
POPULATIONS FURBEARERS

Concern

Muskrats and beaver are down (mink and wolverine unknown).

Only one scientific muskrat survey was conducted on the Flats in 1985/86 and it showed there were a lot of rats at that time. Traditional knowledge on muskrats on the Flats is extensive. It indicates a large decline from 1930 to 1934 and that it takes about 10 years for a rat population to recover. Traditional knowledge has always maintained that intensive trapping and hunting of muskrat maintained a high muskrat population and this is now generally accepted.

In recent years there has been generally much less trapping of muskrats, mink and wolverine (note: a number of wolverine taken last year) and the people feel this has upset the predator/prey and population dynamics that used to prevail there when people trapped a lot. For instance, mink are normally a major predator of muskrat and would help to limit the muskrat population. Trapping has declined, however, and the mink population has not increased greatly. With no predation on the muskrat population it may now be experiencing large increases and declines.

Decreased trapping has also, in turn, impacted the entire ecosystem. Previously, scavengers were able to take advantage of discarded carcasses of trapped muskrats, and caribou fed on the numerous muskrat push-ups in winter. Elders tell us that beaver were abundant in certain areas of Crow Flats such as Little Flat, the north edge of Crow Flats at Timber Creek, and the south edge of Crow Flats near King Edward Mountain. At the centre of Old Crow Flats, such as the Schaeffer Lake area, there were very few beaver.

Solution Keep track of furbearers.

Lack of existing programs covering the Flats combined with the low level of trapping requires special programs be created for monitoring furbearers. As always, expense is a key factor and coordination among governments and agencies and the community is important.

Actions

Responsible parties, Time line

VGFN
2001/02

Traditional knowledge field trip.

This is a companion project with the waterfowl monitoring action. It consists of a field trip by elders to the Flats to observe its present state and compare this with the past in order to maintain an ongoing record of the status of fish and wildlife and the environment there. Another proposal for this type of information was a school survey since this type of field trip already goes to Schaeffer Lake. As well, information collected by the Game Guardian could contribute here. Again, the need is for the VGFN government to establish a central information storage and access system. [2001-NY-AI-3]

PC
2002/03
2003/04

Wolverine and other furbearers survey to include Flats outside of park*.

A wolverine study is being prepared by a University of Calgary student for Vuntut Park as part of the Vuntut Park Plan because the general feeling is the population is quite high. In the interests of cooperating with this plan, the survey could be extended to the rest of the Flats outside the park and may include other furbearers as well. The methods are still being worked out. [2001-NY-AI-4]

*Note: This primarily belongs to the Vuntut Park Plan but is included here for coordination.

continued...

YG, VGFN
2003/04

Repeat 1986 muskrat survey.

This was an aerial survey where muskrat push-ups are counted on lakes. It was noted that the timing of such a survey is very important and that it is easiest to see the push-ups in the spring. Another consideration is that the survey should be done the same time of year as the last one for better comparison. [2001-NY-AI-5]

Muskrat

