



## River Otter Season Q&A

### **Why is Game, Fish and Parks proposing a river otter harvest beginning in 2020?**

The river otter has been protected since 1978 as a state threatened species. It was recently delisted because it met established goals for distribution and reproduction. While protected, river otters have been incidentally harvested by trappers, with an average of almost 17 otters trapped each year for the past 5 years. As state threatened species, these animals were required to be surrendered to GFP. Despite incidental take by trappers and other mortality causes, the river otter is expanding, especially in eastern South Dakota, and we have determined the population can support a limited harvest.

### **Why must river otter pelts be tagged and carcasses surrendered?**

Some species traded in international markets are covered by CITES, which stands for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna. Because the river otter is similar in appearance to a rare species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regulates and monitors river otter harvest. A state that plans to begin harvesting river otters must comply with certain regulations, which include approval of the harvest structure and tagging and marking of fur skins. GFP will require the surrender of river otter carcasses for data collection on sex, age, size, and other biological information.

### **How was the harvest limit determined?**

An average of 17 river otters are incidentally taken by trappers each year, a loss that is not affecting the species' expansion in South Dakota. We are proposing a conservative harvest of 15 river otters during the 2020 season, which GFP believes will not be an additive mortality factor. This proposal would allow trappers to keep harvested river otters during the open season rather than surrender them to GFP as is now required.

### **Why is the season statewide?**

Although river otters occupy some streams and rivers in western South Dakota, eastern South Dakota watersheds provide the most productive habitat for river otters. Harvesting a few river otters from western South Dakota is unlikely to impact the species' continued recovery and expansion.



## **Why are you proposing that only residents can harvest a river otter?**

This is the first river otter harvest opportunity in modern times, and we would like this unique, yet conservative, recreational opportunity to be available to resident trappers. Nonresident trappers have many opportunities to harvest river otters in many other states.

## **How were the season dates determined?**

The proposed season for 2020 is November 1 to December 31 or until the statewide harvest limit is reached. The November 1 date coincides with the start of beaver trapping. Most of the incidentally trapped river otters from the last five years were taken in November.

## **What do I do after I trap a river otter?**

As proposed, a trapper must report a harvested river otter to GFP within 24 hours. At that time, arrangements will be made to check in the detached pelt and surrender the carcass to a GFP office for registration and pelt tagging within 5 days of harvest.

## **What if I trap a river otter after the harvest limit has been reached?**

Trappers must regularly monitor status of the river otter harvest, which will be available on the agency's website and by calling a designated phone number. Once the season has closed (either on December 31 or after the harvest limit has been met, whichever comes first), a person has 24 hours to notify GFP of a harvested otter. Any river otter harvested after the 24-hour period following the close of the season will be considered incidental take and shall be surrendered to GFP.

## **How will Game, Fish and Parks coordinate with tribal wildlife departments about river otter harvest?**

Regional wildlife staff will inform tribal wildlife departments in their area of the 2020 river otter harvest once the proposal is finalized and answer or refer any questions about this action.