

MONTANA FUR HARVESTERS

JULY 2023
SUMMER issue

**MOVE OVER
EVERYONE
I'M COMING
BACK!**



Getting kids involved
Grizzly Delisting?

President's Message

Nothing like a Friendly Skunk

Meet our Members

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Cover Photo, Grizzly Bear

Below: Fuzzy and warm,
nothing like a close encounter to
high lite the day! Check out Scott's
article on page 14.



Look for us at the Fair



Notes from the president.

Summer in Northwest Montana.

Summer is here and the weather has been good for us. Rain has greened up the landscape, lots of new fawns all over the valley, antlers are already a foot tall, spent some quality time with our family and looking forward to fall hunting and trapping seasons.

Hard to believe that it's time to put together the summer issue of this magazine. Time has just been flying by, so many obligations to one group or another. I may need to resign and go back to work just to get some time off. I still need to get my traps treated and ready to go back into containers.

June and July months should be a chance to catch up and enjoy the weather. Not so, many of us were busy with all the banquets, fur shows at various events and meetings around the state. Speaking of banquets, **The Rockin WK Banquet** this spring was another good fund-raising event. Tim Viano did a good job of putting it on at the Expo Building at the Flathead Fair Grounds. Between the **F4WM** and the Rockin WK events we helped raise a lot of funds to reimburse sportsmen for legally harvested wolves. Be sure to update your memberships before the wolf season starts.

Our **Spring Trapper Meeting** with FWP went well and was well attended. Biologists from R1 and R2 both felt that very little changes were needed so we shouldn't see much. However, be sure to read Ed Hebbe IV notice on the upcoming Commission Meeting in August on the following pages. Also, Josh Jurek, Region 1 Director for the MTA did a great job of recapping the R1 Meeting. See page 7. Josh has been doing a good job as our new director and continues to donate his artwork to raise funds for sportsmen. R2 Director, Bruce Hover stepped down and Guy Kempthorne has been selected to take over in R2. Thanks, Bruce, for all your past work and looking forward to working with Guy in the future.

Trapper Ed Classes taking place this summer. We held an R1 Class on June 3rd at the FWP Office in Kalispell. Information Officer, Dillon Tabish had everything lined up and ready for us when we arrived that morning. We had nine

instructors that did an awesome job at each station. Around 30 students were certified at the end of the day. On July 8th we will be in Missoula putting on another class for R2 at the FWP office. These are long days, instructors show up at 6:30, students at 7:30, class starts at 8:00am. Students leave at 5:00 and Instructors leave at 6:00pm. Great Falls has a class scheduled on July 22nd for anyone that still needs to get certified. We have some good instructors that have taught multiple classes. We are still looking for additional trappers that would be interested in becoming an instructor to contact Wayne Cooperider at FWP or myself and we can get you started. I plan on offering another class in September or October if we get enough requests.

Larry Rattray, Dan Thingelstad, Scott Smith and I attended a two-day **Rendezvous in St Maries Idaho**. We set up our fur booth and got to meet a lot of new friends and see many familiar faces. Building strong support with other states is important and productive. Always good to get out in front of the public. Another upcoming event will be a **F4WM** event in **Coeur d'Alene Idaho**. The First Annual **Wolfer Summit** will be held on July 14-16. I am hoping that we can get a few volunteers to help man our booth so if interested let us know soon. August 5th will be the 11th **Annual Big Sky Youth Event** in Billings. **Flathead County Fair** will be on August 16-20th. Brad James has volunteered to work at the booth all week and will surely need more help. This is the biggest crowd we typically see each year, from three to four thousand visitors are counted attending the booth. Not unusual to have twenty people lined up to get through the tour. August 25-27 will be the **Montana Trappers Association Rendezvous** held in Livingston Mt. The fall **Kalispell Gun Show** is another busy one for us and normally the final one for the year. It will be held at the Majestic Arena on September 6-10th.



Wolf harvest.

Just when I thought that we could relax for a while on changes to trapping regulations, dang, here we go again. For some reason the



Commission is planning on reducing the harvest quota on wolves statewide. Reducing the harvest quota to last year's harvest, even though we never met any of the set quotas. Seems that panic set in because the estimated population dropped by 44 animals from the year before at 1,143 in 2021. The intent of the legislature was to increase the harvest of wolves to help reduce the population. Make sure to follow this and get your comments sent in soon. More on this later.

The estimated wolf population for 2022 was 1,087 wolves. This is down 44 wolves from 1,143 in 2021. The number of wolf packs was 181, down 10 packs from 2021. The total wolf harvest for the spring and fall of calendar year 2022 was 248. FWP website lists 258 harvested in 2023. I myself have not seen a reduction of wolves in our trapping area. Some pack sizes are smaller, but we still have three packs that average over 10 each. I do not want to see quotas reduced in R1 or R2.

Grizzly bear delisting is a hot topic right now. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is in the process of delisting the bears and the antis are doing everything possible to stop it. We as sportsmen are dedicated to scientific wildlife management and have known for years that populations of these bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem have exceeded recovery goals. In December 2021, Gov. Gianforte petitioned the federal government to

delist the grizzly bear in the NCDE. The petition outlined that NCDE grizzly bears are within a distinct population, have far surpassed population recovery goals, and that Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has the structure in place to successfully take over full management of this iconic native species. Stay tuned for more information.

Here in The Mission Valley, virtually every square mile has grizzly bear activity or is occupied. People have bears passing through all the time. Trail cameras capture photos that go unnoticed that people are unaware of.

The other day I was on the phone with a father who said hold on. After a long silence he came back and said that he saw through the window, a big grizzly walking across his yard with his kids outside. He brought the kids inside to safety. It was the third time in a few weeks that several other bears, including a sow with two cubs, had been in the neighborhood.

This was at 3pm in a subdivision within a quarter mile of town. This is not uncommon, almost all the time the bears have few encounters, but they will and do happen. Can you imagine what would happen if a child playing in the yard ran around the corner into a cub. As fall comes, kids are walking to school bus stops at early dawn low light conditions when foraging hungry bears are most likely to be out.

There are probably more bears outside of the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zones now than inside. That area was what was once considered suitable habitat for grizzlies because of low human use. Are we willing to put the local people living here in danger just to appease radicals from outside the area and even the country.



HELENA, Mont. – Governor Greg Gianforte today welcomed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (FWS) acceptance of the state of Montana’s petition to delist grizzly bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) in northwest Montana. FWS will begin a comprehensive status review of the grizzly bear in the NCDE.

“After decades of work, the grizzly bear has more than recovered in the NCDE, which represents a conservation success,” Gov. Gianforte said. “As part of that conservation success, the federal government has accepted our petition to delist the grizzly in the NCDE, opening the door to state management of this iconic American species.”

In December 2021, Gov. Gianforte [petitioned](#) the federal government to delist the grizzly bear in the NCDE.

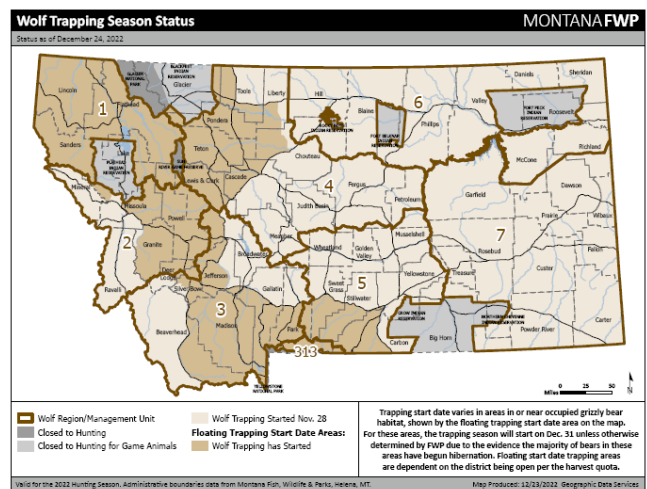
The petition outlined that NCDE grizzly bears are within a distinct population, have far surpassed population recovery goals, and that Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has the structure in place to successfully take over full management of this iconic native species.

Beyond seeking to delist grizzly bears in the NCDE, the petition also asks the FWS to designate the NCDE bears as a distinct population segment.

Grizzly bears were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1975. At the time, the population of grizzly bears in the lower 48 states was estimated to be in the hundreds. Today the bear population in the NCDE alone is estimated at approximately 1,100.

Upon delisting, state laws and administrative rules, already in place, become the primary regulatory and legal mechanisms guiding management.

FWP monitors grizzly bears in the NCDE with the best available science and a team of dedicated specialists. Although grizzly bears in the lower 48 states have remained under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, much of the day-to-day management is done by FWP’s specialists who work with landowners and the public to address conflicts and increase safety and education in bear country.



This map shows what is considered occupied grizzly bear habitat in Montana. Along with this comes more restrictions on other game management practices and recreational opportunities.



Wolf Management 2023

As usual, Ed Hebbe IV did a good job putting together this notice.

FWP SEEKING COMMENT ON PROPOSALS FOR AUGUST COMMISSION MEETING

Fall 2023–winter 2024 furbearer and wolf trapping and hunting seasons and quotas

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is seeking public comment on several proposals slated to go to the Fish and Wildlife Commission in August. Comment is open through July 24.

After public comment, commissioners can offer amendments to the proposals as they see fit. The proposals and supporting documents, commissioner amendments and collected public comment are available on the commission webpage. The commission will make a final decision on these proposals at its meeting on Aug. 17.

Fall 2023–winter 2024 furbearer and wolf trapping and hunting seasons and quotas
FWP is proposing draft furbearer and wolf trapping and hunting regulations for the upcoming trapping and hunting season.

Rename trapping districts, to be called regions. Trapping districts correspond with FWP regional boundaries and legal descriptions will remain the same. This will limit confusion about the applicability

of quotas for hunters pursuing bobcats and wolves.

- FWP has detected a gradually declining trend in the statewide wolf population and predicts the proposed harvest quotas will continue that trend. Wolf harvest quotas are being proposed that sum to the average annual statewide harvest from the last five years, which is 289 wolves statewide, distributed as follows:
 - Region 1 – 120 wolves last years195
 - Region 2 – 91 wolves 116
 - Region 3 – 52 wolves 82
 - Region 4 – 15 wolves 39
 - Regions 5 through 7 – 5 wolves 18
 - Wolf Management Unit 313 – 6 wolves 6
- Wolf trapping season floating start date that would apply to an area described as the mapped occupied grizzly bear range, which is based on a modeled occupancy based on known locations and exclusions of mathematical outliers. The mapped occupied grizzly bear range will be available for download through the FWP Hunt Mapper application for field use. See below;
- Harvest data characteristics for bobcat indicate recruitment was limited in recent years in Regions 5

and 6. In response, reductions in harvest are recommended.

- Recommend reducing the quota for bobcat within Region 5 from 100 to 50.
- Recommend reducing the quota for bobcat within Region 6 from 50 to 25.
- Amending the closed area for marten in response to continued efforts to introduce these furbearers into formerly occupied habitat.
 - Marten trapping is closed in (The following section is struck. [Wheatland and Judith Basin counties and those portions of Meagher and Cascade counties that are east of the Smith River or east of Highway 89 as it runs south from White Sulphur Springs](#)) that portion of Montana north of Interstate 90 and east of Interstate 15.
- **Ed Hebbe IV**

Spring Trapper Meeting R-1

Josh Jurek

Good evening, folks,

I just wanted to write a brief overview of the spring meeting from Tuesday night. For a weekday night, the meeting was well attended by close to 20 trappers in the room. FWP presented us with data to support furbearer populations and graphs that detailed where each species are today.

There were no proposed changes to seasons or quotas at this time. We talked about the decline in muskrats across the nation and FWP is starting to gather data on sex and age of rats. There is a possible proposal coming to help with that data gathering. We discussed martin and the data shows a decline in martin annually for decades. FWP is starting a new study funded by PR funds. 188 samples were collected last season and are

expected to have improved sampling from this season. The 10 martin per trapper quota was reached only by few over the last few seasons. Otter is a species that they believe is on the incline though they struggle to have enough sampling for research. It was discussed that Idaho has a study on them that shows promise, so Nathan, our furbearer biologist, is looking into it to find a better way to assess and collect data on our otter populations. Bobcat data shows that they are on a slow decline or near stable, but the data is off a bit with the recent changes in lion season, fur prices, and weather. The FWP has elected to hold quotas the same for an additional year then re assess. Wolves and setbacks were mentioned with a 299 statewide harvest, which 23 were killed by the agency.

The signage at every recreational use trailhead was discussed and asked if we as trappers support it. Consensus was that trappers support it as long as it is at EVERY possible access point.

We then moved onto Beavers. There is a large movement coming to save the water and the beaver is how they plan to do it. If you have any concerns or questions on this, reach out to Torey Ritter, our non-game biologist and he can fill you in. I for one get the idea but do not support relocation of beavers. One its illegal in the state and two if beavers were meant to be in an area and what they need are in that area, eventually they will get there on their own.

On a final note, we still need some trapper education instructors. I just signed up myself and have to go get certified. If someone would like to join me, I would love some company. Please reach out to me and I can point you in the right direction.

Now we move into preparation season. This is the time that most truly successful trappers enjoy the most. Time to tinker with traps, mix bait for next season, gain access, and scout new locations. Trapping for me starts the minute I pull my last set from the previous season. And if I can add one thing to your list this summer, it could quite possibly be the most important thing you do as a trapper. Find a young kid that has the desire to learn and pour your heart into them to fill that passion because without them we have no tomorrow in trapping. Feel free to call me or email me anytime!

Starting dates and snares. Mineral county

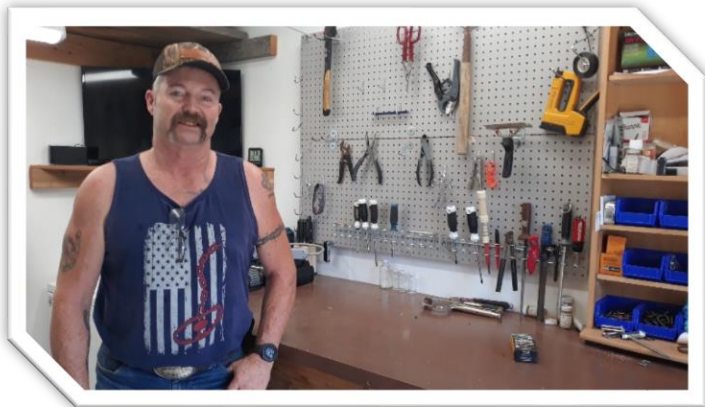


Spotlight on V.P. Brad James

By Kim Davie

Two years ago, Brad James was voted in as V.P. I caught up with him to see what drives him to work hard for the Montana Fur Harvesters and what he sees in the future for this organization.

Brad found MFH when he was looking for a skinning clinic and happened to see one being held close to home. He was amazed the clinic didn't charge a fee. It was hands on, fun and provided valuable education. It was there that Brad met Tom Fieber who made him feel welcome, signed him up as a member and helped him get involved.



The Montana Fur Harvesters rely on volunteers and that year Brad helped with the booth at the Fair. At first, he felt like he didn't know what he should do or say, but very quickly he stepped up to answer questions from the hordes of people. The excitement from kids of all ages hooked Brad and showed him the need for fur education. At the same time Brad was growing in his own understanding as a trapper and did extensive research to continue his learning. He remembered as a kid reading westerns like Louis

L'amour or watching shows about trappers and feeling the excitement, romance and challenges of dealing with predators. At 10 years old, Brad bought a trap and caught a muskrat, but other priorities took over and trapping got left behind. Four years ago, a friend running a trap line invited Brad to come along, and his enjoyment of trapping was re-kindled.

Brad has a full-time job, but still traps year-round, makes his own bait and lure, and takes the time to help others. His name is on the Fish and Game website as a nuisance trapper, so he gets lots of calls from people dealing with skunks and other nuisance animals. He built a Fur Shed completely decked out with tools to have a place for skinning. He has generously invited others to use the space and help them with their projects.

Like so many others who find joy in trapping, Brad finds value in what he does and has many fond memories. On one occasion he was called to trap a fox that was eating pet cats. He set a live trap and was called back to the scene when the trap was sprung. Brad took his daughter along to introduce her to a fox... and it turned out it was a skunk! The skunk was huge! It was exciting for them to look at this animal and work together. As they dispatched the skunk it gave a small spray as its final goodbye. The whole situation gave everyone a good laugh and the fur is still hanging on his daughter's wall. These stories of the outdoors will be re-told and passed on to grandkids.

As V.P. Brad feels it is vital that education is a priority for the Montana Fur Harvesters. Not only do we need to keep talking to kids and going to schools, but we need to reach adults and get the public to truly understand issues and get them on our side. His goal is to get younger folks to become active members so they can carry the MFH torch. He wants people to know that trappers don't just kill animals. Trapping provides an important service to control predator populations. It also reduces the harm animals can have on the environment and to personal property. Trappers use every part of the animal so that nothing goes to waste. The profession is an art and tanned skin is beautiful as well as a fond memento. Thank you, Brad, for all you do!

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Hello from Idaho,

Haying season is in full swing here so it's baling at night when the humidity is higher and trying to juggle other duties in between daytime naps. Haying season only lasts three weeks for 1st cutting and couple weeks for 2nd cutting so I can power through for those short stretches.

Summertime means convention time! I have already hit two conventions and have three more over the rest of the summer to attend and represent ITA. In early June I drove over to Rock Springs Wyoming with Tim Conant to represent at the NTA Western convention. WSTA did an amazing job and we signed up some new ITA members. Then in mid-June we had our Idaho convention up in St Maries. I can't say enough about Bernie, Michielle and all of the volunteers up that way. The event was a smashing

success with just short of 300 people through the gates (not counting vendors or kids). With St Maries being 8 ½ hrs. from me, we couldn't personally help much with the set-up of the event, but the volunteer help was amazing. In two weeks, I will be setting a booth up at the 1st ever Wolfers Summit in Couer d Alene put on by Foundation for Wildlife Management. Then at the end of the month I will be in Escanaba, Michigan for the National Trappers Association convention. ITA director Justin Webb and ITA VP Angel Lovan will both be back at the National as well. Love to see Idaho representation back there at the National and see ITA mentioned with the other state organizations. Then lastly in August I will attend the Nevada Trappers Association convention down in Spring Creek Nevada. Funny that two surrounding states have conventions that are half the distance my own convention in Idaho is!

Mark your calendars! The 2024 ITA Banquet will be at the Fairgrounds in Twin Falls next April. Next year the NTA Western Convention will be back in Glenns Ferry on May 31st and June 1st, 2024. This is going to be an amazing event and one you don't want to miss!

Last weekend Ron Martell and Tim Conant set up a booth in Jerome with the High Desert Pointing Dog club. These booths educating folks on how to open traps and snares are critical to the future of trapping. I am actively seeking more of these events that we can travel to set booths up at. We also need volunteers to help at these events so the same handful of people don't get burned out.

Lastly, I am reminding everyone of our price increase for ITA membership that went active on July 1st. Regular memberships are now \$40 and life memberships are now \$600. I'm sorry for the increases but we can't continue to be an aggressive organization without raising prices. We still have free junior memberships that were sponsored by Greg and Wendy Raver. If you know of any youth that would benefit from membership, please contact me with their info. Again, all memberships receive our Idaho Trapper Magazine. We still have some 2023 bobcat patches that come with our sustaining membership program. If you know of anyone that would love to see their name, business or organization listed as a sustaining member please have them sign up!

Not much to report on the grizzly lawsuit. We are accruing plenty of bills for this so if anyone is interested in donating to the legal defense fund checks need made out to NTA and mailed to their Indiana address.

Thank you

Rusty Kramer

Idaho Trappers Association President

208-870-3217

idahotrapguy@hotmail.com

Montana Things:

Mandatory Trapper Education Classes

will be coming again this season. We held one on June 3rd at the Region One FWP Office in Kalispell. Another class was held in Missoula on the July 8th and on July 22nd in Great Falls. Some trappers are required to take them. Check with FWP Regulations. We are looking for trappers to get certified to teach classes. Contact FWP.

Tom Fieber 🐾

2023 Raffle Rifle

Our Rifle for this year's raffle is ready. We were able to get the ever-popular Smith&Wesson AR-15 Super Kit MOE. **Westland Seed of Ronan** has assisted in procuring these for us. The last two years they were not available so it's nice to have them again. We have sold out of tickets in the past years, we started with 600 then went to 700. I suggest that we go for 800 tickets this year. Tickets are \$10 each.



WE PROMOTE AND PRESERVE FUR HARVESTING AND ITS HERITAGE IN MONTANA AS BOTH A SPORT AND AN INDUSTRY THROUGH EDUCATION AND REGULATORY ACTIVISM. WE SUPPORT FUR HARVESTING AS A SUSTAINABLE USE TOOL FOR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT, AND FIGHT TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE WILDLIFE AND HABITAT. WE WORK WITH MT FWP TO SUPPORT THEIR MANAGEMENT GOALS.

Activities*****

Active with FWP shaping regulations that shape our trapping.

Trapper Education

Booths at Family Forestry Expo

School Shows

Northwest Montana Expo

Newsletters

Local County Fairs

Fur Handling Clinics

Public events

✕ Montana Fur Harvesters represents Trapper, Houndsmen and Predator Hunters

✕ Consider becoming a member of The Montana Trappers Association and The National Trappers Association. Every dollar raised will help to fight for trappers across the nation. Go online to their websites to join.

Memberships run from January 1 to December 31

Please Complete this form and send to: MFH, PO Box 3482, Kalispell MT 59903

Please Print Clearly

Date ____/____/____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please check one ☐ New Member ☐ Renewal ☐ Pro-rate for 2020 balance.

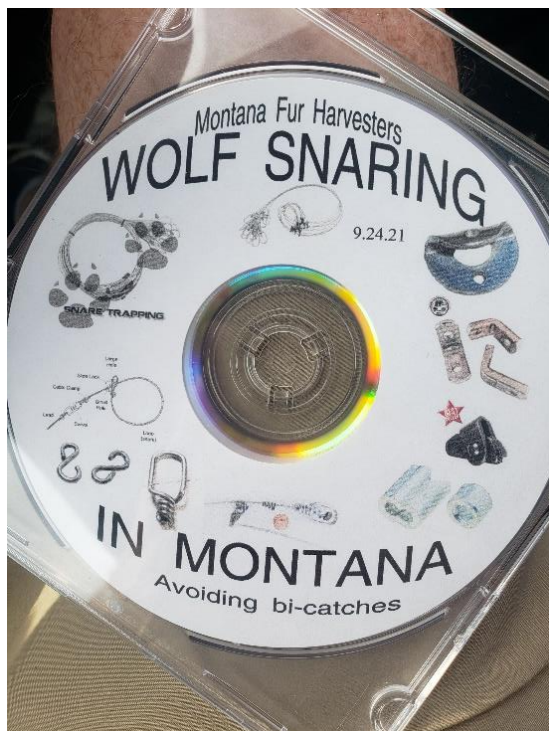
☐ Sustaining Membership \$20.00 annual dues ☐ Junior (under 18) \$10.00 annual dues ☐ Family Membership

\$30.00 annual dues ☐ Charter Member \$100.00 annual dues **Add a magazine to your membership at a**

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This very popular video is a must see for anyone thinking of snaring in Montana. I have sent them out to Alaska, Idaho and Montana. If you can't make one of your local classes, at least take time to view this before you start buying or making snares. It could save you money from buying wrong supplies or worse making a bad set. **To purchase a video:** Pick one up at a local class for \$20 and save \$5 postage. Send a **check** for \$25 in the mail to, Tom Fieber, 507 Bayview Dr, Polson Mt 59860. For **Credit Card** sales at \$25. Send me your contact info then call me at 406-250-3386 Our Wolf Snaring Education Video on Avoiding By-catches has been shown to over 400 prospective wolf snaring trappers. The video has been sold in multiple states as well. Evening classes were held in a dozen local communities and in online FWP Wolf Certification Classes. The video is available to all. **Tom Fieber** 🐾

Thanks to The Meuli's of Columbia Falls.

They are always willing to share their facility for our events. Shawn and Amber are great sportsmen!

Charter Members

Donating \$100 or more !

The following members have gone the extra mile to support MFH. Without this commitment, it would be hard to publish this and host the fur shows.

Tom Gilmore, Tom has donated more time and merchandise to trapping organizations than most. His Fur Handling Clinics in Libby are top notch.

Linda Tutvedt, Linda not only joined as a charter member but offered muskrat trapping on her property this fall. Her generosity was really appreciated by the kids and instructors as well.

Bill Boehme, Bill has been supporting us as a charter member for years. He is a great seminar instructor and a real member of the trapping community.

Josh Jurek, Josh raised \$400 at the Palooza that he donated back to MFH. Josh is a dedicated trapper and a great artist. Josh is now MTA District 1 Director.

Dan Thingelstad, Dan has donated several wolf pelts that he donated back the proceeds and helps run booths. His work on the Fisher denning Box project was above and beyond.

Idaho Trappers Association, This Association is a real asset to the entire US Trapper Community. Thanks to Rusty Kramer for all he does.

Ed Schweitzer. Ed attended our booth at the Kalispell Gun Show and signed up as a charter member. This is deeply appreciated.

Scott H Smith, Director from Whitefish has been supporting the Fur Harvesters in many ways, manning booths as well.

Kenneth Cordoza, our past President still goes out of his way to support his organization.

Rusty Kramer, Idaho Trappers Association President has been a strong supporter here in Montana.

Montana Fur Harvesters works closely with local FWP personnel. Game warden, **Jon Obst**, is one of the first to work with trappers and is a valued asset to the trapping community. He knows trapping, regulations, how traps function, what trappers are dealing with.

Wildlife biologist, **Jessy Coltrane**, has been heading up the fisher denning box project in the Cabinet Mountains. She has been great to work with and is a hard worker herself. Wildlife manager for region one,

Neil Anderson, he has been another one that attends public meetings and sportsman events. He has been working to address road and trail issues as well as other issues that affect sportsman. Neil really listens to people's concerns and acts on them.

Biologist, **Tyler Parks** in Region Two is also very good to work with. Tyler runs the region 2 spring trapper meetings and is a member of the trapping education committee.

Dillon Tabish from Region 1 is always doing what he can to get things organized and get out press releases.

Nathan Kluge is our new Furbearer biologist for FWP in Helena. Nathan has been active at the Trapper Education Class and has been really good to work with and knowledgeable as a trapper.

These are just a few of the many local personnel that I work with and appreciate.

Thanks to each and every one of them!

Tom Fieber 

SEEING STRIPS OR SPOTS

By Scott Smith!

Summer has arrived. Also, the arrival of new offspring of the year. We always have a few snow-shoe hare, fawns, pine squirrels and ground squirrels in the yard. One thing we have noticed was the absence of the young turkeys. The turkey hatch has been very low in our area the last few years. The weather has played a part in that, late snows, and cold rain. Along with the coyotes and other predators that have been lucky enough to see another season. I know that the crows and ravens take quite a lot of young turkeys. I can hear them calling from the trees above the nesting hens.

I know spring arrived later than normal this year, but I spoke with several people that are just not seeing the number of birds as before. I read several reports that the bird numbers across North America have been on the decline for the last 5 decades. The number is down 2.9 billion birds.

We have many things in Montana that eat eggs and chicks. We cannot control the diet of a predator. But we can help control the numbers of predators. The Predatory Animals covered under {MCA 87-6-101} Montana FWP. Coyote, weasel, skunk, and civet cat. The only definition I could find in Montana for a Civet Cat is the spotted skunk??

This year my trapping partner and I went after a few skunks. It was the gift that kept on giving.... YES, I mean kept on giving. My poor wife was about over the smell of it. You could smell the essence for quite a distance. Sometimes she made me un-robe at the door. And no this was not the same un-robe as a youngling. She took my duds straight to the laundry.... Mumble, mumble. Not, she is a great wife, partner, and friend. She always comes out to check on me late in the skinning shed to make sure I am still moving.

We had a very good season this last year. If I was out on one part of the line my trapping partner checked the other. I would get a text saying I had one hanging. This was a secret code for look in the tree beside my shop. I would look and there it was hanging in the shade, out of the sun. The sun really heats up the black color of the skunk. DO NOT overheat a skunk!!

We have 2 species of skunk native to Montana; some say we have 3??

Striped Skunk- [*Mephitis mephitis*]

Western Spotted Skunk- [*Spilogale gracilis*]

Eastern Spotted Skunk- [*Spilogale putorius*]

Striped skunk is native to Montana. They range statewide. They are about the size of a house cat. Black in color with 2 white stripes running down the side of the back, and into the tail. Skunks do not hibernate, but they do den up. Sometimes there can be as many as 8 or more in the den. The adult skunk is mostly solitary. The times they are not solitude is when they breed or gather in the communal den.

When this communal denning happens, they do tolerate each other. But this is where they have a chance of transmitting heavy parasites and can even spread rabies. There have now been verified cases of Avian Flu- HPAI [High Path Avian Influenza] in skunk. Six skunks have tested positive. Seems that the Avian Flu has mutated from a bird flu into a mammal flu H5N1. The Avian Flu was first discovered in CHINA 1996, and in a human in Hong Kong 1997.

Striped skunk mate during February and April. They have a gestation period of 59 to 77 days. This depends on their health they may exhibit delayed implantation. Young are usually born in May or June. The litter size is 5-6 young. The young can leave the den at 4 weeks. They follow their mother after being weened for about 7 weeks. Striped Skunks reach sexual maturity at 7 months.

Striped skunk is omnivorous which means they eat more animal matter than plant matter. The diet does vary from small mammals, reptiles, amphibians. They also feed on berries, fruit, carrion, bird eggs, garbage, and insects.

* Western Spotted Skunk are native to Montana. These skunks are about half the size of the striped skunk. These skunks are listed as potential species of concern. This listing is imparted due to the lack of data. There have been very few studies in the Western Spotted Skunk. The one study I did find had no data on population size, the range size or exact area of occupancy. The area they do inhabit is the southwestern part of Montana.

The study did sight that they do mature quickly and can reproduce frequently. This helps the population to recover quickly. [<5years or 2 generations] The species has a high dispersal capability becoming reestablished through natural recolonization.

The western Spotted skunk does differ from the striped skunk in their reproduction. The female comes into estrus in September and are bred by October. They also have delayed implantation of the embryo. This embryo can spend 180-200 days floating in the uterus. When the embryo attaches the total gestation is 210-230 days. Again, this depends on the health of the skunk to ensure future generations. Young males may become sexually active at 3-4 month.

The Western Spotted skunk also differs from the striped skunk in the way they deploy their essence. The spotted skunk will stand on its forelegs and arch its back. They do mean business in this position and take aim. They are very accurate, up to 10 feet. Just like the striped skunk they have 2 musk sacs or a gland on each side of their anal opening.

This is the gland you do not want to cut when skinning them out. I will send a photo of this area of the skunk. As you can see this male skunk had a very full load. This skunk had no smell to him when I picked him up and had no smell when I skinned him?? He had plenty of essence. The kind of skunk I like to skin. Of course, by this time I had been skinning several skunks a week/ day and my nose may not have been working well? I also sent a photo along of the second batch of skunk we did up.

I hope everyone has the time to get out this season and help the nesting birds. We did enjoy the time out last season in the pursuit of nest raiders. My partner is already chumping at the bit for cooler weather, so we can get out and enjoy what the good lord has provided.

Please remember to take someone new to trapping along.

Have A Blessed Year.

Tail Dragger Scott



Where have our porcupines gone? Once common in Northwestern Montana, now a rare sight. This is one species that is struggling on this side of the divide. This species has **not** been trapped in Montana. In fact, no species that is trapped has been decimated. Facts are species that were wiped out are now regaining space in Montana.

Our black-footed ferrets are coming back to Montana

The black-footed ferret is one of North America's most endangered mammals. Once thought to be extinct, after the species was rediscovered in Wyoming in 1981, concerted efforts by numerous partners have given black-footed ferrets a second chance for survival. Captive breeding, reintroductions, habitat protection, and cloning have helped restore them to over 300 animals in the wild. Habitat loss and disease remain their key threats.

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footed

History of Swift Fox

Swift fox are year-round residents, inhabiting shortgrass prairies. Largely nocturnal, swift foxes can range over several square miles a night. They breed from late December to early March, with a single litter of three to six pups born in late March to early May. Young are raised in an underground den, emerging in early June and dispersing in late summer or early fall.

Swift fox were once abundant on the Great Plains, but in the early 1900s numbers began to decline in response to government poisoning campaigns aimed at wolves, prairie dogs and ground squirrels. Swift foxes lost a prey source in prairie dogs and ground squirrels, and when wolves declined, they couldn't outcompete coyotes and red foxes for food.

In 1969, Montana declared swift fox basically extinct locally. However, due in part to transplant programs in Canada, sightings of swift foxes have increased in eastern and central Montana since the 1980s. Currently, there is a sustainable population of swift fox that allows for



a limited trapping season, with a current harvest quota of 10 fox, in a portion of district 6 in northern Montana for those with a valid trapper's license. It is not legal to shoot a swift fox.

Swift foxes are North America's smallest native canid (Foresman 2012), weighing 1.8 to 3.0 kilograms, with males averaging larger than females. The winter pelage is dark buffy-gray above, and orange-tan on the sides, legs, and lower surface of the tail. The chest and belly are buff to white, the tail is tipped with black. In summer the coat is shorter, harsher, and more reddish. The length of the head and body is 38 to 53 centimeters and tail length is 23 to 35 centimeters.



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