



## Conservation Federation of Missouri

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**Zachary Morris**  
*President*

**Tyler Schwartze**  
*Executive Director*

May 31, 2023

Missouri Department of Conservation  
Conservation Commission & Regulations Committee  
2901 W Truman Blvd  
Jefferson City, MO 65109

Subject: Consider changing the open season on muskrats and otters to run concurrently with the beaver season.

MDC Commission & Regulations Committee:

Founded in 1935, the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM) with over 90 affiliate organizations representing tens of thousands of Missourians, serves as the voice for the wise use and conservation of Missouri's abundant natural resources. CFM is a citizen's organization whose members and affiliates represent a broad and diverse array of interests, all with a deep concern for and appreciation of Missouri's natural resources.

We would like you to consider a trapping regulation change to season dates on muskrats and otters. Currently, it is legal to trap beavers in Missouri until the end of March each year but the otter and muskrat season closes at the end of February. It is virtually impossible to effectively capture beavers without also capturing muskrats and otters using lethal body grip type traps which is, by far, the most effective way to capture beavers.

In our opinion, the Missouri water trapper is given four choices in Missouri under the current regulatory structure:

- 1) The trapper can stop trapping beaver at the end of February. In some cases, trappers do not have access to the property until after all the deer seasons close and "ice out", especially in Northern MO, may not occur until sometime in February.
- 2) The trapper can legally commit wanton waste with muskrats and otters accidentally and unavoidably caught in March.
- 3) The trapper can call their Agent and the agent could eventually commit wanton waste.

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4) They can lie about when they captured the animal accidentally and unavoidably because they do not wish to commit wanton waste.

The previous reasoning MDC and the Missouri Trappers Association offered for not allowing the seasons to run concurrently was based upon the biology of the animals, their vulnerability to trapping, and the optics of orphaning baby otters and muskrats. We are in a different time. Populations of most furbearing animals are at all-time highs and comparatively, very little trapping still occurs. The fur markets are not likely to rebound any time within the next decade, so the concern of over-harvesting otter and muskrat populations is likewise not a legitimate concern.

Most Missouri water trappers currently trapping are doing so in an animal damage control capacity. Most of these do their work within the confines of the regular season because they have identified niche markets that allow them to make enough to justify their time without charging the landowner for their services. In this sense, trappers are not asking for additional opportunities, we want the legal ability not to have to throw them away when we catch them or be forced to lie about when we catch them because we do not wish to wantonly waste the harvested animal.

All of these points considered, we recommended that the Missouri Department of Conservation change the open season on muskrats and otters to run concurrently with the beaver season until the end of March, until such time that population indices dictate a reason to go back to a more conservative season framework.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

The Big Game, Turkey, and Furbearers Resource Advisory Committee  
The Conservation Federation of Missouri



# MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

## Headquarters

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SARA PARKER PAULEY, Director

June 22, 2023

Conservation Federation of Missouri  
Big Game, Turkey, and Furbearers Resource Advisory Committee  
728 West Main Street  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Big Game, Turkey, and Furbearers Resource Advisory Committee,

Your letter to the Missouri Conservation Commission and Missouri Department of Conservation's (Department) Regulations Committee has been received and as Chair I am happy to provide a response.

In your letter, you recommend changing the open trapping season for muskrats and otters to run concurrently with the beaver trapping season. The Department set trapping regulations for muskrat and river otter based on the animal's biology and concerns of many trapping organizations of trapping adult animals with dependent young during the month of March.

Given the start of a new river otter population study, upward trends in the both the otter and muskrat populations, and increased interest in additional trapping opportunities for these two species, the furbearer working group will be advised to consider regulation changes for these animals. The furbearer working group meets annually to review regulation change requests and typically meets mid to late summer each year. After reviewing these regulations, the group may recommend changes to be considered by the Regulations Committee and subsequently the commission.

If you have any further comments or questions regarding this topic, please contact Furbearer Biologist Nathaniel Bowersock at [Nathaniel.Bowersock@mdc.mo.gov](mailto:Nathaniel.Bowersock@mdc.mo.gov) or 573-815-7901 ext. 2903.

Sincerely,

JASON SUMNERS  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
(CHAIR, REGULATIONS COMMITTEE)

c: Conservation Commission  
Director Sara Parker Pauley  
Science Branch Chief Laura Conlee  
Furbearer Biologist Nathaniel Bowersock

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