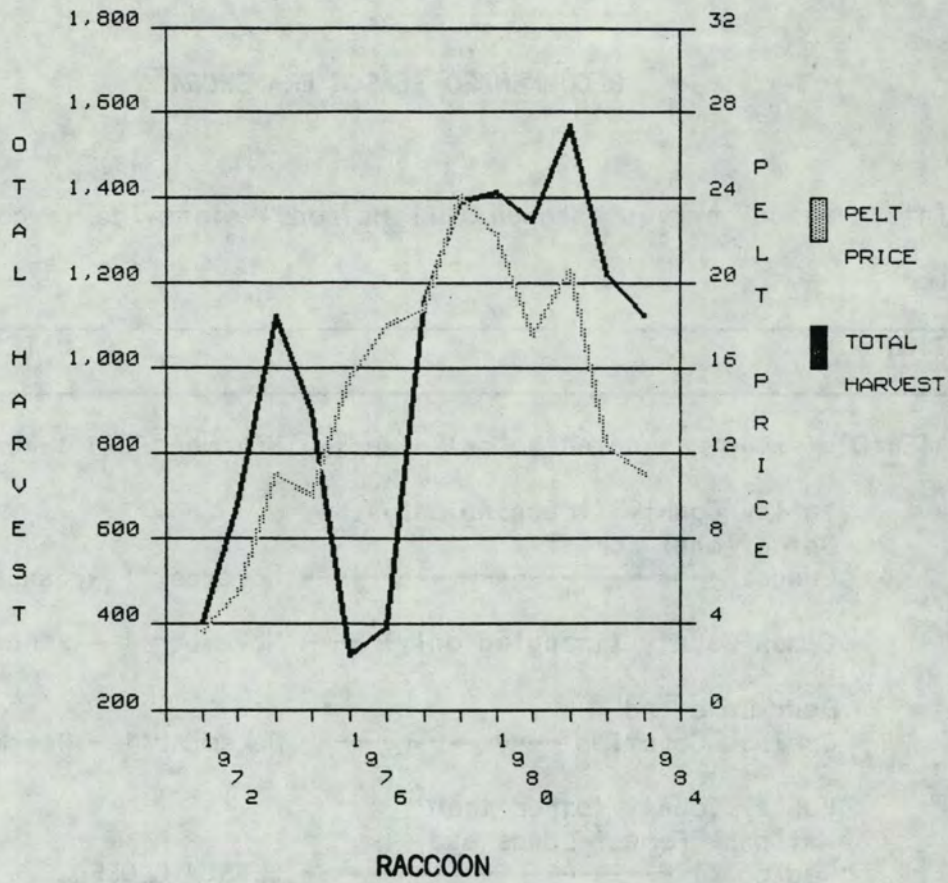
Maintain annual trapping seasons for red fox. Maintain opportunities for fur and incidental hunting. Handle red fox depredations on a complaint basis.



**RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK**

Maintain annual harvest season (all methods) statewide (except as noted below).

REGION	DATES
STATEWIDE (except as noted below)	----- November 1 - January 31
Valley County (trapping only): On National Forest Lands.	----- November 1 - January 31
Camas County (trapping only)	----- November 1 - January 31
Bear Lake and Caribou Counties	----- December 1 - December 31
Valley County (other than National Forest Lands and Region 4)	----- SEASON CLOSED



Raccoon contributed only two percent of the total value of the fur harvest. Pelts brought nearly \$13,000 to the Idaho trappers during the 1983-1984 harvest season, with just over 1,000 raccoons harvested (Fig. 7).

Raccoons occur throughout most of Idaho. Although raccoons are most abundant near waterways, they are very adaptable and commonly live within urban and suburban areas. Raccoons are omnivorous, which means that they eat a wide variety of foodstuffs, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains, insects, small mammals, birds, fish, carrion (such as highway-kills) and, near human habitations, garbage. Raccoons

typically range over less than one square mile. Males tend to be solitary, although females are usually accompanied by young. Breeding typically occurs in March, and the young (usually 3 or 4) are born in May. Young animals may remain with their mother until February or March of the year following their birth. Raccoons may live to 16 years of age in the wild, but few live past 3 or 4 years of age. Causes of mortality include malnutrition, disease, predation, and human-related losses.

Raccoons may cause depredations on gardens and small domestic livestock, and a number of "nuisance" problems (tipped-over garbage cans, etc.) where they live in close proximity to humans. Such depredations are not common and are usually confined to single individuals.

Trapping accounts for most of the raccoons harvested in Idaho each year, and probably provides more recreation days than does pursuit of raccoons by trailing hounds. Raccoons may be taken by use of hounds during the entire harvest season; in addition, a nonconsumptive, pursuit-only season is allowed from August 15 through October 31 statewide. Raccoons are the only Idaho fur-bearing animal that may be pursued by trailing hounds at night.

#### GOALS

Maintain annual trapping season. Maintain trailing hound harvest season and pursuit season. Attempt to minimize depredation problems.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

**ISSUE** - Raccoons may cause depredations to gardens and small domestic livestock, as well as "nuisance" problems, on private land.

**STRATEGY** - The Department will (1) handle complaints of raccoon depredation on an individual problem basis; (2) provide, on a loan-only basis, livetraps for capture of raccoons to private landowners experiencing problems in urban or suburban areas; and (3) provide information on methods for reduction or elimination of raccoon depredation problems.

**ISSUE** - Raccoons have been implicated as reservoirs of some diseases that may be transmitted to humans, pets, and domestic stock.

**STRATEGY** - Responsibility for monitoring threats to human health from all causes lies with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Department will cooperate with and assist this agency with regard to human health concerns relating to wildlife.

**ISSUE** - Use of trailing hounds, particularly at night, can lead to conflicts between hunters and private landowners.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) discourage the use of trailing hounds in or near urban/suburban areas; (2) require that written permission be obtained from the landowner or lessee to hunt on private property; and (3) require that all individuals using trailing hounds possess a "Hound Hunter Permit".

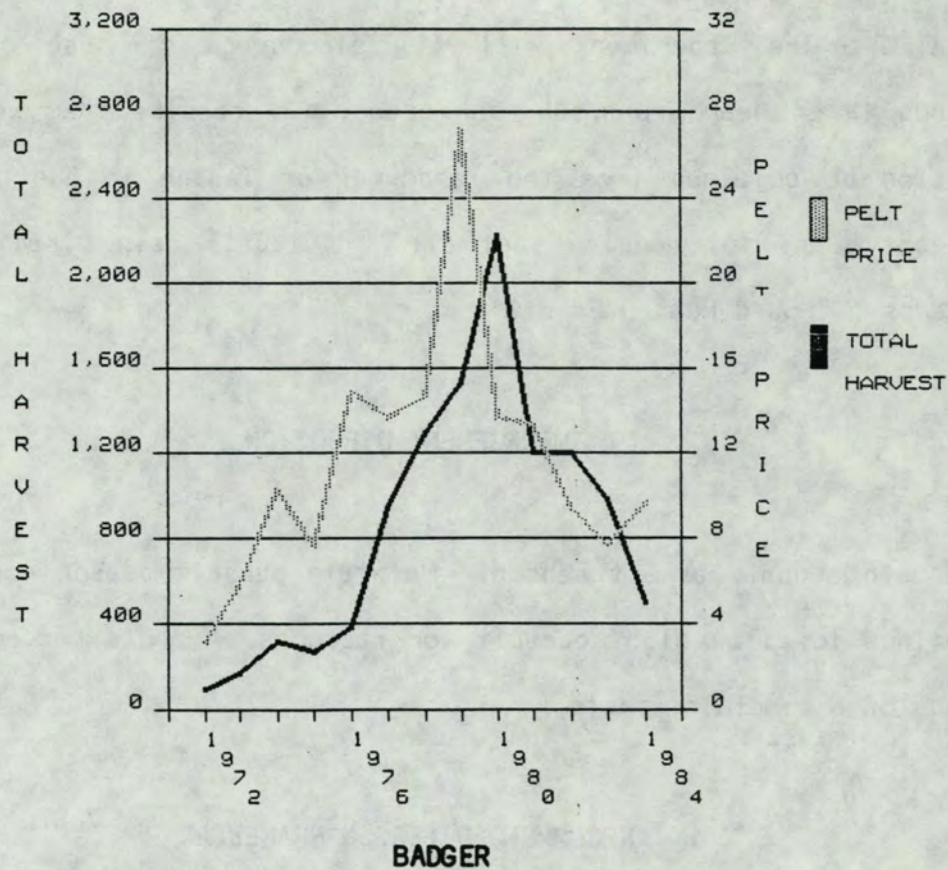
#### MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Maintain annual harvest season. Maintain pursuit season for raccoons. Continue to allow night pursuit for raccoons. Handle raccoon depredations on a complaint basis.

#### RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

Maintain annual trapping season (except as noted below).

REGION	DATES
STATEWIDE (except as noted below)	----- November 1 - March 31
Kootenai County	----- November 1 - January 31
Maintain annual pursuit season statewide.	----- August 15 - October 31



Badgers are currently classified as "Unprotected Wildlife" in Idaho, and although a number are harvested for their fur each year, they are not legally recognized as Idaho furbearers. The "Unprotected Wildlife" classification places the species under the jurisdiction of the Department, but does not allow regulation or timing of harvest.

Badgers occur in most of the state, but are most common south of a line connecting Lewiston on the west and Salmon on the east. Adapted for digging their prey from loose soil, they can cause severe damage to fields used for agriculture by their digging activity.

The Department has cooperated with the University of Idaho in several studies concerning badger ecology in the state. These studies have shown the badger to be largely nocturnal, feeding primarily on Townsend's ground squirrels, with other small mammals, insects and birds completing the diet. Home ranges generally included less than one square mile. Badgers are generally solitary, except for females accompanied by young. Young badgers (usually 2 or 3 per litter) are born in March and disperse from their mother in early summer (June and July). Badgers can live in the wild to an age of 14 years, but mortality among badgers is high with few living to be older than 3 years of age. Most of the mortality among badgers in Idaho (over 90%) is human-related: shooting, poisoning, trapping, and road-kills are common factors.

Of these mortality factors, harvest of badgers by trappers for their pelts has fluctuated from about 100 in 1972 to over 2,200 in 1980, primarily in response to market conditions (Fig. 8). Sales of badger pelts accounted for about 1% of the total value of Idaho's furbearer trade in 1983-84.

#### GOALS

Transfer the badger from "Unprotected Wildlife" to "Furbearer" status to allow better management for the species. Maintain badger populations in non-agricultural areas. Continue to allow landowners to protect property.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE - Badgers can cause damage to agricultural fields or other developments by their digging activity.

STRATEGY - The Department (1) recognizes that badger digging activity may result in complaints; (2) will continue to allow landowners and land managers to kill badgers at any time to protect property; and (3) will develop and implement a wildlife depredation plan.

ISSUE - Badgers may currently be taken by any means at any time throughout the state.

STRATEGY - Although the Department realizes that badgers can cause agricultural damage, badgers also provide significant benefits in some areas by helping to control ground squirrels and rodents. They also contribute to Idaho's economy as a furbearer, and have values in terms of nonconsumptive enjoyment by the public. Therefore, the Department will (1) seek to transfer the badger from "Unprotected Wildlife" to "Furbearer" status; (2) manage the badger as a furbearer resource; and (3) continue to monitor harvest of badgers by trappers.

## MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Manage the badger as an Idaho furbearer. Continue to monitor badger harvest by trappers.



## RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

Maintain a July 1 through June 30 open season for badgers within 1 mile of agricultural areas. Establish limited season closures in areas away from agricultural areas if evidence exists to indicate that badger populations are being over-exploited.

## PREDATORY WILDLIFE

Idaho's coyotes, skunks, weasels, and jack rabbits are defined as "Predatory Wildlife" in the Idaho code. The Department is not authorized to change classification of these wildlife species. However, five species in this group (coyote, spotted skunk, striped skunk, long-tailed weasel, and ermine) may be harvested for their fur, and records of such harvest are annually compiled by the Department along with furbearer records. For that reason, discussion of Department philosophy concerning management of these species is included here. (Discussion of jack rabbits is included in the Nongame Species Plan.)

Coyotes ranked second in importance among species harvested for their fur in the 1983-1984 fur harvest season in Idaho (Fig. 9). Found throughout Idaho, from desert to high mountain habitats and including urban and suburban areas, coyotes may range over an area that includes 50 square miles. They feed primarily on small mammals, birds, insects, and fruit, and on occasion cause depredations to livestock and crops. Following breeding in March, litters of 2 to 8 are born in May or June. Most natural mortality of coyotes is probably due to malnutrition, disease, accidents, and human-related activity. Coyotes are heavily trapped for their pelts, and many are killed each year to protect agricultural interests on public and private lands. In Idaho, there is also much interest in sport hunting of coyotes during the winter.

Two species of skunks, spotted skunks and striped skunks, occur in Idaho. Both are found nearly statewide (no spotted skunks occur in the northern Panhandle counties) although the striped skunk is commonly restricted to areas near agricultural development. Of the two species, the spotted skunk is more likely found in broken, brushy, and wooded habitats while the striped skunk is most abundant in agricultural and urban areas. Both species commonly feed on insects, small mammals, birds and bird eggs, and some fruit. Spotted skunks breed in September and produce young (usually 2 to 4 skunks per litter) the following May; striped skunks breed in February or March and also produce young (6 to 8 per litter) in May. Natural mortality among skunks is largely due to predation by raptors and malnutrition. The impact of trapper harvest on skunk populations is minimal. Skunks have been implicated as a potential reservoirs for several diseases transmittable to humans, and cause a number of "nuisance" problems near human habitations each year.

The two kinds of weasels found in Idaho, the long-tailed weasel and the ermine, are both found statewide. These species have small home ranges, and their primary diet is small rodents. Weasels breed in the fall and typically give birth to litters of 2 to 4 young in April. Weasels are preyed on by a number of other animals, and many die from malnutrition. The impact of trapping on weasel populations is minimal.

The Department has little management authority concerning these species under the Idaho Code. Control of coyote depredation problems is managed by the Animal Damage Control (ADC) Program of the USFWS.

## GOALS

Continue to monitor harvest of these species by trappers. Encourage the sport hunting of coyotes by Idaho sportsmen. Assist in efforts to minimize depredation problems associated with predatory wildlife.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

**ISSUE** - Predatory wildlife can cause depredations on public and private lands.

**STRATEGY** - Depredation problems associated with predatory wildlife will be referred to the ADC Program of the U.S. Department of Interior.

**ISSUE** - Compound 1080, a poison effective in coyote control efforts, is currently being evaluated for effects on other species of wildlife.

**STRATEGY** - The Department is concerned about accidental and secondary poisonings of other wildlife species with Compound 1080. Tests on the potentials for accidental and secondary poisoning are currently underway in Idaho, and results of such tests will be evaluated by the Department when available.

ISSUE - Predator control, directed primarily at coyote, is annually conducted on public and private lands in Idaho by the ADC Program administered by the USFWS. Predator control removes animals sought by trappers and hunters for sport and profit.

STRATEGY - Predator control should be directed at target animals, not at general population reduction. The Department will continue to work with the ADC Program and to utilize the expertise of ADC personnel to reduce problems associated with depredations on wildlife when necessary. The Department will discourage predator control in areas where depredation problems do not exist, and will encourage sport trapping and hunting of coyotes in these areas.

ISSUE - Skunks have been implicated as reservoirs for some diseases that may be transmitted to humans.

STRATEGY - Responsibility for monitoring threats to human health from all causes lies with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Department will cooperate with and assist this agency with regard to human health concerns relating to wildlife.

ISSUE - A variety of "nuisance" problems may be caused by skunks.

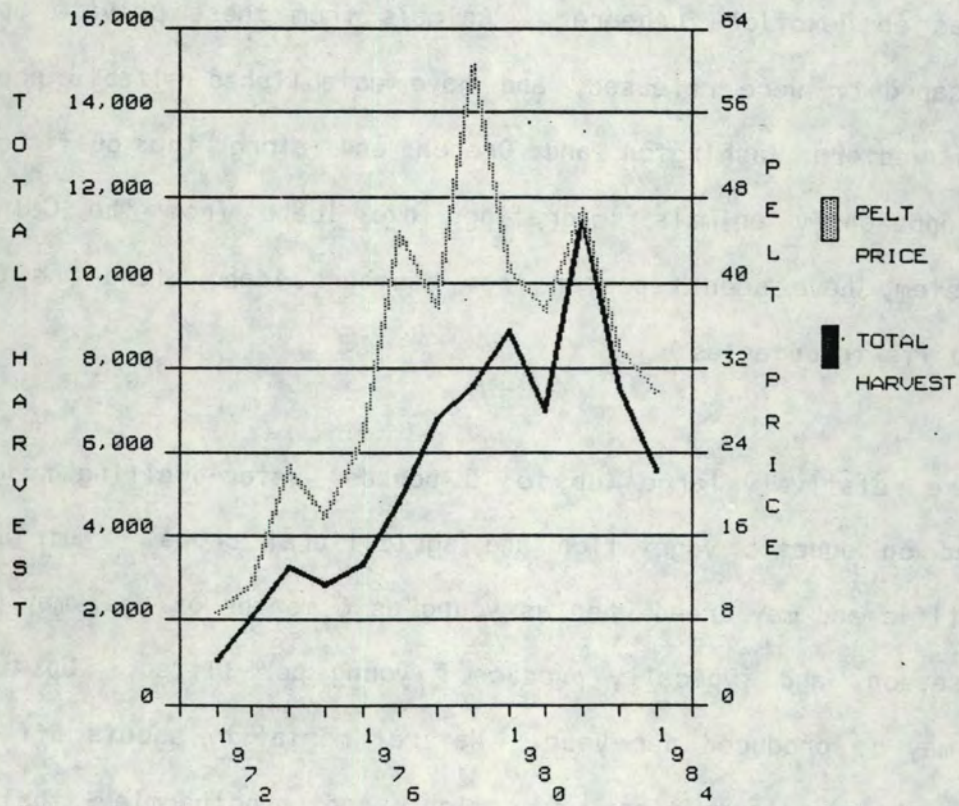
STRATEGY - The Department will provide, on a loan basis, livetraps for the capture of skunks to private individuals experiencing problems in urban or suburban areas.

## MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Continue to monitor harvest of these species by trappers. Encourage the sport hunting of coyotes by Idaho sportsmen.

## RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

These animals may be taken at any time.



Coyote harvest and average price received per pelt, 1972-1984.

## NUTRIA AND OPOSSUM

Nutria and opossum are non-native, unprotected nongame species that may have emigrated into portions of Idaho from Washington and Oregon. They are included here because they are harvested for fur, on at least a limited basis, in the adjoining states where they have become established. Neither is afforded any form of legal protection in Idaho. Both compete with native species for living space and food, and can cause a variety of problems.

Nutria were imported into North America from South America by private parties as an "exotic" furbearer. Animals from these private operations escaped or were released, and have established sizable populations in western Washington and Oregon and along the Gulf Coast. Nutria, apparently animals emigrating into Idaho from the Columbia River system, have been reported from southern Idaho along the Snake River and its tributaries.

Nutria are relatively large (up to 15 pounds) water-dwelling rodents. They feed on aquatic vegetation and agricultural crops. Nutria are very prolific and may breed when as young as 6 months of age, may breed at any season, and typically produce 5 young per litter. Up to two litters may be produced per year. Natural mortality agents affecting nutria include malnutrition, predation, and hypothermia - that is, freezing during severe winter weather.



Nutria consume large amounts of plant material and can cause severe depredations on farm crops and desirable aquatic vegetation. Nutria also construct burrows, which can damage to earthen dams and canals. Department policy will be to attempt to prevent establishment of nutria populations anywhere in the state, and to eradicate the animals wherever they occur in Idaho.

Opossums are native to midwestern and eastern North America. Like nutria, they have become widely established in western Washington, Oregon, and California. Opossums are omnivorous, eating a wide variety of foods, including fruit, vegetables, carrion, insects, and garbage. Like nutria, opossums are very prolific. Females may breed at 6 months of age and may produce 8 to 12 young per litter and two litters per year. Opossums may occupy almost all habitats from sea level to over 6,000 feet in elevation, including urban and suburban areas.

Opossums can cause depredations to crops and numerous "nuisance" problems. Department policy will be to prevent establishment of opossum populations in Idaho and to eradicate opossums wherever they occur within the state.

#### GOALS

Prevent establishment of nutria and/or opossum populations in Idaho.  
Eradicate nutria and opossum wherever they occur in Idaho.

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

ISSUE - Both nutria and opossum are non-native, unprotected nongame species capable of causing agricultural depredations and "nuisance" problems in Idaho.

STRATEGY - The Department will (1) eradicate both species wherever they occur in Idaho; (2) notify trappers of the potential damage these species can cause and solicit their assistance in eliminating these species; and (3) inform the general public of the potential damage these species may cause and solicit reports of occurrence of these animals in Idaho.

## MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Eradicate nutria and opossum wherever they occur in Idaho. Inform Idaho citizens of the potential for damage these species may cause.

## RECOMMENDED SEASON FRAMEWORK

As non-native, unprotected nongame wildlife, these animals may be taken at any time.

## DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS USED

Many failures to communicate via written word are caused by the writer and reader attaching different meanings to the same word or phrase. To lessen this problem, we provide the following definitions of acronyms, words or phrases used in this plan.

### DEFINITIONS:

The Commission - The Idaho Fish and Game Commission, a five-member body appointed by the Governor of Idaho to set policy for and oversee the functioning of the Department.

Controlled Season - Any season in which only those who have drawn a permit can participate; i.e., one form of a limited entry season.

Demand (Hunter Days) - Refers to effort and, specifically, is the number of man-days which we predict will be spent hunting or trapping.

The Department - The Idaho Department of Fish and Game in its entirety.

Depredation - Any situation in which wildlife is damaging, economically or physically, man's interests or property.

Furbearer - A general term which refers to all mammals whose pelts are used in the commercial fur trade.

Fur-bearing Animal - A legal classification applied by the Commission under Title 36, Idaho Code, to ten of Idaho's furbearers: the beaver, bobcat, fisher, red fox, lynx, marten, mink, muskrat, otter and raccoon.

General Season - Any season open to all those who hold valid hunting or trapping licenses; i.e., there are no restrictions on the number who can participate.

Habitat - All components of a population's environment which provide for the animals' basic life-support needs of food, water, shelter and security.

Harvest - The number of individual animals we estimate have been or will be reduced to possession.

Nonconsumptive Use - Any use of wildlife which does not involve taking of that wildlife.

Population - Preseason numbers and is, specifically, our estimate of the number of individuals of a species within the stated area.

Population Dynamics - The causes, effects and specifics of changes in numbers, structure and distribution of a species over time. The following population attributes or processes are included: sex and age composition, birth and death rates, movements to and from the population, trend in numbers and/or density, geographic distribution.

Predatory Wildlife - A legal classification applied by the Idaho Legislature, under Title 36, Idaho Code, to five of Idaho's fur-bearers; the coyote, striped and spotted skunks, long-tailed weasels, and ermine. The Legislature granted the commission the authority to classify all wildlife except "predatory wildlife". The Commission has established the following eight classifications: game animals, game birds, game fish, fur-bearing animals, migratory birds, threatened or endangered wildlife, protected non-game species, and unprotected wildlife.

Issues - Factors which will interfere with or prevent achievement or measurement of specific management goals or objectives.

A Product - Any benefit, either physical or non-physical, which people derive from wildlife.

Strategies - The actions or adjustments the Department or others will have to make to circumvent problems.

Protected Nongame Species - Legal classification applied by the Commission under Title 36, Idaho Code, to three of Idaho's fur-bearers; the kit fox, red squirrel and wolverine.

Pursuit Season - Any season during which game animals may be pursued with trailing dogs but may not be killed.

A Region - The geographic subdivision of Idaho administered from an outlying office of the Department.

Riparian - Vegetation adjacent to a body of water such as a stream, river or lake.

Threatened or Endangered Wildlife - A legal classification applied by the Commission under Title 36, Idaho Code, to one of Idaho's fur-bearers; the wolf.

Unprotected Wildlife - A legal classification applied by the Commission under Title 36, Idaho Code, to all wildlife in Idaho that is not specifically classified as fur-bearing animals, game animals, game birds, migratory birds, predatory wildlife, protected nongame species, or threatened or endangered wildlife. The badger is the only furbearer in Idaho that is classified as unprotected wildlife.

Wildlife - A broad term which refers to all wild animals in Idaho.

ACRONYMS USED:

- ADC - Animal Damage Control Program, administered by the USFWS.
- BLM - Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior.
- CAP - Citizens Against Poaching.
- INEL - Idaho Nuclear Engineering Laboratory.
- USFS - Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- USFWS - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Interior.
- WMA - Wildlife Management Area, property owned by the Department which is managed specifically to provide wildlife habitat.

