

Division of Wildlife
Ohio Department of Natural Resources

25 April 2016

2015-2016 OTTER HARVEST SEASON IN OHIO

Although once common in Ohio, river otter populations were severely reduced during the mid-1800s due to habitat loss and unregulated trapping. The Division of Wildlife undertook a reintroduction effort and released 47 pregnant females and 76 males in eastern Ohio from 1986-1993. River otters for this restoration program were trapped in Arkansas and Louisiana and released at 4 eastern Ohio locations: Grand River (Trumbull County), Killbuck Creek (Wayne and Holmes counties), Stillwater Creek (Harrison County), and Little Muskingum River (Washington County).

As a result of this restoration effort, Ohio's river otter population increased rapidly in size and distribution. By 2002, a population of approximately 2,100 otters had been established in at least 52 watersheds encompassing 52 counties, and the species was removed from Ohio's list of Endangered Species. Currently, river otters have been observed and reported in at least 69 watersheds encompassing 67 counties, with scattered observations of single river otters in western Ohio watersheds. Anecdotal reports suggest river otter populations may be increasing in western Ohio. Bridge surveys were expanded statewide in 2016 to better document population trends.

The first modern-day trapping season for river otters occurred in 2005-2006. Thirty-one counties in eastern Ohio were open to trapping with a bag limit of 3 (Zone C; Table 1), and an additional 12 counties with a 1-otter limit (Zone B; Table 2) served as a buffer area within the otter's known range in Ohio. A total of 225 otters were taken from 17 counties during the inaugural season. In 2006-2007, harvest fell, likely in response to a dramatic drop in otter pelt prices (Fig. 1).

During the 2015-2016 harvest, 137 river otters were taken from 21 counties, an increase from the 91 river otters taken from 17 counties during the previous season. Similar to previous years, however, otters were primarily taken from areas near the original release site watersheds, where density is presumably greatest (Table 1).

The number of otters taken in the 1-bag limit buffer zone (Zone B) continues to be low; 3 of the 137 harvested otters was taken in the buffer zone during 2015-2016 (Table 2). Last year's harvest was relatively high considering the drop in pelt prices (Fig. 1). Pelt prices, as well as catch per unit effort based on information from the trapper survey will allow the Division to track the effects of the market and other factors on river otter harvest in upcoming years.

Thanks go out to Division staff that checked in and tagged otters during the 2015-16 season.

Table 1. River otter harvest in Ohio by county and season in Zone C, 2005-2006 through 2015-2016.

County	Trapping Season											TOTALS
	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	
Ashtabula	33	18	18	12	7	13	22	21	13	14	11	182
Athens	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Belmont	4	5	4	2	5	1	7	1	1	1	8	39
Carroll	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Columbiana	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	4
Coshocton	0	1	4	3	1	3	3	6	7	6	8	42
Gallia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Geauga	19	10	6	8	8	11	11	18	14	7	11	123
Guernsey	3	3	3	1	9	6	3	6	7	5	4	50
Harrison	12	11	5	3	4	5	7	8	6	3	11	75
Hocking	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Holmes	11	7	5	10	5	6	3	6	4	2	5	64
Jackson	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Jefferson	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lake	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	4
Lawrence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mahoning	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	5	1	0	0	11
Meigs	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Monroe	17	7	3	6	10	10	9	10	4	7	7	90
Morgan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
Muskingum	5	2	2	2	1	7	11	9	4	7	6	56
Noble	5	7	5	6	10	8	11	4	8	7	6	77
Perry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portage	9	8	11	9	5	9	14	8	16	4	12	105
Scioto	5	1	2	2	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	15
Stark	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trumbull	66	39	23	25	23	22	57	30	33	15	31	364
Tuscarawas	10	6	0	3	0	11	6	3	4	2	4	49
Vinton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Washington	0	0	1	0	0	1	7	3	3	8	3	26
Wayne	23	7	12	6	11	8	15	15	5	1	1	104
Unknown	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
TOTALS	224	136	104	98	107	122	194	153	133	90	134	1495

Table 2. River otter harvest in Ohio by county and season in Zone B, 2005-2006 through 2015-2016.

County	Trapping Season											TOTALS
	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	
Adams	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	4
Ashland	1	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	3	0	0	10
Delaware	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fairfield	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Franklin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Knox	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Licking	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	5
Morrow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pickaway	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Pike	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Richland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ross	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	4
TOTALS	1	1	2	3	2	4	3	3	4	1	3	27

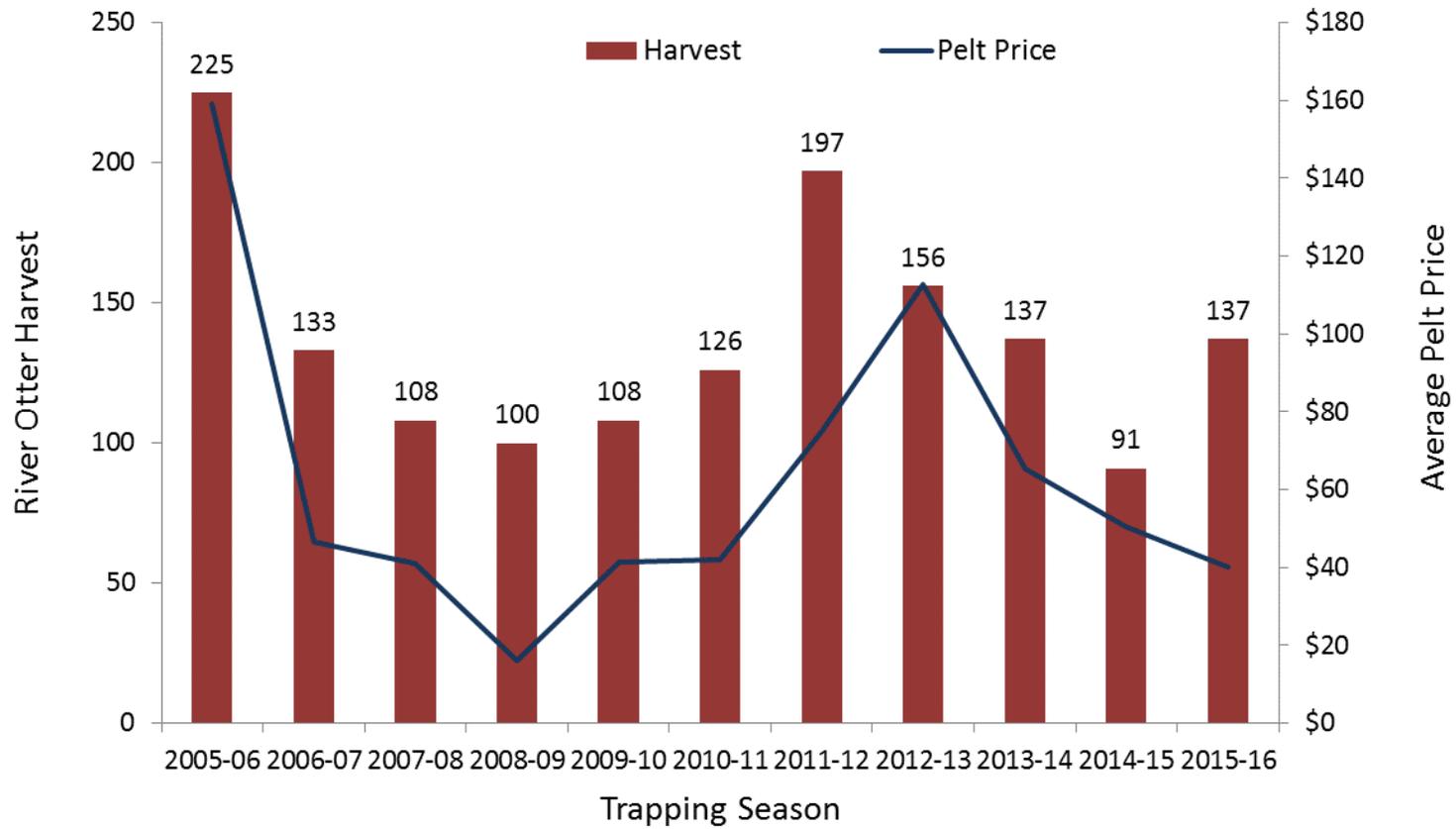


Fig. 1. River otter harvest in Ohio by year in comparison with average pelt price, 2005-06 through 2015-16.