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To: Washoe/Clark CABS

Regarding: Bobcat trapping season recommendations for 2011-2012

The Nevada Trappers Association has put forward its proposal to return to a 4-month trapping season because “If the season was decreased in light of two years of disappointing data, then it is appropriate to reinstate the longer season following two years of positive data” (per NTA statement to County Advisory Boards, July 18, 2011). The statement further claims, “For the past 2 years the data has turned around and now shows an impressive rebound in young bobcat recruitment.....”.

I quarrel with NTA’s rosy assessment. For example, NDOW data shows:

- There is still a marked difference between juvenile recruitment numbers for the north as compared to the south. Kitten/adult female ratios in the north generally sit above 1.0. In the south, specifically Mgmt areas 13,14,15,16, 17 and particularly areas 20-29, none of the ratios reaches 1.0, and many are below 0.5.

- The eastern region data shows an average annual kill for bobcats (2000-2009) as 847. The 2008-2009 kill was 663. The 2009-2010 number was 277 (about 1/3 of the decade’s average). The 2010-2011 tally was 574, still 33% below the decade average.

But rather than nitpick NTA’s assertions which are...after all...what you’d expect trappers to say, anyway, let me address what I regard as a 30+ year history of deficiency in bobcat management. I believe reform is needed since the bobcat is killed for money, and not “sport”. Some trappers have killed over 100 bobcats per year. There is no biological justification for this.

First of all, I believe there is a difference between data collection (counting dead bobcats, doing tooth analysis, establishing sex/age of dead bobcats, calculating ratios of various sorts) and management (where data collected is used to establish goals and objectives, against which measurement of success/failure can be seen).

As to management, NDOW has repeatedly affirmed that the ONLY management “tool” it has or needs is the setting of season length. Historically, tinkering with season length from time to time has been done in order to try to obtain some change in outcome for the next trapping season, though the expectations/goals are almost never stated. The presumption is that if a season is shortened, the desired outcome would be fewer bobcats killed, and visa versa.

How well does NDOW's only management "tool" work? A simple correlation coefficient, comparing annual season length over 31 years with number of bobcats killed each year, yields $r=0.12$, or, translated to percentage terms (by squaring the r), season setting predicts only 1% of what will happen the next year. In short, setting season length has nothing to do with the number of bobcats that will be killed the next years. (Now, if we were talking season lengths of a few days, instead of months in length, the correlation might be higher.)

What would a good management plan look like? Here are some of my ideas.

- What is the biology of bobcat management? What is the limit on the number of bobcats available to be killed for each trapping season. Are females and juveniles to be spared in some way? Where are the cutoff points for the various ratios beyond which curtailment of trapping takes place? What field validity exists to justify the use of various ratios? When might a management area or even a region be closed to trapping for recovery purposes?

- Since NDOW staff has said publically that it no longer makes any effort to establish census data for the bobcat (and therefore has no clue as to the population status), should the department make an effort to determine population status using increasingly available sophisticated technologies to do so?

- What are the limits on trapper conduct. Should trappers be allowed to kill as many bobcats as is possible during a season? Should there be quotas....by trapper, by management area, by region? Why should bobcats be subjected to "commercialization" and periodic risk of decimation of its status when pelt prices are high, field conditions are favorable for trapping and fuel costs are low? What right does a trapper have to kill in an unlimited manner when many other wildlife species are protected from that kind of excess.

In conclusion, for the near term, the shortened trapping season should be continued in the southern half of Nevada since the numbers are most worrisome for that region. Beyond that, a sensible, biologically based management plan should be developed by the department and the commission for the bobcat and implemented as soon as possible.

Sincerely

Don Molde