White Coyote in Newfoundland

Stanley Jacobs with a rare white coyote, caught in the Badger Lake area of the province.

Dear readers. On November 16, 2014, in the Badger Lake area of the central interior region of Newfoundland, a longtime member of the NLTA, Stanley Jacobs of Westport, trapped a rare white coyote. Although this is not the first time a unique coloured animal of this type has been captured on the Island, it still definitely holds a memorable treasure in a father and son's trapping season.

It is in the appreciation and respect for all fellow trappers, the NLTA and the great Newfoundland and Labrador outdoors, that we wanted to share the following in continuous support for years to come.

Happy trapping.

Strategy for Accidental Lynx Harvest Flawed

by Mac Pitcher

Lynx and marten are often inadvertently harvested on Newfoundland in sets designed to capture other species, notably lynx in predator snares, and marten in land-based or shoreline mink sets. While the accidental harvest and non-reporting of marten is in itself a cause of major concern and mirrors many of the concerns involving lynx, this paper will focus only on lynx.

Lynx is a highly cyclic species, with population peaks occurring at approximate 10-year intervals. It is highly reliant on its primary prey species, which also cycles at approximate 10-year intervals, and so must be managed carefully. Most jurisdictions harvesting lynx allow for a harvest during the upswing of the snowshoe hare cycle, and curtail lynx trapping after the collapse of the hare cycle. An accurate assessment of both the hare population and lynx harvest levels is essential in ensuring that the species is managed properly.

In eastern Newfoundland, the last open season for lynx occurred approximately ten years ago in December 2005. Anecdotal and documented evidence suggests the eastern NF lynx population is again on the verge of peaking.

Newfoundland has over the years been divided into a number of lynx management zones; at present there are two insular zones. Currently the central, west and north of the island is open for lynx harvesting during the month of December only. The eastern sections, including the Avalon and Burin Peninsulas, have been closed since 2005, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that both lynx and hare numbers on the Avalon last crashed around 2004.

This open season discrepancy within insular Newfoundland, combined with the open trapping system, facilitates the non-reporting and misreporting of lynx harvested, and seriously compromises timely lynx management decisions.

However, there is a legal loophole in that lynx harvested in the closed zone can be reported as having been harvested in the open zone. Similarly, it is widely known that even in the open zone, lynx accidentally harvested in November are retained and reported as having been harvested during the December season. Similarly, lynx harvested accidentally after the December 31 season close are retained and reported in the following season's harvest.

In years when there is no open lynx season in Newfoundland, accidental lynx obviously cannot be reported and marketed employing that legal loophole, and it appears the majority of these lynx are retained until such time that the season re-opens. There has also been some suggestion that Newfoundland lynx taken in closed times may have been transported to other Canadian jurisdictions by commuting residents and reported as having been harvested there.

Regardless of the manner of non-reporting or misreporting, effective lynx management is seriously compromised, and this could result in management decisions that may adversely affect lynx recovery. A classic example of this would be the re-opening of the lynx season following a period of prolonged closure. If this closure had been island wide, then the problem would be further exacerbated. All the retained "deep-freezer lynx" are reported in that initial open season. This artificial number could be interpreted to mean that lynx are near or at peak numbers, and may affect management decisions that could induce long-term repercussions.

Lynx populations are intrinsically aligned with snowshoe hare populations and both are subject to the law of diminishing returns when numbers are down. When hares are scarce, snaring (and shooting) effort diminishes as success rate declines. It appears that lynx are similarly patterned with accidental harvest in predator snares. Simply put, when the lynx population is rising, more accidental lynx are taken. Conversely, when the lynx population is down, there are less accidental catches.

Our present management strategy is seriously flawed in that it is incapable of recording this illicit lynx harvest and sale, and consequently is out of sequence with how the lynx population is trending. There has to be a method adopted that promotes a stewardship attitude by trappers toward furbearer management – giving them an incentive to report accidental and out-of-season captures.

At least one Canadian province currently uses this principle. Page 26 of the *2014 - 2015 Alberta Guide To Trapping Regulations* states, "Trappers who accidentally take a fur-bearing animal during a closed season, after a quota has been filled or a species they are not licensed to trap, are required to deliver it to the nearest Fish and Wildlife office as soon as possible. The trapper will be required to complete a statutory declaration and the pelt will be registered and tagged. Circumstances will determine whether the animal may be returned to the trapper for sale purposes. The animal does not have to be skinned."

This cooperative and pro-active policy by Alberta (and possibly other jurisdictions) is to be commended. It creates a win-win situation for both the wildlife management agency and the trapper. The wildlife agency gets timely and accurate data at minimal budgetary and personnel resource cost, and the trapper, if sincerity can be established, is permitted to retain and market what is potentially a significant contribution to his/her annual harvest income.

In this era of government fiscal restraint and staff shortages, the ability for a resource agency to avail of reliable data at minimal cost is one that should be embraced. Any resource agency finding them selves in a similar predicament should seriously consider implementing the Alberta model.