

**MIDWEST FURBEARER GROUP**  
**Annual Report**  
**May 2024**

**MEETING TIME AND PLACE**

The 2024 Midwest Furbearer Workshop was held jointly with the Northeast and Southeast Furbearer Groups, as well as some western biologists on May 20-23, 2024, in Louisville, Kentucky.

**ATTENDANCE**

There were 58 in-person attendees for the 2024 meeting including furbearer biologists from 12 Midwest member states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and Wisconsin). All states represented at the meeting included: AL, AR, CT, DE, FL, GA, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, NC, ND, NE, NH, NJ, NV, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, VA, VT, WI, WV as well as representatives from USFWS, AFWA and National Trappers Association. Contact information for all Midwest furbearer biologists can be found in Appendix 1. Attendees also included university researchers, and students. The meeting agenda, including a complete list of presentations and presenters, can be found in Appendix 2.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Midwest Furbearer Workshop provides a valuable opportunity for state furbearer biologists to exchange information and ideas related to furbearer management and research. Participants benefit greatly from the experiences of their peers and from the combined efforts of the group and can often apply subjects from this meeting to their duties in their home state, greatly enhancing their efficiency and effectiveness as a furbearer biologist or researcher.

The 2024 workshop included 24 presentations related to furbearer and carnivore management. State reports were given, and a variety of additional subjects were discussed during the business meetings. In addition to the formal meeting, the group engaged in discussions and exchanged ideas on a variety of subjects informally during the evening hours. In sum, this workshop provides an excellent venue for discussing new ideas, management challenges, research projects, and generally gathering broad expertise on furbearer-related issues affecting multiple states.

The working group had no Director Action Items for discussion but did have several Information Items which were discussed at the business meeting.

## **DIRECTOR ACTION ITEMS**

None

## **DIRECTOR INFORMATION ITEMS**

1. Support for BMPs – The group continues to support the AFWA Best Management Practices for Trapping program. Additional research on trapping devices and techniques as well as the continued development and delivery of trapping outreach and education is needed for our agencies to maintain the highest standards of furbearer management and the informed consent of the public to sustain agency-regulated trapping activities.
2. Spotted Skunk ESA Review – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) completed their review and did not list spotted skunks.
3. Large Carnivore Status – As instructed by the Directors, an annual update of large carnivore status within individual Midwest states is provided in Appendix 3.
4. Cooperation with Public Engagement and Education Staff – The AFWA Furbearer Conservation Technical Work Group (FCTWG) has developed an outreach plan for maintaining and even improving public support for trapping. The use of science-based “key messages” in media typically distributed through agency public engagement and education efforts are a significant part of this plan – the ultimate goal of which is to maintain regulated trapping as a legal furbearer management technique. However, issues in furbearer management may not always rank very high for public engagement and education staff. We would appreciate the support of directors in incorporating these key messages and, more generally, topics in furbearer management, into the plans of agency public engagement and education staff, especially in a proactive manner whenever possible.
5. Beavers and Beaver Management – There’s been an increase in the number of issues related to beavers and their management. There are more questions being asked by the public and/or interest groups about ways to trap and transplant (translocate) beavers into areas for water conservation or water quality projects in the Midwest like some projects done for water conservation in some Western States. In the meantime, the usual issues continue to arise with beaver conflict. So, furbearer biologists and other staff in the Midwest are fielding inquiries related to interest in getting more beavers in certain areas, and less beavers in other areas. This is a complex topic and often takes significant staff time to discuss with folks. Our group agreed there may be a need for coordinated messaging and outreach on this topic both at the Midwest level regionally, and internally within our own departments as these questions are likely to continue to increase.

6. Muskrat Health – Some Midwest states (OH, KS, NE, OK, IN, MO, and IA) are cooperating in the AFWA funded multi-state muskrat health project funded through a multi-state conservation grant. Participating states collected muskrats, with samples being sent to the Southeast Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS) lab where they will be tested for exposure to various diseases and toxicants. Muskrats are vital to wetland and ecosystem health, as well as being important to the fur trade and licensed trappers and both published and anecdotal information continues to suggest muskrat populations have declined (notably in some areas) compared to historic levels. This project is the first large-scale health assessment of this species. The group appreciates continued support in cooperating on research on this important furbearer and encourages states to explicitly consider muskrat habitat concerns and needs in broader wetland wildlife management activities and planning.
7. Predation Management – Many of the Directors are aware of the concerns (real or perceived) over declines in some game populations (e.g., deer, turkey, upland birds, etc.). This has led to a discussion, or in some cases pressure, for various forms of enhanced furbearer harvest or “predator control.” It is true that harvest of some predatory furbearers like raccoon have declined substantially in many states, and that the incentive for a portion of current furbearer harvest has more to do with predator or damage control than traditional acquisition of fur. To the Directors, we would like to emphasize the importance of maintaining support for science-based decisions about management of furbearers even in the face of pressures from either direction related to predator control. We also want to note the potential for a lot of new, non-traditional furharvesters motivated by damage prevention and control rather than fur, to be recruited into the field. With these new furharvesters and their different motives comes an increased potential for conflict and non-compliance due to inexperience, as well as public concerns about wanton waste or harvest seasons that may overlap reproductive seasons. As such, it is imperative for states to maintain effective trapper or furharvester education programs and carefully consider messaging related to wanton waste or timing of harvest seasons. We do support this new recruitment opportunity, but also recognize some challenges could come along with it.
8. Issues on Horizon – Many states are concerned about gray fox populations and several states have started research on gray foxes (IA, IL, IN, MO, OH) to try to understand declines. Urban coyotes are seeing increasing visibility, concerns, and conflicts, and corresponding expansion in studies on urban canid ecology. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s BIDEH policy, or biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health, has been of concern to the group as it may limit trapping opportunity or its use as a management tool. We are watching as edits to this policy are made as it could have impacts on habitat management and furbearers.

The group thanks state Directors for their continued support of travel for state furbearer biologists to the annual Midwest Furbearer Workshop. The annual workshop continues to be a critical component of sound resource management in the Midwest. Annual meetings allow for an open, thorough exchange of information and knowledge resulting in efficient, effective, and sound management of these unique species.

**TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING**

The 2025 workshop will be hosted in South Dakota. An exact time and location are yet to be determined. A complete list of previous host states is available in Appendix 4.

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## **APPENDIX 1. Midwest Furbearer Biologists – contact information.**

### **Illinois**

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**South Dakota**

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## Appendix 2. Agenda for the 2024 Midwest Furbearer Workshop.



### 2024 National Furbearer Joint Workshop

May 20 - 23, 2024

Louisville, KY

Hotel: Residence Inn by Marriott Downtown Louisville  
333 E Market St, Louisville, KY 40202

Agenda  
(subject to change)

#### **Monday, May 20<sup>th</sup> (Travel Day)**

Arrival and check-in at hotel

6:00 - 8:00 pm Registration (meeting room on ground floor of hotel) and evening social.

#### **Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>**

6:30 - 8:00 Breakfast (complimentary at hotel or on your own)

8:30 - 8:40 Welcome from Deputy Commissioner Brian Clark, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources

8:40 - 9:00 Wildlife Restoration Program and Funding Opportunities, Tom Decker, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

9:00 - 9:20 BMP Trap Research Updates, Matt Peek, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

9:20 - 9:50 AFWA Best Management Practices for Trapping Program and Outreach Resources for Trapping, Bryant White, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

9:50 - 10:20 Break

10:20 - 10:40 ETHICS SD Trapper Education Program, Jacquie Ermer, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (virtual)

10:40 - 11:00 CITES Program and Tagging Overview, Mark Hofberg & Monica Horton, USFWS

11:00 - 11:20 Renewing River Otter Export Authority. What Data is Needed and How You Can Help. Dr. Nathan Roberts, College of the Ozarks, Missouri

11:20 - 11:40 National Furbearer Monitoring Survey: Comparing Past and Present Methods, Dr. Rem Moll & Andrew Butler, University of New Hampshire

11:40 - 12:00 Tracking Harvest: Updating North Dakota's Furbearer Survey Strategy for Tomorrow, Chad Parent, North Dakota Game and Fish Department

12:00 - 1:00 Lunch



- 1:00 - 1:20 Of Muskrats and Men: Can Paddlers Help Us with an Index for Furbearers, Geriann Albers, Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- 1:20 - 1:40 Discussion: Trapper Surveying Techniques & Other Topics from Morning Session
- 1:40 - 2:10 History and Overview of the Agreed Minute, Gordon Batcheller, Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (virtual)
- 2:10 - 2:30 Break
- 2:30 - 2:45 Southeast Furbearer Working Group Introductions and Update
- 2:45 - 3:00 Midwest Furbearer Working Group Introductions and Update
- 3:00 - 3:15 Northeast Furbearer Working Group Introductions and Update
- 3:15 - 3:30 Western Introductions and Update (virtual)
- 3:30 - 3:50 Frequent Prescribed Burns Reduce Mammalian Species Richness and Occurrence in Longleaf Pine Sandhills, Dr. Wesley Boone, Clemson University (virtual)
- 3:50 - 4:30 Discussion: Predator Hunting Contests, Introduced by Geriann Albers, Indiana Department of Natural Resources - Meso-carnivores and Game Issues - AFWA document
- 4:30 Adjourn
- 5:30 - 7:00 Dinner (reservations at La Bodequita De Mima or Feast BBQ)
- 7:00 - 9:00 Evening Social and Discussions

**Wednesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>**

- 6:30 - 8:00 Breakfast (complimentary at hotel or on your own)
- 8:30 - 8:50 Meso-carnivore Camera Study to Monitor Marten and Fisher Populations, Shevenell Webb, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- 8:50 - 9:10 Strengths and Limitations of Large-scale Camera Surveys for Management: Insights from New York, Mandy Watson, New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation
- 9:10 - 9:40 Evaluation of Camera Trapping Methods for Tracking Trends in Mesopredator Species, Jenna Myers, University of Georgia
- 9:40 - 10:00 What's New with Weasels? Collaborative Actions by the North American Weasel Working Group, Dr. David Jachowski, Clemson University
- 10:00 - 10:20 Break
- 10:20 - 10:40 How Illinois DNR Uses Satellite-collar-fitted Coyotes to Engage Teachers and Students, Jon Marshall, DJ Case & Associates (virtual)

- 10:40 - 11:00 Anticoagulant Rodenticide Exposure in Wild Mammalian Carnivores – an Underappreciated Threat to North American Furbearers, Meghan Keating, Clemson University
- 11:00 - 11:30 Furbearer Disease Research Updates, Dr. Justin Brown, Penn State (virtual)
- 11:30 - 12:00 Furbearer Disease Research Updates, Dr. Chris Cleveland, Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (virtual)
- 12:00 - 1:00 Lunch
- 1:00 - 1:25 Illinois Residents' Opinions of Furbearer Hunting and Trapping, Rachel Menale, DJ Case & Associates
- 1:25 - 1:40 We Reintroduced Them, Now What? Assessing the Impact of River Otter Reintroductions and Contemporary Conservation Needs Across Appalachia, USA, Eden Nitza, West Virginia University
- 1:40 - 1:55 Understanding River Otter Survival and Spatial Ecology in West Virginia. Laurel Glover, West Virginia University
- 1:55 - 2:10 Status of Gray Fox in Eastern North America, Nate Bowersock, Missouri Department of Conservation
- 2:10 Adjourn - meet back in lobby at your assigned time to depart for field trip - short walk next door.
- 2:45 - 5:00 Field Trip - Further Discussions - Networking
- 5:30 - 7:00 Dinner (reservations at West Sixth Nulu)
- 7:00 - 9:00 Evening Social and Networking

**Thursday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>**

- 6:30 - 8:00 Breakfast (complimentary at hotel or on your own)
- 8:30 - 9:00 Overview and Discussion of NE Harvest Database System, Tom Keller, Pennsylvania Game Commission
- 9:00 - 10:00 Open Discussion: Beaver conflict management, Impacts of Otter on Game Fish, Climate Change, New Technology, etc.
- 10:00 - 12:00 Regional Working Group Business Meetings
- 12:00 pm Adjourn and Safe Travels!

**Appendix 3. Large carnivore status in Midwest states.**

**MOUNTAIN LIONS**

	<b>Protected (Y/N)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Estimated population</b>	<b>Harvest (Y/N/NA)<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Recent changes in distribution</b>
<b>Illinois</b>	Y	No breeding population	NA	Rare visitor
<b>Indiana</b>	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
<b>Iowa</b>	N	<5	NA	Occasional visitor
<b>Kansas</b>	Y	0	NA	None, occasional dispersers
<b>Kentucky</b>	Y	0	NA	
<b>Michigan</b>	Y	No breeding population	NA	A few transients each year, >100 confirmed sightings since 2008. All but 1 in Upper Peninsula.
<b>Minnesota</b>	Y	No breeding population	NA	Decline in transients apparent from 2014 – 2017 compared to 2010 – 2013, and then recent uptick in confirmations from 2018 - 2024.
<b>Missouri</b>	Y	No breeding population	NA	Several transients confirmed each year; 120 confirmations since 1994
<b>Nebraska</b>	Y	No statewide estimate; Pine Ridge: 70 estimated Niobrara: 27 detected Wildcat Hills: 24 detected	Y	3 populations formed since mid-2000s
<b>North Dakota</b>	Y	None available	Y	No
<b>Ohio</b>	N	0	NA	
<b>South Dakota</b>	Y	Approximately 260 in Black Hills, no statewide estimate	Y	No
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Y	No breeding population	NA	Rare transients; Average ~15 verified per year since 2017.

<sup>1</sup>Yes indicates the species is protected by state or provincial laws (e.g. listed as a game animal with an open or closed season).

<sup>2</sup>NA indicates the question is not applicable because no known breeding populations exist with the state or province.

## BLACK BEARS

	Protected (Y/N) <sup>1</sup>	Estimated population	Harvest (Y/N/NA) <sup>2</sup>	Recent changes in distribution
<b>Illinois</b>	Y	No breeding population	NA	Occasional visitor
<b>Indiana</b>	Y	0	N	Occasional visitor
<b>Iowa</b>	N	<5	NA	Occasional visitor
<b>Kansas</b>	Y	0	NA	None, occasional dispersers
<b>Kentucky</b>	Y	800-1,000 in core area	Y	Expanding population
<b>Michigan</b>	Y	~12,250	Y	Stable population in Upper Peninsula (80% of MI bear population), expanding population in Lower Peninsula
<b>Minnesota</b>	Y	13,000-17,000	Y	Population peak in 2001 with ~25,000; bottomed out in 2012 with 10,000; slow increase the last 8-10 years
<b>Missouri</b>	Y	~1,000	Y	Growing and expanding population; First bear hunting season held in October 2021.
<b>Nebraska</b>	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
<b>North Dakota</b>	Y	No breeding population	N	Regular visitor, with some individual bears overwintering
<b>Ohio</b>	Y	5-10	N	50-100 transients confirmed each year (increasing trend); <5 confirmed reproducing females
<b>South Dakota</b>	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Y	~25,000	Y	Stable population across northern Wisconsin, expanding southward

<sup>1</sup>Yes indicates the species is protected by state or provincial laws (e.g. listed as a game animal with an open or closed season).

<sup>2</sup>NA indicates the question is not applicable because no known breeding populations exist with the state or province.

## WOLVES

	Protected (Y/N) <sup>1</sup>	Estimated population	Harvest (Y/N/NA) <sup>2</sup>	Recent changes in distribution
<b>Illinois</b>	Y	No breeding population	NA	Rare visitor
<b>Indiana</b>	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
<b>Iowa</b>	Y	<5	NA	Occasional visitor
<b>Kansas</b>	Y	0	NA	None, have only confirmed 2
<b>Kentucky</b>	Y	0	NA	N/A
<b>Michigan</b>	Y	631 ± 49 (in winter 2021-22)	N	Upper Peninsula fully occupied. Minimum population estimate, new estimate complete soon.
<b>Minnesota</b>	Y	~2900 (in winter 2022-23)	N	Slight expansion, most suitable habitat occupied
<b>Missouri</b>	Y	0	NA	Occasional visitor, 7 confirmations since 2001
<b>Nebraska</b>	Y	0	NA	Rare visitor
<b>North Dakota</b>	Y	0	NA	Occasional visitor
<b>Ohio</b>	N	0	NA	
<b>South Dakota</b>	Y	0	NA	Rare occurrence
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Y	~972 (95% C.I. 812-1,193; overwinter 2021-22)	Y	Distribution stable, most suitable habitat likely occupied

<sup>1</sup>Yes indicates the species is protected by state or provincial laws (e.g. listed as a game animal with an open or closed season).

<sup>2</sup>NA indicates the question is not applicable because no known breeding populations exist with the state or province.

**Appendix 4. Host states for Midwest Furbearer Workshops, 1979-2024.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>State</b>
1979	Kansas	2017	Iowa
1983	Wisconsin	2018	North Dakota
1984	Illinois	2019	Oklahoma
1985	Iowa	2020	Michigan (virtual business meeting)
1987	Minnesota	2021	Michigan (virtual)
1988	Indiana	2022	Nebraska
1989	Missouri	2023	Kansas
1990	Nebraska	2024	Kentucky
1991	South Dakota		
1992	Ohio		
1993	Oklahoma		
1994	North Dakota		
1995	West Virginia		
1996	Michigan		
1997	Illinois		
1998	Kansas		
1999	Wisconsin		
2000	Missouri		
2001	Ohio		
2002	Iowa		
2003	Minnesota		
2004	Illinois		
2005	North Dakota		
2006	Michigan		
2007	Nebraska		
2008	Kansas		
2009	Kentucky		
2010	South Dakota		
2011	Wisconsin		
2012	Missouri		
2013	Illinois		
2014	Ohio		
2015	Indiana		
2016	Minnesota		