

A Fur Marketing Service was established in Regina to give fur producers a local auction where their fur could be graded, displayed and sold to the highest bidder. In 1946 a Fur Conservation Agreement was concluded with the Federal Government by the Province in which the two Administrations agreed to spend certain moneys annually for the purpose of managing fur and game and improving wildlife habitat in the northern isolated areas for the benefit of the residents of those areas. The particular interest of the Federal Government in this region lay in the welfare of Treaty Indians who are their wards. Regulations under the Agreement gave Indians, métis and whites equal rights and security on their community, family or individual traplines. Local trappers' councils were elected by the trappers to act as spokesmen on their behalf when dealing with the Provincial Department of Natural Resources. During the subsequent five years 3,600 live beaver were moved from settled areas to new homes in the northern frontier where they were required for propagation purposes and for the improvement and maintenance of water levels. The result of this action has been a steady increase in the population of beaver, while the take has increased from approximately 400 pelts in 1943-44 to 51,700 in 1954-55.

The south Saskatchewan muskrat trapping program was inaugurated in 1946. Under this program each trapper in settled areas obtains a permit describing the area in which he is authorized to trap muskrats and the quota he may take from it—based on the number of houses and bank runs located therein. It is estimated that five muskrats per house will survive a winter and that three may be trapped, leaving the others for propagation. Thus general close seasons are a thing of the past and muskrats existing in any section may be trapped on the basis of the program. Average yearly production since 1946 has been almost tripled in relation to the average yearly production for a similar prior period. The 1955 crop numbered almost 1,965,000 muskrats, the fourth highest ever recorded in the Province.

Other fur bearers of economic importance are fisher, fox, lynx, marten, mink, otter, squirrel and rabbit. These animals have fluctuated in population as well as in pelt value in past years but the increased production of beaver and muskrat has helped stabilize the income of the trapper. Most fur prices have declined in recent years but the income received from Saskatchewan wildlife fur pelts has been maintained.

Badger, raccoon and wolverine are of little economic importance at present. Wolves and coyotes are on the predator list in settled areas as well as foxes and very comprehensive programs of control have been carried on to reduce the population of these animals.

By 1948 it was quite apparent that bounties did not have the desired effect of reducing the coyote population and a paid hunter program was introduced in co-operation with the rural municipalities, in which all field personnel were directly responsible to the Department of Natural Resources. Under strict supervision these men used guns, traps, cyanide guns or coyote-getters and poison. The program has been extremely successful and coyotes are no longer a problem in settled areas. In the autumn of 1954 the bounty on wolves was discontinued. Bait treated with poison, placed out on large lakes in isolated areas, is the present method of control of wolves. Here again only employees of the Department are allowed to handle the poison. This work is becoming increasingly important not only to protect game that is necessary to the welfare of people living in the north country but also to reduce the chances of spreading the rabies epidemic which has been apparent in the West during the past two years as well as hydatid disease which has been found in some species of big game.

The weasel is a valuable fur bearer as well as a controller of rodents and to increase its population there has been a demand to have the close season extended throughout the greater part of the settled areas. However closure in large areas does not seem to increase the weasel population and the Department is carrying on biological studies to ascertain the effect of trapping on these valuable fur bearers at various degrees of intensity over a period of years.