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Miscellaneous Research Report No. 7  
(Game)

HISTORY OF BEAVER IN WISCONSIN

by  
George J. Knudsen

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WISCONSIN CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT  
Division of Research and Planning

February, 1963

Final Report of Pittman-Robertson Project W-79-R-7

Final Report of Pittman-Robertson Project W-79-R-7

Division of Wildlife Management

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Washington, D.C. 20250

George J. Robertson

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1969

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## ABSTRACT

Wisconsin's beaver populations during the pioneer period were wide-spread over the state, but were not as dense per unit area as they have been in recent years. This was due primarily to the fact that there were few large areas covered with aspen stands before 1850. Maple and pine predominated on the uplands and swamp conifers and hardwoods grew on the lowlands.

After 1850 logging became more important and by 1900 the effects of intensive logging and subsequent burning of slash had created open grasslands with low brush over great areas of the state. Nonrestrictive trapping from 1850 to 1900 helped to reduce the beaver population. The combination of ruined habitat and trapping reduced the beaver population to near extinction by 1900.

In the early 1900's the burned and cut-over areas began to recover to forest stands composed largely of aspens. The remnant beaver population of the far northern counties began to respond to these habitat changes so that many of these counties had fair beaver populations by about 1920.

The west central part of Wisconsin had vast areas of pioneer aspen by 1930 but these areas were devoid of beaver. During the period 1932-34 beaver were transplanted into this area; the result was a rapid recovery to dense beaver numbers. By 1940 beaver were moving into the southwestern parts of Wisconsin via the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers.

By 1950 beaver were found in 60 of our 71 counties and in my opinion were at an all-time peak. Evidence in many areas during the period 1950-60 showed that aspen lands were rapidly being replaced by timber stands less conducive to heavy beaver populations. This trend will continue and large tracts of what was once excellent beaver habitat will become less satisfactory, with a consequent decrease in beaver densities.

## INTRODUCTION

Information concerning beaver distribution and relative densities in past years throughout Wisconsin was collected to set the stage for a better understanding of both present and future beaver management problems.

## METHODS

Beaver history data in Wisconsin were gathered from: (1) special questionnaires sent to beaver trappers in 1950, asking for dates and locations of the first reappearance of beaver in their counties after the all-time beaver "low" of the early 1900's; (2) personal contacts with many beaver trappers and Conservation Department personnel during 1950-56; (3) information in old journals, books, etc., on the densities and distribution of beaver during pioneer times (before 1850); and (4) Conservation Department records of past beaver seasons and beaver complaint reports.

## FINDINGS

### Early History

During the pioneer period (1600-1850) Wisconsin had a widespread beaver population, though I doubt if this furbearer was as abundant statewide during this period as it has been during the past two decades (1940-60).

Jesuit journals and records kept by pioneer explorers in Wisconsin mention the beaver as an important furbearer and also make reference to many trappers that brought in large numbers of beaver pelts.

The Jesuits often mentioned pulling their large canoes over countless beaver dams on the Brule and St. Croix Rivers and other rivers and streams in the northwestern part of Wisconsin. Then there are long periods of time when these men mention nothing about beaver dams. This suggests that beaver populations had their ups and downs even in these early periods. Going one step further, one might logically conclude that plant successions cycled from pioneer aspen stands following "Indian-set" fires and lightning fires, to mature dominant stands less conducive to high beaver densities. The Jesuits often mentioned seeing the night skies lighted up by local forest fires. These fires certainly produced relatively large areas of pioneer aspen lands in their wake and these stands allowed beaver to increase locally.

Many books dealing with the early history of midwestern U. S. and central Canada mention the attraction of the country around the Great Lakes to beaver trappers and remark about the large stacks of beaver pelts brought in by the trappers.

These sources of information suggest that beaver were very dense during pioneer times. However, there were no bag limitations on beaver and these professional trappers could trap all year-round if desired. They also picked up many beaver pelts in trades with local Indians. This would account for the large stacks of beaver hides brought in by the relatively few trappers operating in Wisconsin at this time.

The beaver was probably not as numerous state-wide in the pioneer period as in recent years because Wisconsin's forests at that time were in subdominant to dominant stages of succession. Research in Wisconsin and many other states has shown that beaver populations are always more dense in forest stands composed of abundant aspen, a pioneering tree. As subdominant and dominant tree species replace aspen, beaver densities drop accordingly.

A vegetation map prepared by Dr. J. T. Curtis of the University of Wisconsin shows the forests of Wisconsin about 1840 were composed largely of maple and pine communities and their associated species. These forest-cover types were found in northern, central and eastern Wisconsin while oak and prairie communities were found in southern and western Wisconsin. The stream floodplains at this time undoubtedly had more lowland conifer stands than current floodplains which are largely alder-willow complexes. This broad zonal distribution of plants was probably representative of the typical cover of pioneer times, with the exception of relatively small areas that always appeared with their associated pioneer stands after the early forest fires.

Though the forest-cover types present in Wisconsin during pioneer times would indicate that beaver populations were less dense per unit area than currently, it is quite probable that beaver were state-wide in distribution except possibly in the true prairie regions of southern Wisconsin. Available records show that beaver trappers operated over a large part of Wisconsin during pioneer times and occasionally old beaver-cut sticks and deeply buried logs are found during dredging of peat and muck soils in all parts of the state.

### Recent History

#### State-wide Populations

Information on beaver trapping seasons is presented in Table 1. During the period from 1850 to 1902, only 5 years were closed to beaver trapping. In the years that were open, trapping was allowed the year around. This suggests that beaver were either widespread and relatively abundant, or that no one was particularly interested in protecting the beaver stock. Harvest figures were not available until 1934.

During this 52-year period logging was gaining momentum and by 1900 great inroads had been made into the virgin forests, producing slash and brush country. Fires became abundant and burned vast areas for decades

before and after 1900. Roth (1898) recorded that at this time half of northern Wisconsin had been burned over at least once and was covered with nothing but dead remnants of former forests, sparse brush and grass.\* Scott (1953) reported that in 1903 there were only 3 beaver colonies left in the state.\*\* From 1903 to 1933, 22 years were closed to beaver trapping, while 7 consecutive years (1917-23) were open to one or two months of trapping annually (Table 1). Thus during this "brush" period beaver were recognized as being very low in number and were given abundant protection. This low beaver population was presumably the effect of the intensive trapping pressure of the latter half of the 1800's, and to poor beaver habitat resulting from deforestation and fires during the period 1850-1930.

Great slash fires continued to bare the mineral soils until the early 1930's when forest fire protection was finally organized. By 1930 many areas previously burned had rejuvenated forest cover of pioneering aspens, birch and pin cherry.

From 1933 to 1960 only 3 years were closed to beaver trapping, indicating a great increase in beaver numbers. Column 5 of Table 1 shows the trend of beaver population distribution during these three decades with more counties being opened to beaver trapping each year as the beaver range rapidly extended southward. Seasons in the mid-thirties were allowed in only a few northern counties, but by the 1940's beaver seasons were allowed also in central Wisconsin. A few years later many southwestern Wisconsin counties were opened to beaver trapping. This rapid increase in beaver densities and expansion of range after 1930 is without doubt directly related to the upsurge of the aspen stands following the intensive deforestation of the 1800's and early 1900's.

Information from beaver complaint reports received by the Conservation Department further corroborates the state-wide population picture revealed by trapping season data. No beaver complaint records prior to 1935 could be found and only an incomplete set existed for the period 1935-38. There were no records from 1939 to 1944.

It was necessary in 1917 to pass the first legislation allowing the trapping of complaint beaver and this furnishes evidence that a few beaver colonies were beginning to cause trouble. It is unlikely that many complaints were registered annually before 1930.

A minimum of 40 complaints per year were recorded during 1935-38 and these involved primarily the far northern tier of counties across the state. South of this line of counties complaints were very rare on an annual basis per county.

---

\* Roth, Filibert. 1898. On the forestry conditions of northern Wisconsin. Wis. Geol. and Nat. Hist. Surv. Bull. 1, 78 p.

\*\* Scott, W. E. 1953. Statement on Bill 137 A, 1953 Legislature. Filed Beaver Project files.



TABLE 1

## Beaver Trapping Seasons in Wisconsin

| Year      | Dates                                 | Length    | No. Counties<br>Open | Bag<br>Limit   | Avg. Pelt<br>Price | No. Licenses<br>Sold | Harvest | Avg. No. Taken<br>Per Trapper |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------|-------------------------------|
| 1850-64   | All year                              | All Year  | -*                   | -              | -                  | -                    | -       | -                             |
| 1865-79   | Nov. 1 - May 1                        | 6 months  | -                    | -              | -                  | -                    | -       | -                             |
| 1880-92   | All year                              | All Year  | -                    | -              | -                  | -                    | -       | -                             |
| 1893-98   |                                       |           |                      |                |                    |                      |         |                               |
| 1899-1902 | All year                              | All year  | -                    | Closed Seasons | -                  | -                    | -       | -                             |
| 1903-16   |                                       |           |                      | Closed Seasons |                    |                      |         |                               |
| 1917-20   | Dec. 1 - Dec. 31                      | 1 month   | 3                    | -              | -                  | -                    | -       | -                             |
| 1921-23   | Feb. 1 - Mar. 31                      | 2 months  | 12                   | -              | -                  | -                    | -       | -                             |
| 1924-33   |                                       |           |                      | Closed Seasons |                    |                      |         |                               |
| 1934      | Feb. 19 - Mar. 4                      | 13 days   | 17                   | 15             | \$7.44             | 1,154                | 2,208   | 2                             |
| 1935      | Feb. 19 - Mar. 4                      | 13 days   | 15                   | 15             | 6.73               | 818                  | 1,869   | 2                             |
| 1936      | Mar. 1 - Apr. 15                      | 1½ months | 16                   | 25             | 9.72               | 1,364                | 5,747   | 4                             |
| 1937      | Mar. 15 - Apr. 15                     | 1 month   | 18                   | 20             | 13.89              | 900                  | 6,867   | 8                             |
| 1938      | Feb. 1 - Mar. 31                      | 2 months  | 13                   | 15             | 9.53               | 558                  | 4,355   | 8                             |
| 1939      | Mar. 1 - Mar. 31                      | 1 month   | 15                   | 10             | 11.70              | 769                  | 5,135   | 7                             |
| 1940      |                                       |           |                      | Closed Season  |                    |                      |         |                               |
| 1941      | Mar. 1 - Mar. 31                      | 1 month   | 19                   | 10             | 21.04              | 1,523                | 5,992   | 4                             |
| 1942      | Mar. 1 - Mar. 31                      | 1 month   | 13                   | 10             | 20.98              | 978                  | 3,910   | 4                             |
| 1943      | Mar. 1 - Mar. 31                      | 1 month   | 24                   | 10             | 28.77              | 969                  | 4,564   | 5                             |
| 1944      | Mar. 1 - Mar. 31                      | 1 month   | 22                   | 10             | 35.00              | 1,830                | 7,720   | 4                             |
| 1945      |                                       |           |                      | Closed Season  |                    |                      |         |                               |
| 1946      | Mar. 5 - Mar. 25                      | 20 days   | 43                   | 10             | 46.00              | 3,674                | 15,280  | 4                             |
| 1947      |                                       |           |                      | Closed Season  |                    |                      |         |                               |
| 1948      | Feb. 10 - Feb. 19                     | 9 days    | 37                   | 5              | -                  | 3,125                | 5,582   | 2                             |
| 1949      | Feb. 10 - Feb. 28                     | 18 days   | 51                   | 8              | 19.00              | 3,367                | 9,150   | 3                             |
| 1950      | Feb. 15 - Mar. 16                     | 1 month   | 30                   |                |                    |                      |         |                               |
|           | Feb. 15 - Mar. 31<br>(Ext. to Apr. 9) | 53 days   | 6                    |                |                    |                      |         |                               |
|           | Feb. 15 - Mar. 6                      | 20 days   | 13                   | 12             | 15.23              | 2,863                | 11,544  | 4                             |

\* No records available

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Dates</u>  | <u>Length</u> | <u>No. Counties<br/>Open</u> | <u>Bag<br/>Limit</u> | <u>Avg. Pelt<br/>Price</u> | <u>No. Licenses<br/>Sold</u> | <u>Harvest</u> | <u>Avg. No. Taken<br/>Per Trapper</u> |
|-------------|---|---------------|------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1951        | Feb. 15 - Mar. 31<br>(4 Cos. to Apr. 10)                | 44 days       | 18                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 15 - Mar. 15<br>(2 Cos. to Mar. 31)                | 1 month       | 40                           | 12                   | 21.20                      | 2,243                        | 13,146         | 6                                     |
| 1952        | Feb. 15 - Mar. 31                                       | 1½ months     | 31                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 15 - Apr. 15                                       | 2 months      | 6                            |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 15 - Mar. 15                                       | 1 month       | 16                           | 15                   | 11.81                      | 1,822                        | 10,305         | 6                                     |
| 1953        | Feb. 20 - Apr. 20<br>(Small area to<br>May 5)           | 2 months      | 46                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 20 - Mar. 21                                       | 1 month       | 6                            | 20                   | 12.39                      | 1,442                        | 13,477         | 9                                     |
| 1954        | Feb. 25 - Apr. 10<br>(Small area to<br>May 1)           | 1½ months     | 52                           | 20                   | 11.42                      | 1,174                        | 8,969          | 8                                     |
| 1955        | Feb. 25 - Mar. 26<br>(2 small areas to<br>Apr. 10 & 30) | 1 month       | 18                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 25 - Mar. 16<br>(5 cos. to Mar. 31)                | 20 days       | 22                           | 20                   | 15.54                      | 847                          | 6,083          | 7                                     |
| 1956        | Feb. 25 - Mar. 26<br>(2 small areas to<br>Apr. 20 & 30) | 1 month       | 31                           | 20                   | 10.27                      | 766                          | 5,905          | 8                                     |
| 1957        | Feb. 25 - Apr. 10                                       | 1½ months     | 35                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 25 - Mar. 26                                       | 1 month       | 22                           | 20                   | 8.83                       | 975                          | 9,192          | 9                                     |
| 1958        | Feb. 25 - Apr. 20                                       | 2 months      | 23                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 25 - Mar. 26                                       | 1 month       | 23                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 25 - Apr. 10                                       | 1½ months     | 12                           | 25                   | 10.91                      | 1,164                        | 14,232         | 12                                    |
| 1959        | Feb. 1 - Apr. 20  | 2½ months     | 23                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 25 - Mar. 26                                       | 1 month       | 24                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 25 - Apr. 10                                       | 1½ months     | 11                           | 35                   | 9.96                       | 938                          | 11,515         | 12                                    |
| 1960        | Feb. 1 - Apr. 20  | 2½ months     | 23                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 25 - Mar. 26                                       | 1 month       | 24                           |                      |                            |                              |                |                                       |
|             | Feb. 25 - Apr. 10                                       | 1½ months     | 11                           | 35                   | 12.69                      | -*                           | 10,595         | *                                     |

\* Beaver license requirement dropped, so no calculation of total number of beaver trappers possible.

Data from 1850 to 1947 were compiled by N. R. Barger, and from 1948 to 1960 were taken from beaver research project records.

From 1945 to the present the number of complaints registered annually increased phenomenally and the number of counties involved increased yearly until every county except our southeastern counties had annual beaver damage complaints registered. In recent years, 400-600 complaints were recorded and handled each year on a state-wide basis.

### Area Populations

Supporting data on the distribution and relative densities of beaver in various parts of the state were obtained from Conservation Department personnel and beaver trappers, and are presented below by area.

The questionnaire attached to the required beaver trapper reports in 1950 was returned by over 99 per cent of the trappers but relatively few offered information concerning beaver history in their particular areas. This was expected since many of these trappers undoubtedly were relatively new. Many of the older trappers could not recall first dates of beaver appearance or did not observe them intensively in the three decades before 1930 when most years were closed to beaver trapping. The comments that were made on the questionnaires by individual trappers are listed verbatim below by county within the respective state areas.

#### Northwestern Wisconsin

Beaver were present though very rare from 1900 to 1920, at least in the northern tier of counties of the Northwest Area.\* Jakoubek (1937) writes that the only known beaver colony in 1900 in north central Wisconsin was found in Price County on a tributary to the Jump River.\*\*

Around 1920, beaver dams and cuttings were very rare in most of the Northwest Area and people often made special trips to beaver colonies just to see their workings.

By 1933, the northern counties were opened to beaver trapping and these trapping seasons gradually extended to all counties of the Area by 1946. Most have had an annual beaver trapping season to the present.

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\* Alvin J. Yeager supplied much information for northern Washburn and southern Douglas Cos.

\*\* Jakoubek, K. C. 1937. Memorandum to Mr. Alexander filed with W. E. Scott.

Comments by beaver trappers:

Ashland Co. Had more beaver in 1924 than now in 1950 in Marengo Township. Five times as many beaver in Morse Township in 1930's than now; mink, ducks and muskrats too.

Bayfield Co. I came to Bayfield County in 1919 and there were beaver here then. From 1919 beaver were quite plentiful in Drummond Township. Beaver have been in Delta Township since before 1920. Iron River and Hughes Townships have had beaver since 1920. Beaver have been in north-eastern Bayfield County since at least 1935 and probably long before this. Beaver in Bayfield Township for about 10 years, that is since (1940) and possibly before this, but not many. More beaver in Mason Township in 1920 than now. Noticed beaver in Barksdale area in 1939, but I am sure some were here before this. Beaver plentiful way back in 1925 in Lincoln and Pratt Townships.

Barron Co. Clinton and Barron Townships first beaver appeared about 1930. Beaver moved into Dallas Township in 1935 and since this time surely have increased. In my area in Maple Grove Township, beaver first came in 1948. In 1920 on Rock Creek in Yellow River Township. First colony noted in Barron County was in 1921 in Cedar Lake Township, as I recall.

Burnett Co. Saw first beaver in 1922 on south fork of Clam River. First saw sign in 1906 in LaFollette Township and beaver increased very slowly until 1920. Beaver here in Dewey Township since 1930. Roosevelt Township has had beaver since 1930. Beaver first moved into Wood River and Grantsburg Townships in 1940. Lincoln Township has had beaver since 1924, and they have spread extensively since then. Beaver have been in Union Township since 1920. Webb Lake Township beaver moved in in 1922. Town of Westmarshland has had beaver colonies since 1933.

Chippewa Co. In 1922, 18 beaver caught northeast of Fall Creek, Wisconsin on Paint Creek. Beaver first noted in Birch Creek Township in 1908. Eagle Point Township had ten beaver colonies in 1930, now 25 (1950). I first saw beaver in my part of county in 1931. (No location given). Cleveland Township first had beaver in 1934. Beaver have been in Colburn Township since at least 1925.

Douglas Co. Two dams on Ox Creek and two dams on Mud Creek in 1922 in Highland Township, and have been beaver here ever since. We've had beaver in Brule Township since 1906. Beaver in Wascott Township since 1919. First beaver on Ox Creek (Wascott-Gordon), above Ox Lake in 1910. First beaver in Summit Township were on St. Croix River in 1915.

Polk Co. First noticed beaver in Luck Township in 1931-34. First on St. Croix River between St. Croix Falls and Grantsburg in 1938 and on Apple River same year. In Pine Lake, Bone Lake Township as early as 1932. I saw first beaver dams in Farmington Township in 1934. Johnston Township had first beaver. On Rice Bed Creek in 1927. Beaver came to McKinley Township in 1933.

Price Co. Found in 1902 on Jump River near Price-Taylor County line. Beaver plentiful in Emery Township from 1915-25. Beaver were in Fifield Township in 1908, in Sailor Lake. Beaver have been in central Price County since 1920.

Rusk Co. More beaver in Lawrence and Grow Townships in 1929 than now (1950); another trapper says a few in Lawrence in 1916 and before. Beaver in Big Bend Township since 1930. Flambeau Township: 1939-40 first beaver. Stubbs township beaver appeared in 1916. More by 1920 than now (1950); another trapper says they were on Soft Maple Creek near Weyerhauser in 1909-10 and people came from miles around to see them. True, Cedar Rapids and Dewey had beaver as early as 1918.

Sawyer Co. Beaver in town of Weirgor since 1930. Beaver in county as far back as 1921-24.

Taylor Co. Beaver seen first in 1922 in Rib Lake Township. First beaver in Maplehurst Township in 1930. Westboro Township had first beaver in 1910. In 1902 beaver found very rare in Grover and Westboro Townships. Roosevelt and Maplehurst Townships had lots of beaver in 1929-35.

Washburn Co. There were 17 dams on Chicog Creek in 1929. Very rare as early as 1911, very abundant 1930-50. Beaver first came to Sarona Township in 1930.

The Northwest Area had a remnant beaver population in a few spots all through the early 1900's, primarily in the northern tier of counties. Parts of Bayfield evidently had better populations than any other counties in the state. The more southern counties of the Northwest Area apparently had a few isolated pockets of beaver too, but they were exceptionally few and far between before 1920.

However, compared to observations and trapper reports, the Northwest Area had a more widespread beaver population from 1900 to 1920 than did any other area of the state.

#### Northeastern Wisconsin

Beaver were recorded in northeastern Wisconsin through the early 1900's but they were very rare, as was the case in the Northwest. In 1920-22 a beaver dam was recorded on Simpson Creek in Forest County (R. A. Nixon). In 1928 beaver were found to be well established throughout Florence Co. (R. A. Nixon).

In Forest, Langlade and Marinette Counties beaver were a novelty before 1925, according to early trappers (B. Bradle). After 1930 they became common in Forest County but were still not common in Oconto and Langlade Counties as late as 1937. Surveys in National Forests in 1937 indicated the same relative beaver densities in Forest County.

The earliest date of beaver appearance heard of in Vilas County was 1915 (B. Popov and L. Ellerman). Beaver were first noted in Oneida County about 1918 and in Lincoln County about 1920; people from Tomahawk, Wisconsin traveled regularly to see the Lincoln County beaver colonies (L. Fields). Beaver colonies were known as early as 1921 in Oneida County though were quite rare and sensational (H. McKeague). By 1930, beaver were very plentiful and causing damage and concern in Oneida County (L. Oshesky).

Comments by beaver trappers:

Florence Co. More in early 1930's in Florence Township than now. First seen in Homestead Township in 1925. Started good in Florence and Tipler Townships in early 1930's. Beaver here in Tipler Township when I first came in 1920. First dam I saw in 1926 in Fence Township. A few beaver here in Florence Township in 1926.

Forest Co. Wabeno Township had first beaver in 1936. First ones I knew of in Alvin Township were in 1920. First beaver came to Brule River, Alvin Township in 1917. First beaver appeared in Lincoln Township in 1930 and in the town of Nashville beaver came in in 1931. Pine River in 1924.

Iron Co. Saxon Township first had beaver in 1934. In 1905 beaver first seen in county on Flambeau River and they were more common by 1912 in Mercer Township. By 1926 they were on most creeks. First beaver seen in Mercer Township in 1912. (Apparently Iron County had a remnant beaver population in the very early 1900's. This might have been one of the nucleus areas from which the beaver spread. -- G.J.K.)

Langlade Co. First beaver in Wolf River Township in 1930. First beaver in Langlade Township in 1936. In town of Ainsworth beaver were planted in Lily Lake in 1925. They were in Poplar River in 1917. Some beaver in south branch of Oconto River in 1916. First beaver in Upham Township seen in Bullhead Lake in 1932.

Marathon Co. First beaver moved into Little Eau Pleine River, Township of Spencer in 1930's. Beaver have been in Green Valley Township since at least 1942. In Little Eau Claire River since about 1945. Guenther Township; another trapper says 1939. In Day Township since 1930; another trapper says 1932. First beaver known in Marathon County were here in 1920 or so. Weston Township had first beaver dam in 1932. First noticed beaver in Harrison Township in 1930. On western end of Lake Wausau about 1932-34. Beaver have been in Brighton Township since 1925. Have been in Weston Township since 1920.

Marinette Co. Only a few colonies in Athelstane and surrounding townships in 1920. In Amberg and Wausaukee Townships since 1930. First seen in Lindquist Lake, Township of Pembine in 1925. In Amberg Township, main part of Pike River, back as far as 1926. I first noticed

them in Dunbar Township in 1929; another trapper says 1920. First saw them in Beaver Township in 1932. First beaver on Wausaukee River in Athelstane Township in 1912.

Oconto Co. First beaver came to Bagley Township in 1932. Wheeler Township had first beaver sign in 1937. Beaver appeared in Doty Township in 1936. First beaver around Mountain in 1936.

Oneida Co. Just as many in Lynne Township in 1925 as now. First beaver in Minocqua and Woodruff area in 1924; another trapper says 1912!

Vilas Co. In Presque Isle Township saw first beaver in 1915. Old timers talk of beaver here in Boulder Junction Township in 1880's. Beaver in Lincoln Township in 1929 for first time. Beaver appeared in Phelps Township on Deerskin River for first time in 1926-28. First beaver seen in Crescent Township in 1928. Beaver planted in Plum Lake Township in 1915. Boulder Junction Township had beaver in 1915.

Beaver were very low in the northeastern part of Wisconsin until about 1920-25. They increased for the next 15-20 years until they were found in abundance and trapped annually in all counties of the Northeast Area by 1940-42. The more southern counties had beaver populations build up at a later date (from 1920 to 1940) presumably by movement to the south from more dense nucleus populations to the north.

#### West Central Wisconsin\*

Before the early 1930's there were no beaver, or they were very rare in west central Wisconsin. Beaver had not been here for decades prior to this time. Deforestation, fires and heavy trapping pressure had eliminated them in this area probably by 1900.

In 1932-34 an effort was made by the Conservation Department to re-establish this animal in the West Central Area, an area with tremendous acreages of newly established aspens. Beaver were live-trapped on complaints in the far northern counties of the state by Mr. Jakoubek and others and transported to west central Wisconsin where they were released in Jackson, Juneau, Adams and Wood Counties.

After this initial stocking effort, the beaver populations increased rapidly, for they were given complete protection in optimum habitat. My own recollections (having lived in this area in the late thirties) confirm this information. Game men working for the Resettlement Administration also often mentioned the rarity of beaver in the early thirties and the rapid recovery of the population by the late thirties after the transplants.

---

\* Information supplied by many WCD personnel, especially E. Jensen (Adams), H. Weaver (Nekoosa), S. DeBoer and W. Radke (Black River Falls), and S. Plis (Babcock).

Maps and data from the intensive fur surveys of 1936 and 1937 in Monroe, Jackson and Juneau Counties show that beaver were widely scattered and relatively sparse; a few areas had relatively dense populations. These beaver furnished the basic stock that produced trappable numbers of beaver by 1941-43.

During the period 1910-30, large areas of marshland in west central Wisconsin were drained to develop the cranberry industry. The sweeping forest fires of this period created monotypes of aspen in large blocks. The combined effect of an excellent food supply and the creation of hundreds of miles of artificial waterways, in addition to the many streams of the area, led to the literal "explosion" of the beaver population in this area.

Comments by beaver trappers:

Adams Co. Beaver were first noticed in Preston Township in 1934. Beaver first appeared in Easton Township about 1942. First noticed beaver in Adams Township in 1935. First noticed beaver in Leola and Big Flats Townships in 1935. (This agrees well with the data on the 1932-35 beaver transplants. -- G.J.K.)

Buffalo Co. Saw first beaver in Nelson Township (Tiffany Bottoms) about 1925. Noticed first beaver sign in Buffalo Township in 1938. Noticed first beaver sign in Waumandee Township in 1940 and in 1945 by another beaver trapper. Saw my first beaver cuttings in Nelson Township in 1920, another trapper says at least present since 1930. Beaver planted in Alma Township in 1916 and by 1926 there were quite a few. Observed in 1930 by another trapper; in 1934 by another. In Township of Belvidere, first beaver colonies in 1936. Beaver noticed west of CB&Q RR tracks first time in 1920. Milton Township had first beaver in 1941. In 1934 in Mondovi and Gilmanton Townships. (These earlier dates for this area of west central Wisconsin are indicative that beaver moved down the Mississippi and Chippewa Rivers from more northern range, and apparently there was a transplant in 1916. --G.J.K.)

Clark Co. Beaver in Mentor Township as long as I can recall. Hendren Township has had beaver since at least 1925. First noticed beaver in Seif Township in 1920. Very few in colonies in Seif Township in 1926. First noticed beaver in Lynn and Sherwood Townships in 1919. First beaver in Washburn Township in 1925. In Mead and Butler Townships as early as 1919. On Popple River in town of Sherman in 1928.

Dunn Co. In Springbrook Township first in 1928 and another trapper says 1935. First saw beaver in Menominee Township in 1930, and another Eau Claire trapper says 1930 for this area also. Noticed first time in Eau Galle Township in 1940 and another trapper offers same date. Here in Sand Creek Township in 1932 for first time since 1880. In 1928 a colony started in Tiffany Township.



Eau Claire Co. Beaver have been in Bridge Creek Township as long as I can remember. Beaver in Ludington, Seymour and Bridge Creek Townships for at least 20 years. Beaver first seen in Lincoln Township in 1915. First beaver in northern Eau Claire County in 1924 and in southern half in 1931. First beaver in Clear Creek Township in 1915-25.

Jackson Co. Two brothers from City Point Township say beaver there for past 50 years! First noticed in Komensky Township in 1925. In Garfield Township since 1925. Only a rare beaver in Bear Bluff Township in 1920. I know beaver were in Jackson County since 1930. First beaver work I saw in Manchester Township was on Robinson Creek below Highway 27, in 1935. Very few beaver in Manchester Township in 1930. First beaver 3 miles south of Melrose in 1929. (This ties in well with previous data, but indicates rare occurrence before the 1932-34 plantings. -- G.J.K.)

Juneau Co. Beaver first noticed in Kildare Township in 1947. Positive the first beaver in Cutler Township in 1923, and another trapper says first in Cutler Township in 1947. (This information agrees poorly with our other data. -- G.J.K.)

LaCrosse Co. First beaver observed on Mississippi River at LaCrosse in 1934. First beaver in Holland Township in 1940. First noticed in 1945 on LaCrosse River, Barre Township.

Monroe Co. Angelo Township had first beaver in 1944. Beaver first noticed in Lincoln Township in 1940. New Lime Township had first beaver in 1937. There was one colony of beaver in Monroe County in 1932. Beaver first noticed in Sheldon Township one year ago (1949).

Pepin Co. Noticed them first in 1937 in Durand Township. Maybe they came from Nelson bottoms reserve.

Pierce Co. In 1931 first beaver were in Diamond Bluff Township; another says 1933 for this township. Very rare in Isabell Township in 1940 but by 1950 very common. In Clifton Township came in 1943.

Trempealeau Co. Beaver first worked up the river to Arcadia in 1943-44. Beaver first in northern part of county in 1927. First noticed beaver in Dodge Township in 1940.

Wood Co. Beaver have been in Port Edwards Township for last 20 years. First noticed in Milladore Township in 1930. Dexter Township had first beaver about 1936. In Seneca Township at least since 1940. Beaver first seen in Cranmoor Township in 1930; another trapper said in 1925. In Wood Township since at least 1942.

Beaver were moving into the Mississippi River counties in the early and mid-30's and a bit earlier in Buffalo County. Beaver in the northern part of this area were noticed in the mid-20's and presumably moved down from counties to the north of them. Beaver appeared in the central and eastern part of this area in the mid-30's due without doubt to the transplant of beaver during this period.

### East Central Wisconsin

Very few records exist concerning beaver history in this area. W. E. Scott developed a beaver distribution map in 1938 based on information received via a questionnaire to Department personnel. At this time, northwestern Portage County had a medium beaver population while the rest of the county is recorded as having a light (scarce) beaver population. Northwestern Waushara County and central Sheboygan County (Sheboygan Marsh) had light populations. An isolated colony was reported in northern Door County. Fond du Lac, Washington and Waukesha Counties had 2, 3 and 2 colonies, respectively; the beaver were presumably released at this time in the Kettle Moraine country. In the fall of 1928, 6 beaver were released in Horicon Marsh; subsequent records show a remnant population has existed here up to the present time. (L. R. Jahn)

Beaver populations spread eastward into the East Central Area from the rapidly increasing beaver population of the West Central Area during the period 1935-60. There were probably no beaver in the East Central Area for a number of decades before about 1930.

#### Comments by beaver trappers:

Door Co. Bailey's Harbor Township first had beaver brought here by W. B. Grange in 1929 and 1930.

Fond du Lac Co. The first beaver were seen in Forest Township in 1928.

Waushara Co. Beaver moved into Aurora Township in 1946.

Outagamie Co. Beaver have been here since 1948.

### Southern Wisconsin

Beaver began appearing on the lower Wisconsin and Lower Mississippi Rivers about 1940, and the first cuttings observed in many areas were often considered minor sensations.\* Seasons for trapping beaver in the southwestern counties were not opened until 1949, but there have been annual beaver trapping seasons since this time.

On the lower Wisconsin River in 1947, I came upon many beaver cuttings of large cottonwoods that dated back to 1943 and 1944 (based on resprout ages), but no indication of cuttings before this time. In 1950-52 I found soft maple, swamp white oak and green ash stumps with resprouts that were 8-10 years old on the lower Mississippi and lower Wisconsin Rivers. It is apparent that before 1941-43 beaver were uncommon and probably were non-existent during the mid-30's in this area.

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\* Information from W. Hiebing (Crawford Co.), J. Washburn (Richland Co.), J. Rubesh (Iowa Co.), A. Kvallek and O. Valley (Grant Co.), L. Fritz (Mazomanie area), and personal observation of the author since 1946.

## Comments by beaver trappers:

Columbia Co. Beaver have been in Lewiston Township since 1942 and another trapper substantiates this. Beaver first noticed in Ft. Winnebago Township in 1947.

Grant Co. No beaver in Bloomington Township in 1930. Now in 1950 many beaver colonies. Beaver first noticed in Waterloo Township in 1936. Beaver first noticed in Millville Township in 1936 and another trapper substantiates this. Beaver first seen around Muscoda in 1943-44. Harrison Township first had beaver in 1948.

Iowa Co. Beaver first noticed in Arena Township about 1938. Clyde Township had first beaver in 1944. Beaver have been in Pulaski Township since 1944.

Sauk Co. Beaver were first noticed in Honey Creek Township in 1947. First beaver in Witwen Marsh in 1945. Beaver have been in Troy Township since 1942. First moved into Prairie du Sac area in 1944.

Crawford Co. First beaver seen in Haney Township in 1939. Noticed first beaver in Freeman Township in 1940, and by 1950 100-125 houses.

Richland Co. First sign on Pine River in 1941.

Beaver undoubtedly moved down the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers during the late 1930's and began their build-up in southwestern Wisconsin during the next decade and a half. The eastern half of the southern area has no beaver, although there is a recent report of a colony seen in central Rock County in October, 1961 (H. Thorne).

## APPLICATION

The value of historical data on the distribution and relative density of beaver lies primarily in its support of other findings of the beaver research project, such as evaluation of optimum beaver habitat types, the calculated biotic potential of beaver, beaver movement, harvests per unit area, distribution of beaver and value of transplanting beaver seed stock into good to excellent beaver habitat that has had drastic population reductions through trapping.

Since it is abundantly evident that beaver were almost extirpated in Wisconsin by 1900, primarily by habitat destruction and secondarily by non-restrictive beaver trapping seasons, it is recommended that beaver seasons be established which will alter beaver populations slowly, and that closed seasons be established if beaver populations reach low densities in good to excellent habitat types.

The grass and scrub brush lands that occurred immediately following great fires soon reverted over large areas to pioneer aspen stands and historical facts show that beaver seed stocks in this type of habitat rapidly repopulated the once desolate lands. This points up the fact that to provide for optimum beaver production, it is important to maintain large expanses of this important beaver food by any forest management technique that is practicable.

Many areas are known in Wisconsin which from recent historical evidence showed a peak of beaver density correlated with a peak in pioneering aspen stands. However, areas in Ashland, Bayfield and Washburn Counties that carried high beaver populations even as early as the 1930's in their then abundant aspen stands are currently almost devoid of beaver because these areas are trending towards maple-conifer stands. Areas in Vilas, Oneida and Forest Counties show this same phenomenon and the West Central Area is also experiencing the same relationship between habitat change and beaver reduction for many of its aspenlands are being succeeded by oak, jack pine, white pine associations.

Recommendations for increasing beaver densities in local situations have been presented in other reports and directly to area game personnel.

