

MONTANA FUR HARVESTERS

JULY 2024

SUMMER issue



BEAVER OF WESTERN MONTANA

President's Message

**Beavers, a Major Furbearer
in Montana**

WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS

Working with FWP

A Charging Grizzly Thrill

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Montana Fur Harvesters

2024 Summer Magazine

Board Members:

Tom Fieber - Polson 250-3386 President
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Larry Rattray- Proctor 261-7199 Secretary
Kim Davies - C Fall 503-332-2830 Treasurer

Directors:

Mort Hill – C Falls 406- 212-3699
Ken Cordoza – Whitefish 406-250-6038
Tressa Schutter – Kal. 406-871-5638
Scott Smith_ Whitefish 406-249-9951

General Contact: Tom Fieber 406-250-3386 or
tfieber@bresnan.net

Houndsmen: Scott Smith 406-249-9951
smithnwha@yahoo.com

Mort Hill roddyhill@gmail.com 406-212-3699

Montana Fur Harvesters PO Box 3481
Kalispell Mt 59903

Cover Photo, High lighting our Montana Beaver.

Below, A Moments Reflection, Carrie Franklin, was able to photo this awesome sight, recently in western Montana.



Not what a Fly Fisherman want to see in Montana.



Notes from the president.

News from the Fur Harvesters. It's been a while since I sent out something so here are a few things to bring up.

We have reached a time that gives me a few breaks. Banquet season is now over. I have one more Trapper Ed Field Day scheduled for June 22nd in Butte. This will be the first class for Butte, we'll see how it works. Right now, I am trying to get local Butte instructors to signup but so far only two have. We may need to bring in some from region one.

I had a Trapper class scheduled for Missoula so five of our members were there for that. The annual Forestry Expo in Columbia Falls was also that same day. I had mentioned it to Mort Hill, one of the directors, Mort made a trip to the site on Friday and found out that they were planning on us being there. Mort saved the day by taking up the fur show all by himself. His only complaint was he never got a chance to smoke a cigarette all day, he was so busy. Can't thank Mort enough for the day.

I got talked into setting up a **Website** for the Montana Fur Harvesters. Took me and a few others a couple of months to get it going. With my limited ability to do so it was quite an endeavor. Now people can join our membership, shop for furs, learn more about trapping, keep updated on events, request our furbearer show or download past MFH magazines. The site is new, I am hoping that you might have some suggestions on improving it. Here is a link to the [Website](https://montanafurharvesters.com/). <https://montanafurharvesters.com/> Stop in and look around. We are always looking for articles and photos for the site and future magazines. Our next issue will be coming out on the first of July. A hardy welcome to our new members that have signed up on the website.

Our Spring **Trapper Ed Field Day** classes in Kalispell and Missoula went really well. We were a little short on instructors in Kalispell but found out that we could still produce a good class for the 55 students. We normally like to have 2 instructors for each of the three stations. Missoula's class was about the same size and we had a couple of extra instructors that assisted for the first time. We are lucky that we have such a dedicated and experienced group here in Western Montana to offer these classes.

Things are still up in the air over the **wolf trapping** season. With the lawsuits over the grizzly bears, not sure what to do. I was planning on adding some cell cameras to my wolf lines, but I am holding off for now.

Some good news on fur prices.

The Fur Harvesters March sale in Canada

Major highlights were major increases in the price paid for **marten** (overall average of \$58.71) and **fisher** (males at \$63.18, females at \$53.98). This is especially good news for trappers heading to the big woods on remote traplines where marten and Canada lynx (average \$140.96) are key species, along with beavers, of course.

The **bobcat sale** also was great, and when the top price paid reaches \$1,500 for a Western pelt, trappers get excited. Western pelts averaged \$501.21, a great incentive for trappers to go big if you have access to Western cats!

In the list of great surprises was the sale of wild **mink**. Most surprisingly, wild mink finally climbed up above the \$10 mark (Northern pelts averaged \$16.13, Central pelts averaged \$11.65), a significant step up after many years at very low (less than \$5-\$7) levels. It is (difficult to explain why there was such an increase, but we will have to wait to see if the prices paid for wild mink continue to recover. We know that the oversupply of ranch mink due to shut-down operations is slowly being sold. Maybe this has sparked some wild mink interest. This is one item that only a few more sales will confirm, whether we are on our way up, or whether this was just a surprise spike in a very slow market

Also, in the list of good news, **beaver** prices remained very strong (Western pelts at \$28.87, Eastern pelts at \$32.57) as the latter market continues to drive this market. Beaver prices above \$30 USD is good news not only for trappers, but for every landowner, forestry company, and even agricultural operations that have to deal with flooding issues caused by beavers.

At \$30 USD for the pelt alone. trappers find it worthwhile to go out and catch those beavers before they become a nuisance, and with a few additional dollars for the castor glands (range \$30-\$65 per pound depending on quality), and maybe also a meat market. Beavers remain the stronghold of our traplines. The good news is that this market is expected to last as it is mostly independent from international political or economic issues, so beaver trapping is a great idea for the upcoming season of 2024-2025, especially with advancing prices for two other water animals. wild mink and river otter, which also climbed above the \$30 mark (Northern pelts averaged \$34.74, Central pelts \$35.48). The only slow spot in the water species right now remains muskrats. At the latest FHA pelts sold for \$2.14 average, which simply states that this market is not yet recovered.

Other than **muskrats**, two dry-land species continue to struggle, red fox (averages between \$7.31 and \$17.19) Eastern coyotes pelts averaged \$12.11 whereas Western **coyote** sold for an average of \$25.73.

Raccoon has been struggling for a long time, and this last sale saw a slight advance, with prices averaging

between \$7.90 to \$12.77. Very few trappers go after raccoons on purpose at these prices, and the offering at this sale was extremely low (only 12,803 pelts). Good news is, almost all raccoon pelts sold (95%), which at least clears the inventory at hand.

Taxidermy goods such as **wolves**, sell well at every sale. The market for "fancy" skins currently can swallow whatever is offered, and prices remain stable or advanced slightly. Very few trappers make a living catching only such species, but at least when you do catch a wolf or a wolverine, the market will pay fairly. Take your time and handle these animals well as there is sometimes a huge difference in price between one pelt put up "commercially," or one done for taxidermy with feet, claws and bottom lip complete, enabling the buyer to resell the pelt for taxidermy mounts. We can conclude by saying that this sale exceeded our expectations.

Fur Harvesters Auction in North Bay, Canada

www.trappermag.com

Tom

Grizzly bear recovery in Montana has reached a level that needs addressing. We are seeing what people are doing to twist reality around facts to restrict outdoor uses. Taking lawsuits to sympathetic Judges to get rulings in favor of their views, despite science will cost dearly. Now we are faced with the wolverine listing. Checkout page 11 for more on bears.

Calendar of Events

See the **calendar of events** that we will be facing soon. If you ever start getting bored, I am sure you will find something that you could take part in.

Watch your emails for up-and-coming events that I will be sending out. We will be putting on Trapper Certification Classes, Fur handling clinics and Advanced Skills programs this summer that need to be scheduled. **Please note that the Gun Show in September has moved back into the Fair Grounds, and we no qualify for it. Let me know if you have a suggested event that would fit our model.**

Upcoming events; We are working on getting into the Columbia Falls Community Market this summer. They are held on each Thursday from 5pm to 8pm. We did attend the market on July 11th and had good results. Sold lots of raffle tickets and furs. People from around the world and out of state stopped by the booth. We agreed the weneed to return a couple more times this summer.

August 10th Trapper Ed field Day in Missoula

August 13-18th NW Montana Fair & Rodeo in Kalispell

August 23 to 25 46th MTA Convention. In Livingston.

October 19th Trapper Ed Field Day in Kalispell.

Wolf management on **private lands in**

Montana is vitally important. We as sportsmen need to do everything we can to foster good relations with landowners.

Working with FWP

We had a incident recently involving one of our FWP wolf biologists. This is the time of year when they are trapping wolves to collar them. Trapping wolves is never easy, but there is a need to be able to account for them. We as trappers want to know where the population is trending. Anti groups are also looking for data supporting their claims. At present, there are no absolute ways to count wolves.

A hound was caught in a wolf trap. Now that hunting bears with hounds is legal in parts of Montana, people were training hounds during a special season. The traps were not on any roads, yet the hound was caught. This is not much different from lion hunters during lion hunting season. The hound was released but the owner filed complaints and the biologist removed all the traps from the area. Even though a few dogs have been caught in traps none have been fatal. Compared to the multiple number of hounds that have been killed by wolves when hunting lions and bears in the same area.

I believe that working with **FWP biologists** to support their studies and data collection is totally needed to provide scientific facts that can be utilized in setting rules, regulations and legal assaults. We, as members of the outdoor Community, should all be working together. No one wants to see dogs caught in traps but it happens. Seems that they lose 3 to 4 hounds a year in Mineral County, each year, to wolves. As a trapper, we try to work closely with all the hound hunters. We call them on fresh lion tracks, let them know where our traps are and they let us know about wolf sign. Both groups are working to control predators that are impacting the ungulate herds.

Watch for the upcoming **FWP Commission Meeting** in August. There are a few regulations that we may want to keep an eye on. I will be sending out emails as I learn more.

Tom Fieber 🐾



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Greetings from Idaho.

First couple weeks of May I was still buried with spring planting and working crazy long hours, so I am glad that is finally over with. May 3rd and 4th I went to Reno Nevada to the 2nd annual NTA State Readiness Summit. I had both my NTA General Organizer and ITA President hats on and I was so impressed on how this 2nd summit was ran and the results of it. Neil Cheeney the Nevada president did a great job on setting this summit up. These summits are designed to show state presidents how to make their state organizations strong as possible and show them tools they can use. What I like best about these summits is the networking accomplished and friendships formed. I feel comfortable calling folks in these meetings to ask advice and bounce ideas off of. I keep saying we have a dream team of western state presidents that all help each other out.

The Western NTA Convention was in Glenns Ferry on May 31st and June 1st. Attendance was lighter than previous

years, but I felt like it was a great convention with new friendships and coalitions formed with new organizations. I am not sure yet where next year's convention will be, but we need to get it figured out very soon. We try and move the convention around to new places every year to try and get in front of new folks and drum up new membership. If you are interested in a convention being in a place near you, please reach out. We need a place large enough to have the convention and a flood of volunteers to help out with things.

The ballots were counted at the convention and here are the results: Vice President Angel Lovan, NTA Director Justin Webb, Directors Bernie Nelson, Mike Murdock, Ron Martell, and Kenny Kimball. A huge thank you needs to go out to our outgoing directors: Tim Conant and Mike Ward. I know those two will still be deeply involved with the club. One more big announcement was the induction of Tim Conant into the Idaho Trappers Association Hall of Fame. Tim has donated decades of time to the ITA and was a director clear back when I was in high school! Tim will be

dearly missed but I have a sneaky suspicion he will still be at all events with his infectious smile. Mike Ward is taking some time away to spend some more time with his young kids but his technical skills looking at federal legislation for me will be sorely needed. Hope to see some of you at Sioux Falls, South Dakota in July at the National. Come check out the ITA booths and we will be drawing for the Hutzel wolf trap and tanned wolverine for the membership contest. at the convention. We recently topped 1,000 members and then turned right around and dropped back below that milestone. I can't stress enough for you to sign yourself up for a sustaining membership for yourself and sign a friend or fellow trapper up for a ITA membership.

Thank you

Rusty Kramer

Idaho Trappers Association President

MONTANA FUR HARVESTERS 2024 Raffle Rifle!

This year we thought we would buy two rifles, an AR-15 and a scoped hunting rifle and let the winner choose the one they want. Both rifles are in place and look great. Raffle tickets are \$10 each and we had 700 printed this year.

Tom Fieber 🦫

BEAVERS IN MONTANA

General Description

Beavers (genus **Castor**) are large, [semiaquatic rodents](#) of the [Northern Hemisphere](#). There are two existing [species](#): the [North American beaver](#) (*Castor canadensis*) and the [Eurasian beaver](#) (*C. fiber*). Beavers are the second-largest living rodents, after [capybaras](#), weighing up to 50 kg (110 lb). They have stout bodies with large heads, long chisel-like [incisors](#), brown or gray [fur](#), hand-like front feet, [webbed](#) back feet, and tails that are flat and scaly. The two species differ in skull and tail shape and fur color. Beavers can be found in a number of [freshwater habitats](#), such as rivers, streams, lakes and ponds. They are [herbivorous](#), consuming [tree bark](#), [aquatic plants](#), grasses and [sedges](#).

Beavers build [dams](#) and lodges using tree branches, vegetation, rocks and mud; they chew down trees for building material. Dams restrict water flow, and lodges serve as shelters. Their infrastructure creates [wetlands](#) used by many other species, and because of their effect on other organisms in the [ecosystem](#), beavers are considered a [keystone species](#). Adult males and females live in [monogamous pairs](#) with their offspring. After their first year, the young help their parents repair dams and lodges; older siblings may also help raise newly born offspring. Beavers hold [territories](#) and mark them using scent mounds made of mud, debris, and [castoreum](#)—a liquid substance excreted through the beaver's [urethra](#)-based castor sacs. Beavers can also recognize their kin by their [anal gland](#) secretions and are more likely to tolerate them as neighbors.

Historically, beavers have been hunted for their fur, meat, and castoreum. Castoreum has been used in medicine, perfume, and food flavoring; beaver pelts have been a major driver of the [fur trade](#). Before protections began in the 19th and early 20th centuries, [overhunting](#) had nearly exterminated both species. Their populations have since rebounded, and they are listed as species of [least concern](#) by the [IUCN Red List](#) of mammals. In human culture, the beaver symbolizes industriousness, especially in connection with construction; it is the [national animal](#) of Canada.

We as trappers are depended on to help resolve damage caused by beavers. This is something that we need to support the option to manage.



Tom Fieber 🦫

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

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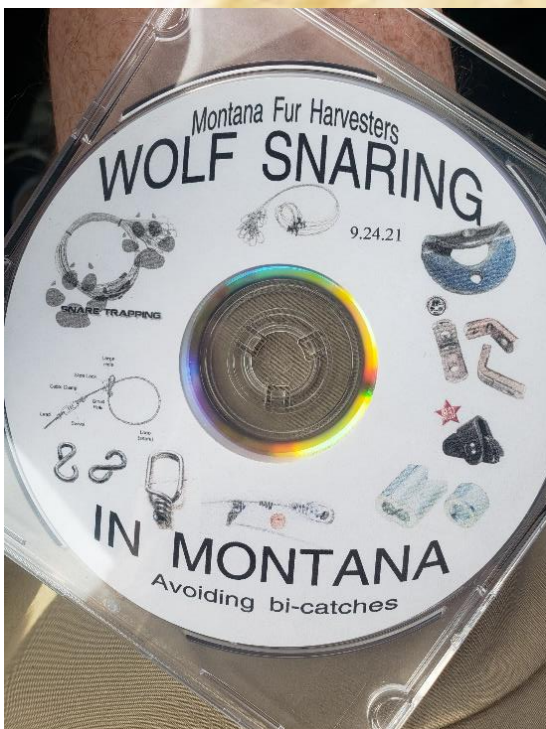
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www.grandviewoutdoors.com/order/subscriptNote: ☐ Check here to receive your Newsletter by Email ☐ Check here to have Newsletter mailed. **This very popular video** is a must see for anyone thinking of snaring in Montana. I have sent them out to Alaska, 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, Amber, and Kimberly are great sportsmen! Great one on March 23rd, more info later.

GETTER DONE

Scott Smith

Well, here we are, halfway through 2024. WOW. I hope that everyone has had a safe and blessed spring trapping season. Now that summer is here, it is time to get all those projects knocked out. The fall trapping season starts in around 4 months for some of us.

There are several things I like to have ready and complete before the season starts. Scouting, traps prepped, waxed dirt-sand and plenty of firewood. Also make sure your truck, 4-wheeler or snowcat are in good working order.

I will start with scouting; this is probably one of the most important items. Things I look for are, did the ownership change hands? There are many reasons for ownership to change hands, life happens. Here lately some of the lumber companies have decided to sell off huge portions of the land around populated areas. Another thing I check on is, did the area or neighboring property have any changes, fires, roads, buildings, lumbering? These are all things that can affect the area and the wildlife on it. I cannot tell you how many times in the last 50+ years one or all of these have happened quickly and plans changed. Now is the time to find out.

While scouting for signs of wildlife, I look for the usual, tracks, scat, dens, and winter kills. The other signs I look for are human activity. Every rural area across north America has been impacted since the China flu. People are fleeing the cities. There is no question that more people have been spending more time outdoors. So please remember that if you are on public land, we all must respect and share. Please remember the last thing we need is bad press. We will lose our trapping. Try to stay calm and talk to them about wildlife conservation and wildlife management. Trapping is a very important tool we use. I always scout new areas so I have other options if something should change. Plan "B"

The next thing I do in preparation for the upcoming season is go over my inventory of traps and gear. I keep a list of all my traps, tools, cubby boxes, and other items on a sheet paper on the back of a cupboard door in my shed. I count and recount to make sure that everything is accounted for. I either use my presser washer or take the traps to the car wash. I clean them well. This helps when I look each one over to make sure all things are in good working order. I go over all the traps, chains, swivels, and welds. I look for broken or worn parts. This is very important; I do not want something I should have fixed come apart, miss a catch or lose a trap. Also, I make sure that each trap has an ID tag on the end of the chain. This is when I make some adjustments, fix, or replace damaged parts.

I still like to dye and wax my traps. This is part of a ritual I have been doing for many years. I have had luck with it so why change? I do use Mark Steck trap and snare dye on my water traps and some snares. This stuff wears well, and last for several seasons. After waxing or dye dipping, I clean the wax from the dog and pan where the two meet. Now I preset the pan tension. Hang or store the traps in a bin with earthy smells. I do finale pan tension just before I load the truck or trailer, this gives me one more time to check and make sure things are correct. REMEMBER- GLOVES WHEN HANDLING CLEAN PREDATOR TRAPS!

After I am finished with the trap prep, I work on the waxed sand and waxed dirt. Yes, I do wax both, (separately). I trap several places and I find that between the two I can better match the habitat in each area. Sometimes I will mix the dirt and sand together for a blend. I do find that the mixture does pack the bedded trap tighter?

While I am prepping for the season, I make sure to go over all my transportation. My truck, are my tires going to make it another season? Are my snow chains in good working order? How about the oil and a quick look under the hood. Are the fan belts worn or cracking? Fan belts seem to come apart when you're stuck. And the battery, is it going to start when the temps drop? Next, we go to the 4-wheeler and snowcat. Are they in good working order? You do not want to wait and find out when the fur is prime.

I have trapped with a pack basket and snowshoes for many years. Well, the years are adding up. I plan on snowshoeing this year, I can still do it, but with a slower pace, much slower. I always seem to find a way to strap on the snowshoes. Yes, I either have a stuck machine or one that breaks down. So, I always have my snowshoes in the truck. When the snow flies I have them with me on the line. Several times they have made the difference. I do not enjoy post holing for hours to get back to the truck.

I also have my firewood split and stacked for the season. I like to come home to a warm cabin. In a future article, I will talk about survival gear and some of the things I carry just in case I have trouble on the line. If you have ever spent a night out on the mountain shivering, you will relate. In closing I

would like to wish everyone a safe and blessed line.



GETTER DONE!

Tail Dragger, Scott

April
28th
was
the

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. 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.

Mark Williams, from Florida has his second term.

Bob and Nickie Clyde of St Regis have supported wolf trapping since 2011.

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 biologist 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.

Ben Chappelow, game warden from the Flathead, has been filling in for Jon Obst in that capacity. Ben has been assisting with the Trapper Ed Classes and doing a great Job.

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

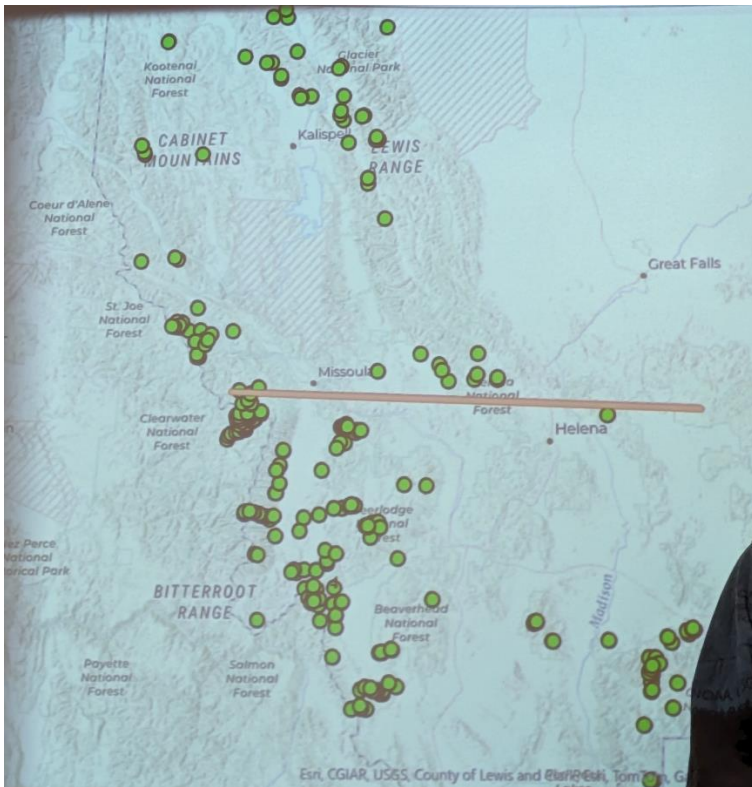
Thanks to each and every one of them!

Region One Annual Spring Trapper

Meeting By Larry Rattray

Region 1 Trapper meeting in Kalispell. There were 15 trappers and 7 FWP personnel present. Tom read a report of events including that we may be able to buy a trapper's license on March 1st next year when all the other licenses are due. Jessy Coltrane then went into the various furbearers. All of the info presented is going to be available on the Region 1 web page. The number of trapper licenses took a sharp decline in 2020 -2021 from roughly 6000 down to 3500.

The **Martin** harvest has slightly declined with an



average of 4 Martin per trapper since 2019 when the per trapper quota was reduced to 10. There were very few who harvested the 10. There was a question as to why the quota was dropped to 10 and why no one was aware of the change. It was interesting because it was a trapper who broached the subject and there was a lot of discussion, and the trappers are the ones who asked for it and voted for it. Jessy asked us to submit the muscle sample vials to help them determine the boundary line of the 2 species of Martin. FWP will give you a vial and a tag to identify where each Martin is trapped, and they would like the GPS coordinates of each Martin. The Pacific Martin are located in the Southern part of the state and the American Martin are

in the Northern part. They are trying to determine to what extent the two are crossbreeding and there are some areas that are blank where they have no samples. FWP has a grad student helping separate the data. Contact nolanhelmstetter@montana.edu for more information.

FWP raised the quota on **Otters** to 40 in 2020. Since then, the harvest has been 43, 47 and then 45. The season does close fast. Idaho is doing an intense study to calculate the number of Otter in an area. Montana FWP is looking at a similar study once we see the results of their efforts. FWP would like to have your help by verifying any Otter sign with pictures and GPS coordinates.

Bobcat has not reached their quota in the past 3 years. The majority of Bobcats are taken by trappers, but the number of trappers is declining, and the success rate of the trappers is declining as well. A study from the Upper Peninsula of Minnesota shows that Wolves will reduce the number of Bobcats in an area.

Region 1 has 70 packs of **Wolves** and 470 Wolves. 121 were harvested this year, 57% by trapping, in Region 1.

FWP is studying the number of **Lynx** in Montana due to the Judge's restrictions on Wolf trapping. If you see any sign, they would appreciate pictures and GPS coordinates of any sign that you see. Northwest Montana has good Lynx habitat. 11 of 19 cameras that were placed had Lynx photos. Lynx were supposed to be delisted in 2020 but there was never a designated criteria to say they were recovered.

Wolverines were listed on the Endangered Species List in December of 2023. The major reason for them to be listed is that British Columbia wrote a paper saying that trapping is the major reason for the decline of Wolverine in Canada. Montana, Idaho and Wyoming all filed lawsuits opposing the listing. Genetic Diversity with Canada is necessary to removed them from the ESL. Recreational trapping is exempt from "Take" of Wolverines. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is taking comments from the animal rights fanatics that trapping is "take" and attempting to determine a number that should be considered nonconsequential.

By **Larry Rattray**

News on the Grizzly bear

front. "In a federal lawsuit ruling March 19th, Judge Candy Dale ruled that parts of Idaho wolf trapping season will start December 1 and end at the end of February. Here in Montana, we are limited to January 1st to February 15th.

She implies that because the odds of "take" of an endangered species via wolf trapping is not ZERO, that means there is reasonable chance that wolf trapping COULD "take" a grizzly bear. It's important to note that the definition of "take" in relation to the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan within the ESA, has nothing to do with grizzly "mortality" as one might have assumed. The way I understand it, if I am hiking down a ridge top and I spook a grizzly bear and it panics and runs away, I have just "taken" that grizzly under the definition of "take" and have breached the Endangered Species Act. " Justin Webb

I shudder to think of all the Grizzly bears that I have taken over the past fifty years. It's unbelievable that with all the encounters outdoors people have had, the grizzly population has exploded to today's level. This is a prime example of common sense that people of emotional guidance bring to the table.

Here in Montana, I am aware of three grizzly bears that were in foothold traps. None were wolf size traps, they were coyote or bobcat sets. They were released and survived just fine. By far the biggest cause of mortality to grizzlies is being euthanized by government agencies for being nuisance bears.

As I see it, a change in the federal government in this next election cycle is our only hope. The current path is destined to accelerate drastic changes that we may never get back. Please remember this at the ballot box in November.

Tom Fieber



A charging Grizzly Sow with three cubs. This is reprinted from 2016.

Standing with a can of bear spray with a charging grizzly sow with cubs, with only a backpack on one's back at twenty yards makes for a memorable day. That followed photographing a very large grizzly boar that was grazing on grass.

Each year as a certified Hunter Education Instructor for the state of Montana, I try to provide hunting trips to hunter education students from our classes that might not otherwise have that opportunity. The perfect opportunity is the youth hunt that runs on Thursday and Friday generally prior to the general rifle season. Youths 10 through 15 can take either sex deer on those days in Montana. Most landowners are more than willing to allow these kids to hunt on their land if asked and public land is open to all.

If their schedules allow, we will camp out for the weekend. The excitement that the kids have building up to the trip is something to see. I can say that accounts for a sleepless night before the day of the hunt for most. Just putting together their hunting packs and clothing for some is almost as exciting, for many, just the camping trip is a highlight. Over the years I had only one that was home sick the first night. By the end of the next day after harvesting his deer he was ready to spend the next three days just being with the other kids trying to harvest theirs.

This year was no exception. This year a 13-year-old student from last year's class was invited to go on the four-day trip. His excitement and enthusiasm started back in August. We would be joined by my 18 year old granddaughter, Hannah

for the last two days. I am not sure where his interest in hunting came from as his family did not hunt. What impressed me with Victor were his projects that he did for the 4H fair this summer. I did not personally judge his projects but observed his presentation and scope of his wildlife interest.

As in the past we arrived at our hunting destination in the afternoon on Wednesday to set up camp. After parking the motor home in the usual spot we prepared the campsite and then spent the evening driving around looking for firewood and possibly a grouse for dinner. We did see one doe that evening just to prove they were there but no grouse.

Next morning at legal shooting time we started out from the camp on foot. We had only hiked maybe a half mile through the heavy timber when we reached some recent logging. As we started across the more open area we passed an open meadow with a small pond in the center. I noticed through the trees what first looked like a buffalo grazing in the meadow. Knowing that there were no buffalo in this valley I looked through the binoculars. Four hundred yards away was a very large male grizzly bear. I motioned to Victor to come over if he wanted to see a grizzly. We watched the boar eating grass next to the pond. I said that we should try to get closer to get some photos, victor was hesitant to do so, I reassured him that since he could probably out run me he was going to be safe. We snuck to the edge of the meadow with the pond between us and the feeding bear. At around 100 yards we were able to take lots of photos of him feeding. He was never aware of us, so we snuck back out away from him.

After seeing him we decided that we would leave the area for safety and hunt in another direction. We covered several more miles passing on a dozen does, Victor wanted to take a buck. Just before stopping for lunch, we were passing through a dense area of new trees in an old clearcut. Just as we came into an open logged area I looked back over my shoulder. There 50 yards away was a Grizzly standing on her hind legs staring at us just uphill. I noticed there were three cubs right behind her. It was not a good place to be. I turned to warn Victor but he was already running away. He did remember me saying that he could out run me.

As I turned back the bear had dropped to all fours and was on a full charge towards me. I turned and ran just enough to get my bear spray out the holster on my belt. In those three to four seconds, she had covered most of the ground between us. Knowing that there was no way to out run her I turned back to her with bear spray ready. She stopped at 20 yards and again stood on her hind legs. That was what I hoped would happen. We both stood facing each other for what seemed like a long time, she finally dropped down and turned back to her cubs that were bawling behind her. When she reached the cubs, they retreated back into the heavy timber.

After it was over Victor asked if I was scared, you know at the time I did not feel scared. When these things happen you don't have time to think about it. You just react and hope it works out. Running was not the best option and probably increased the chance that she charged. As it turned out all of us were fine. My most vivid memory was how fast she came and how, as she ran, how her body was flapping. Her whole body was like jell-o shaking, she must have built up her fat reserves for the winter. I was very happy that Victor did not try to spray the bear from behind me. That would have been very bad for me. Victor said that he was not



sure how to use the spray so I went through a very thorough lesson.

Studies have shown bear spray to be the best defense against an attack, not only for you but also for the bear. Each Hunter Education class that I teach includes how to avoid and deal with bear attacks. I will demonstrate how to use the bear spray. First make sure that the bear spray you have has not expired, each can has an expiration date stamped on it. You have about seven seconds of

spray for the smaller size and nine for the larger size. Each fall test your spray once by giving a very short blast in an area far from others or your camp. This assures that mechanically it works and how effective the pepper still is. If you can smell it without coughing or reacting you need to replace it, don't take the chance. Bear spray costs from \$30 to \$55 and will last four to five years.

The effective range of the spray is thirty to thirty five feet. If we had tried to spray the bear at twenty yards (60') chances are that the bear would have run around the spray or the spray would have blown back to us. When sprayed it produces a rust-colored cloud and a loud whoosh. One time we used it to detour an oncoming bull moose. That frightened the moose enough to change directions before he even got to the spray. I can't say that it would on a grizzly but maybe. It takes a lot of willpower not to fire it too soon but control yourself for the best effect. Only spray at the ground thirty feet between you and the bear, only for maybe a second, do not spray the entire canister at one time. If the bear continues through the first blast spray it again directly into the face. The bear may change direction and you may need additional shots later. If a bear is standing on its hind legs, it is not charging, when it drops to all fours is when it will charge. At that time its head is near the ground, that is why you want to spray at ground level not up in the air.

Once you have sprayed you want to get out of the area as quickly as you can to prevent yourself from inhaling the pepper. It can certainly debilitate you as well as the bear. I have heard people tell me that after spraying a bear they started bawling and running blindly into trees and brush trying to get away. I assume that is what we would do as well. Once you have used your spray you can reinsert the safety back into the canister to make it safe to carry again. If you are not sure how much spray you have left, you would be wise to replace it.

I have spent most of my 67 plus years being in the outdoors hunting, fishing, camping, berry picking, hiking, shed hunting, snowshoeing, skiing and trapping. Throughout most of my archery hunting years for elk I have had many close bear encounters. Archery hunters are doing everything possible to impersonate an elk. We dress in camo,

imitate elk sounds, use scents, elk decoys and hunt where bears live. It is not unusual to have black bears come into our calling. At the time we are so intent on what the elk are doing that we don't pay attention to the things around us. Many times, I have looked around to a sound that turns out to be a bear that has snuck in very close. Fortunately, each time as soon as they recognize me as a human they have turned and ran away. Many of those times if they had charged those final ten or twenty yards, I would not have had time to defend myself even with bear spray. I was fortunate that they have all been black bears and not grizzly.

Back in the seventies I was charged by a grizzly while checking on sheep kills. The sow charged in thick brush, and I was very lucky that my only chance for a shot from a 06' broke her spine. She dropped immediately; her nose was eleven feet from mine.

Another time a black bear decided to enter our elk camp at two o'clock in the afternoon. We had just loaded elk quarters into my partner's truck that we had packed out that morning and he headed to town. At that time, I did not have bear spray with me. I was cooking lunch in the wall tent and walking outside for something when I spotted a black bear walking right at me. It was a hundred yards away, so I wasn't too worried about it. I waved my arms and yelled at it, but it kept coming, I walked over to my four-wheeler and got my bow out of its case. It was now at about thirty yards. I kept yelling and waving the bow. I did not want to shoot it but I also did not want to have it come back in the dark. I waited until it got to about ten yards before I shot. It bawled and climbed a nearby tree, but it quickly dropped back down. Lucky for me it ran back the way it came from and died about seventy-five yards from camp.

I also had a black bear bluff charge that stopped again about twenty yards and stood on its hind legs. I had dropped my bow and had the bear spray ready that time. Each and every time it was thrilling to say the least. I have a deep respect for bears but I have not given up on being in the outdoors.

Back to the hunt with Victor. I am not sure if Victor was scared, impressed or ready for more but I know that he was excited. After we traveled to the other side of a lake we stopped to build a fire

and eat lunch. I kept an eye on the other side where the bears had gone towards. Our fire was welcome and warming in the rain that was falling. It was a beautiful scene even in the rain. Looking across the lake the fall colors of the larch and the birch brightened our lunch as we talked over and over the events from the morning. I was joking about wishing that I could have videoed the charging grizzly but not taking the time to get out my camera. We talked about how these events would be hard to ever top in most hunters' lifetime.

After lunch we again moved away from this area and headed back towards camp in a big roundabout way. Hours later as we were getting closer to camp we came up on a whitetail, a forked horn that Victor was able to make a good shot on. I think that he forgot all about the bears and how tired he was from all the miles that we had hiked as he held onto the horns for his pictures. His excitement was boiling over. After all the years and all the harvests of deer and elk by these youngsters I think that I enjoy each one more than the last. It is so satisfying to be able to share that moment with someone. We field dressed the buck then went to get the pickup.

Back at camp we had to replace the meat pole from last year that had disappeared. We tied a new pole back in the trees twenty feet from the motor home. Then we hoisted up the buck and skinned him and put a game bag over it. As we were skinning the deer a car stopped by and said that he just saw a big black bear cross the road just before he got our camp and to be careful. I tied the rope around a nearby tree and we went in to cleanup and have supper Victor said that he sure hoped that the bears would not get his deer. I reassured him that we have never had a bear come in here and take one before. We had some time before end of shooting hours so we drove to another location to scout for a deer for Hannah on Saturday. Just before dark we spotted a four-point whitetail.

Next morning we slept in later than usual, his tag was filled and we were going to look for grouse anyway. At daybreak I opened the door and no deer. I looked back at Victor and asked if he saw his deer, no way, it was gone. We finished getting ready and decided to go to an area to get cell

service to call a game warden. As I stepped out of the motor home, I could see the rope that the deer was hanging from stretched out tight. I followed the rope and there was what was left of his deer. Apparently, the bear had somehow untied the rope from the nearby tree. We had made sure that the deer was at least ten feet from the ground and more than four feet from the nearest tree. We took some pictures of what was left then drove down towards the highway to get cell service. I contacted our local game warden and explained what happened to his first deer. He gave us permission to get Victor another tag so that he could try to get another deer.

We did go for another short hunt then went back to camp to meet up with Hannah at two o'clock and have some hot soup. After we ate, we again drove to the location that we had seen the four pointer the evening before. On the way the kids spotted another buck about a hundred yards away. Victor got out and into a shooting position and waited until the buck gave him a good angle. One well-placed shot through both lungs and Victor had his second buck down in his first two days of hunting. It was well past dark when we got back to camp, we were all a little nervous about skinning the deer in the dark with flashlights with that bear probably still in the neighborhood. We worked out a plan, Hannah would watch for the bear with the most powerful flashlight while Victor and I skinned.

After finishing we were sure to load the deer into the back of the pickup with the topper. To avoid any more bear problems we even moved the truck two miles away parked it close to the Highway. Victor wanted to save the head and hide so he placed it on top of the motor home. After the long hard day, we went to bed early. About two o'clock in the morning I was awakened by a loud crash, thinking that one of the kids had fallen out of bed I got up to check on them. Both were wide awake and still in their beds. There were four big eyes looking back at me, it wasn't us, they said. It must have been the bear outside. I turned on the outside lights but was unable to see anything. I started the generator and turned a bunch of lights on inside for a while. I said, that should scare the bear away, so we went back to bed. An hour later we were awakened again by a loud noise and a shaking motor home. This time I started the main

motor, honked the horn several times and we looked outside with all the lights on but still could not see anything. Victor said that he had heard the bear breathing outside the window next to where he was sleeping earlier. Back to bed we went until I awoke with the alarm. Poor Victor said that he had not slept for the rest of the night.

After breakfast we headed down to the highway in Hannah's car to get the pickup. From there we loaded up the hunting gear and headed for the area where we had seen the four point buck Thursday evening. We had made one pass through the area at first shooting light but did not see any deer. We returned about an hour later to make another pass. Then Victor spotted the buck not far from where we had first spotted him. Hannah tried a shot at 100 yards but had to shoot through some limbs and missed. The buck just walked over a hill, so she had to move to a higher spot to see it again. This time she made the 150 yard shot. This was her sixth deer and I think that she was just as excited as her first one. After tagging and field dressing we tried to drag the buck up the hill toward a road but it was tough. We decided to go back to the truck and got the game cart that made the job much easier.

We had planned on staying until Sunday but after a short discussion it was decided to get back to camp and then head home.



As we approached the camp a large black bear was standing in the road by the camp. When he saw us he crossed to the other side into the timber and vanished. I am sure that it was the



nighttime raider that the other people had told us about. When we got to the motor home it had paw prints on the sides that are still there today. We decided we would skin the deer when we got home. The kids were eager to get home and share their stories with

their families. Over the years I have been on a lot of adventures, but I am sure that this one was one that the kids and I will always remember.

Hunting or recreating anywhere in Western Montana exposes users to grizzly bears, being it a student on the SKC Community College campus, Ninepipes hunting pheasants, archery hunting in Southwest Montana or walking near Columbia Falls it puts you into the highest concentration of grizzly bears in the Lower United States. This shows that humans being attacked can happen in the valleys as well as in the back country. As we have seen over the past years, their numbers have increased dramatically and now they inhabit all of Western and Southwestern Montana. Human's being attacked by them has increased each year. I have lost track of all the attacks since September 2016 started but five were listed on the web where the people were mauled by the end of October. There are many other close encounters that do not make the news but have been brought to my attention.

Tom Fieber 🐻

Montana Fur Harvesters
PO Box 3481
Kalispell MT 59903



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