

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
Game Division

Report No. 1073
May 17, 1950

THE 1950 BEAVER & OTTER SEASON

Region I

Following the unusually large take in 1945 and 1946, the season in the Upper Peninsula remained closed for three successive years. In 1949, a rapid increase in beaver numbers was readily apparent and the Game Division recommended an open season; however, a large number of trout fishermen, resort owners, and business men, acting through the Northern Michigan Sportsmen's Association, opposed this recommendation so vigorously that the season remained closed. At their convention in September 1949, the N.M.S.A. clubs again opposed the opening of the Upper Peninsula to beaver trapping by a vote of 55 to 29. Their action was based on the belief that beaver are essential to good trout fishing, that their dams provide excellent waterfowl habitat, and that much potential beaver habitat is not heavily stocked at present. However, the Conservation Commission, acting favorably on the Game Division's recommendation, opened the season in the Upper Peninsula for the first time in four years. This action was taken because of an exceptionally large beaver population, that in some areas was doing permanent damage to food supplies, an increasing number of damage complaints involving beaver, and strong popular sentiment for an open season.

From 1943 through 1946 the otter bag limit was included in the beaver limit. For example, in 1946, six animals could be taken, one of which could be an otter. However, the differential in prices received for pelts of these two species led many trappers to throw away, or otherwise dispose of the cheaper otter in favor of the higher priced beaver. This practice was eliminated in 1950 by declaring separate limits for each species (6 beaver and 2 otter).

A liberalization of the bag limit on otter was recommended by District and Regional personnel. However, the more conservative limit of two animals per license was adopted because it was felt that increasing the limit, while not increasing the take, would lend support to the idea that otter should be drastically reduced in numbers.

Reports of beaver abundance boosted license sales to a record high of 3,953 in the Upper Peninsula alone, though it was apparent that deep snow probably would deny access to many trapping sites and pre-season price quotations indicated that \$25.00 for blankets would be top price. Throughout the season snow depths varied from two to three and one half feet in the northern areas to from six inches to eighteen inches along the Lake Michigan shoreline. In some parts of the peninsula two-thirds of the trapping sites were inaccessible except via lengthy travel on snowshoes. A period of thawing weather prior to the season made snowshoeing extremely difficult. Alternate freezing and thawing with rain and sleet, prolonged this condition throughout the season. In District 1, low temperatures, following the third day, permitted limited travel on the morning crust. From 12 to 27 inches of ice covered lakes and ponds and only the fast water portions of streams were open.

Before it was apparent that there would be no pre-season breakup, observers predicted a record or near record take but as it became evident that many favorite trapping sites would remain inaccessible, the estimate dropped to a conservative 5,000.

However, in spite of poor trapping conditions, and prices at their lowest in many years, the third greatest take was recorded for the Upper Peninsula. Table I is a summary of the 1950 beaver and otter take in Region I with similar figures for 1946 for comparison.

TABLE 1
1950 BEAVER & OTTER TAKE, REGION I

| | | - 1946 - | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | County | Licenses Sold* | Beaver Take | Otter Take | Beaver Take | Otter Take |
| District 1 | Baraga | 194 | 377 | 8 | ** | |
| | Houghton | 327 | 604 | 5 | | |
| | Keweenaw | 68 | 87 | 3 | | |
| | Ontonagon | 415 | 659 | 9 | | |
| | Gogebic | 165 | 352 | 18 | | |
| | Total District | | <u>1169</u> | <u>2079</u> | <u>43</u> | <u>3345</u> |
| District 2 | Dickinson | 226 | 220 | 4 | | |
| | Iron | 337 | 605 | 36 | | |
| | Menominee | 138 | 231 | 11 | | |
| | Total District | <u>701</u> | <u>1056</u> | <u>51</u> | <u>1289</u> | <u>33</u> |
| District 3 | Alger | 104 | 422 | 20 | | |
| | Delta | 320 | 349 | 17 | | |
| | Marquette | 495 | 794 | 21 | Closed | |
| | Total District | <u>919</u> | <u>1565</u> | <u>58</u> | <u>1149</u> | <u>45</u> |
| District 4 | Chippewa | 503 | 648 | 11 | | |
| | Luce | 198 | 235 | 11 | | |
| | Mackinac | 114 | 709 | 13 | | |
| | Schoolcraft | 336 | 562 | 32 | | |
| | Total District | <u>1151</u> | <u>2154</u> | <u>67</u> | <u>2514</u> | <u>54</u> |
| Region | TOTALS | 3940 | 6854 | 219 | 8297 | 174 |
| Licenses sold to residents of Lower Peninsula Counties | | | | | | |
| | Clare | 2 | | | | |
| | Kent | 2 | | | | |
| | Washtenaw | 1 | | | | |
| | Total | <u>5</u> | | | | |
| Total Licenses Sold, Region I | | <u>3945</u> | | | | |

*By County of residence of trapper. A few trappers trapped in counties other than the county of residence.

**Records not kept by county in 1946.

A comparison of the beaver and otter seasons from 1940 to 1950 can be obtained from Figure 1.

Even though license sales were up slightly (4 per cent) over the 1946 total, trapping pressure was down compared to that season. In 1946, two-thirds of Menominee County and all of Marquette County were closed, whereas in 1950, a small portion of northern Marquette County was the only extensive closed area. Open water and roads in 1946 aided trappers whereas in 1950 adverse trapping and travel conditions caused many license holders to refrain from trapping or greatly curtail their activity. Many novices purchased licenses in 1950. All of these factors tended to reduce the trapping pressure in 1950 as compared to 1946.

The expected high take in District 4 materialized. A review of damage complaints involving beaver showed that 48 per cent of the 326 complaints from January to November of 1949 occurred in District 4. There is a tendency to consider damage complaints as a means of measuring comparative abundance of beaver but this must be used with reservations. District 1, reporting only 9 per cent of the damage complaints, produced almost an identical number of beaver (see Figure 2) on an area of similar size trapped by an almost identical number of trappers. In District 4 beaver are in closer contact with human habitations than in District 1 and hence the chances for damage to human interests are considerably greater than in District 1 even though beaver numbers may be comparable in both Districts.

The effect of opening Marquette County (a large beaver producing area) can be seen from the graphs in Figure 2.

While anti-otter sentiment is not as strong as in Region II, there is considerable agitation for an increase in the bag limit, and also for placing them on the predator list; with some fishermen and trappers suggesting a bounty. The take of 219 otter in the Region represents the record take for this species in the Upper Peninsula. This was expected since pre-season reports indicated otter have been slowly increasing in recent years. Figure 3 shows the proportionate take among the four districts for 1946 and 1950.

Prices paid for beaver pelts were comparable throughout the Region with blankets going for \$22.00 to \$26.00; extra large, \$18.00 to \$20.00; large \$15-18.; medium, \$10-14.; small \$4-8. and kits as low as \$1.00. Otter pelts brought \$6.00 to \$15.00 depending on their size and condition. The average price paid for these pelts was \$9.00.

There was considerable sentiment prior to the season for an April 1 opening. Many trappers complained during and after the season that normal weather conditions make an April 1 opening almost mandatory. The exceptionally late break-up in 1950 intensified their feelings on this point.

There was an almost universal complaint that the \$2.00 sealing fee is too high in the face of such low fur prices. Trappers are justified in this complaint. With pelt prices averaging \$15.00 or less, a fee of \$2.00 per seal seems excessive. Both a reduction to \$.50 or \$1.00 per seal or a flat sealing fee regardless of the number taken have been suggested. A change would require legislative action, but it should be considered.

When a different bag limit for the Upper and Lower Peninsulas was established in 1950, there arose a possibility that Lower Peninsula trappers might travel to the Upper Peninsula in large enough numbers to cause unfavorable sentiment among Upper Peninsula residents. However, it was felt that low fur prices

and the fact that only three additional animals could be taken in Region I would keep the movement at a minimum. The latter prediction was borne out in fact since only 74 Lower Peninsula trappers were reported in Region I. (District 1, 6; District 2, 5; District 3, 2; District 4, 61). Undoubtedly, there were others who were not reported but certainly there was no great influx. Ferry operators at Mackinac City reported "a few" on each boat on March 24, 25, 26 and 27. Upper Peninsula trappers expressed no opposition to this movement.

Generally speaking, the residual population of both beaver and otter is good throughout the Region. District 1 reports "plenty of beaver left." District 2 estimates that "only half of the harvestable crop was taken." District 3 states that less than 30 per cent of the population was taken and that the residual population is good. District 4 estimates that "10 per cent or less of the otter and 25 per cent or less of the beaver were trapped."

On the basis of post season observations, it seems likely that a similar season could be considered for 1951 without fear of harm being done either to the beaver population or to the trout and waterfowl benefits that their activity creates.

Region II

Pre-season reports of a relatively low beaver population together with low fur prices and the probability of poor weather conditions, held license sales in the Region to 67 per cent of the 1949 total.

There was considerable feeling among residents of the Region that the record take in 1949 depleted beaver numbers to a point where a closed season was advisable. However, recommendations from the Game Division field men indicated that a conservative open season with a limit of three beaver and three otter would not cut too deeply into the population. As in Region I, a liberalization of the bag limit on otter was recommended by the District and Regional personnel, but the more conservative limit of two animals per trapper was adopted as in the Upper Peninsula.

Nine of the southernmost counties in the Region (Bay, Isabella, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Midland, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana) were closed in order that the few beaver present might increase. Beaver numbers and the nature of the land are such that little damage will occur if some increase is permitted.

Trapping conditions in District 5 were more favorable than in the more southerly districts. In the northern part of the Peninsula, temperatures ranged from 10 to 52 degrees above zero and snow depths shrank from 18 to 4 inches as the season progressed. Up to 16 inches of ice on the lakes and ponds made trapping difficult but most all trapping sites were accessible. In Districts 6, 7, 8 & 9, muddy and flooded roads kept trappers away from some trapping sites and fluctuating water levels made trapping difficult if not impossible. Many trappers pulled their traps after the first two days hoping for more stabilized water levels, but fluctuations caused by rain, sleet, snow, and alternate freezing continued for the remainder of the season. Many traps had to be left set after the season was closed. Some were lost permanently. This alternate freezing and thawing was one factor in preventing a larger take of otter since these conditions obliterate otter signs, the location of which is essential to successful trap setting.

Table 2 gives the kill record per county and district in Region II with comparable figures for 1949.

TABLE 2
1950 BEAVER & OTTER TAKE, REGION II

- 1949 -

| | County | Licenses Sold* | Beaver Take | Otter Take | Beaver Take | Otter Take |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| District 5 | Alpena | 34 | 36 | 3 | 180 | 13 |
| | Antrim | 3 | 30 | 2 | 52 | 4 |
| | Charlevoix | 28 | 13 | 1 | 41 | 1 |
| | Cheboygan | 68 | 120 | 13 | 159 | 6 |
| | Emmet | 19 | 26 | 2 | 96 | 4 |
| | Montmorency | 52 | 47 | 14 | 197 | 12 |
| | Otsego | 20 | 17 | 0 | 69 | 5 |
| | Presque Isle | 76 | 85 | 19 | 199 | 16 |
| | Total District | 300 | 374 | 54 | 993 | 61 |
| District 6 | Benzie | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Grand Traverse | 17 | 9 | 4 | 54 | 0 |
| | Kalkaska | 28 | 45 | 4 | 166 | 15 |
| | Leelanau | 7 | 5 | 0 | 8 | 1 |
| | Manistee | 8 | 2 | 2 | 25 | 2 |
| | Missaukee | 26 | 43 | 5 | 77 | 10 |
| | Wexford | 15 | 19 | 3 | 21 | 4 |
| | Total District | 101 | 123 | 18 | 351 | 32 |
| District 7 | Alcona | 64 | 98 | 3 | 202 | 12 |
| | Crawford | 26 | 39 | 8 | 71 | 7 |
| | Iosco | 50 | 34 | 0 | 150 | 2 |
| | Ogemaw | 157 | 153 | 7 | 479 | 6 |
| | Oscoda | 26 | 43 | 4 | 103 | 4 |
| | Roscommon | 76 | 134 | 14 | 259 | 8 |
| | Total District | 399 | 501 | 36 | 1264 | 39 |
| District 8 | Osceola | 44 | 40 | 1 | 69 | 2 |
| | Total District | 44 | 40 | 1 | 69 | 2 |
| District 9 | Arenac | 70 | 50 | 1 | 204 | 0 |
| | Clare | 45 | 89 | 5 | 237 | 8 |
| | Gladwin | 67 | 84 | 5 | 270 | 10 |
| | Total District | 182 | 223 | 11 | 711 | 18 |
| Districts 8 & 9 | Isabella | | | | 13 | 2 |
| | Lake | | | | 15 | 0 |
| | Mecosta | | | | 361 | 0 |
| | Midland | | | | 62 | 0 |
| | Newaygo | | | | 93 | 0 |
| Total | | | | 544 | 2 | |
| Region | TOTALS | 1026 | 1261 | 120 | 3932 | 154** |

*Some trappers purchased licenses in one county and trapped in another area.

**No County of trap given for 3 otter (Total Otter - 157)

The 1950 beaver kill dropped to 1,261 animals, or 32 per cent of the 1949 record take of 3,932 in Region II. Of the 1949 total for the Region, 544 were taken in counties that were closed to trapping in 1950. The proportionate take in each district has remained nearly identical for 1950 and 1949. This is shown graphically in Figure 4. This year, as in previous years, the greatest kill was made in the northeastern part of the Lower Peninsula.

The otter take, always more or less stable from year to year, dropped to 120 for the Region or 76 per cent of the 1949 kill. Like the beaver take, the proportionate otter kill in each district was very similar to that of 1949. (Figure 5).

Prices paid for pelts varied little from those received throughout the State. Blankets averaged \$24.00 but top grades brought \$30.00 in District 6 and 7. Mediums brought as high as \$12.00 but most went for \$9.00 to \$10.00. Small sizes brought an average price of \$5.50 but some sold for as low as \$3.00.

The best otter pelts brought an average price of \$12.00 with a high of \$16.00. Mediums averaged \$8.00 and small sizes brought \$4.00 to \$5.00, with some going at \$8.00 and a few as low as \$1.00. Some fur buyers were of the opinion that fall or winter otter pelts would bring double the value of the spring caught hides. Others thought that \$20.00 would be a good price for a fall or winter-caught non-singed pelt.

Prior to the season, there was considerable concern among residents, trappers and some department personnel as to what an open season would do to the already low beaver population. Reports of a low population after the season might indicate that this concern was well founded, although it is thought that there is a fair breeding stock remaining throughout the Region and that the pre-season population in 1951 will be equal to that of 1950. Summer and fall counts will have to be made before any definite predictions can be made regarding the 1951 season.

Beaver numbers are reported lowest in District 6 and in Oscoda, Crawford and Roscommon Counties. Osceola County reports a good residual population with fewer than 25 per cent of the population being trapped. Mecosta, Newaygo and Lake Counties report fair to good populations.

The otter population is reported as high throughout most of the Region since few of the estimated pre-season population were taken. Many trappers believe that the take would be increased over 200 per cent if a fall or winter season were established. While this point is one of conjecture, it is true that an annual take of 200 to 300 otter from the Lower Peninsula alone probably could not be maintained for long without seriously depleting otter numbers.

There is considerable agitation for a liberalization of the bag limit on otter especially from some resort owners and fishermen in the vicinity of the North Branch of the Au Sable River in Otsego and Crawford Counties, the Manistee River in Wexford County, the Sturgeon River in Otsego and Cheboygan Counties, and in the Lake St. Helen Area.

While an increase in the bag limit would no doubt serve to relieve pressure on the Department from the anti-otter interests, it would not increase the take measurably. A longer or different season on otter might increase the take but this would create other problems. A December season coinciding with the last two weeks of the muskrat season in Region II has been suggested as a means of increasing the otter take and of getting higher prices for pelts. There would be a law enforcement

problem involved with such a season due to the fact that it is difficult to trap otter without taking some beaver. It might be possible to restrict the placing of traps in such a manner as to hold the accidental illegal take of beaver to a minimum. Conservation officers are divided in their opinion as to the feasibility of such a change.

Region II trappers voiced considerable opposition to the \$2.00 sealing fee. There were also strong protests made against limiting the size of beaver traps to those having a 6-inch or less jaw spread. This restriction was adopted by the 1949 legislature but it has been found unsatisfactory and has not been enforced.

If it is advisable to limit the size of traps, the limit should be raised to 8-inches. This limit would include most of the best beaver traps having a jaw spread of 7 to 7½ inches. Such a change is recommended by Game Division personnel.

Region III

The entire Region was open except for small areas and stream sections on state-owned land in Barry and Kalamazoo Counties, though beaver numbers were reported very low or entirely absent.

It is felt that beaver should not be permitted to occur in large numbers in agricultural areas and annual open seasons seem to be the best way to accomplish this. Beaver do have a place as an aesthetic and educational attraction and on certain state-owned lands they do not constitute a threat to agricultural lands, roads and other interests of man.

The pre-season population was considerably below that of 1949 when 59 trappers took 184 beaver. In southwestern Michigan the snow cover and most of the ice was gone before the season and roads were passable although "going was very rough." Most trapping sites were accessible. In the central part of the Region most roads were passable and the trapping sites were accessible but the breakup of lake ice on and after March 23 and the subsequent flooding, made trapping somewhat difficult for the remainder of the open season.

Table 3 gives the kill record per county in this Region with comparable figures for 1949.

TABLE 3
1950 BEAVER TAKE, REGION III

| County | Licenses Sold* | Beaver Take | 1949 Beaver Take |
|------------|----------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Barry | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Berrien | 5 | 6 | 11 |
| Calhoun | 4 | 5 | 18 |
| Eaton | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Hillsdale | 4 | 14 | 0 |
| Ingham | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Jackson | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Kalamazoo | 11 | 19 | 28 |
| Kent | 1 | 0 | 14 |
| Montcalm | 13 | 10 | 63 |
| Saginaw | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| Shiawassee | 5 | 0 | 9 |
| St. Joseph | 10 | 8 | 23 |
| Wayne | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Cass | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Clinton | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| TOTALS | 67 | 63 | 184 |

As in 1949, almost all of the beaver taken in Region III were trapped in the southwestern counties. There was an unofficial report of one beaver being taken in Saginaw County. This was unconfirmed. Several residents of this area were concerned about the welfare of the beaver in Saginaw and Shiawassee Counties and had expressed dissatisfaction with the opening of the season there.

There was little variation in the prices paid for pelts throughout the Region. Blankets averaged \$24.00 with a top price of \$25.00, large to mediums brought \$15.00, but many sold for as low as \$10.00 or \$12.00. Small sizes sold for \$6.00 to \$12.00 and kits were considerably below that amount. As would be expected, trappers, remembering the bonanza years of 1945 and 1946, were dissatisfied with the prices.

Some otter pelts were sold in Region III that were taken in the northern counties. Top price, for the state as a whole, was paid by a dealer in Game District 16. Average price for this species was \$12.00 to \$15.00 for medium to large and \$6.00 to \$8.00 for small pelts.

The population of beavers in the southwestern counties remains high following the trapping season and it is thought to be high enough to constitute a nuisance before the 1951 trapping season removes some of their numbers. Some flooding of crop lands and plugging of drains will no doubt occur since it has been estimated that upwards of 200 beaver are in the area at the present time.

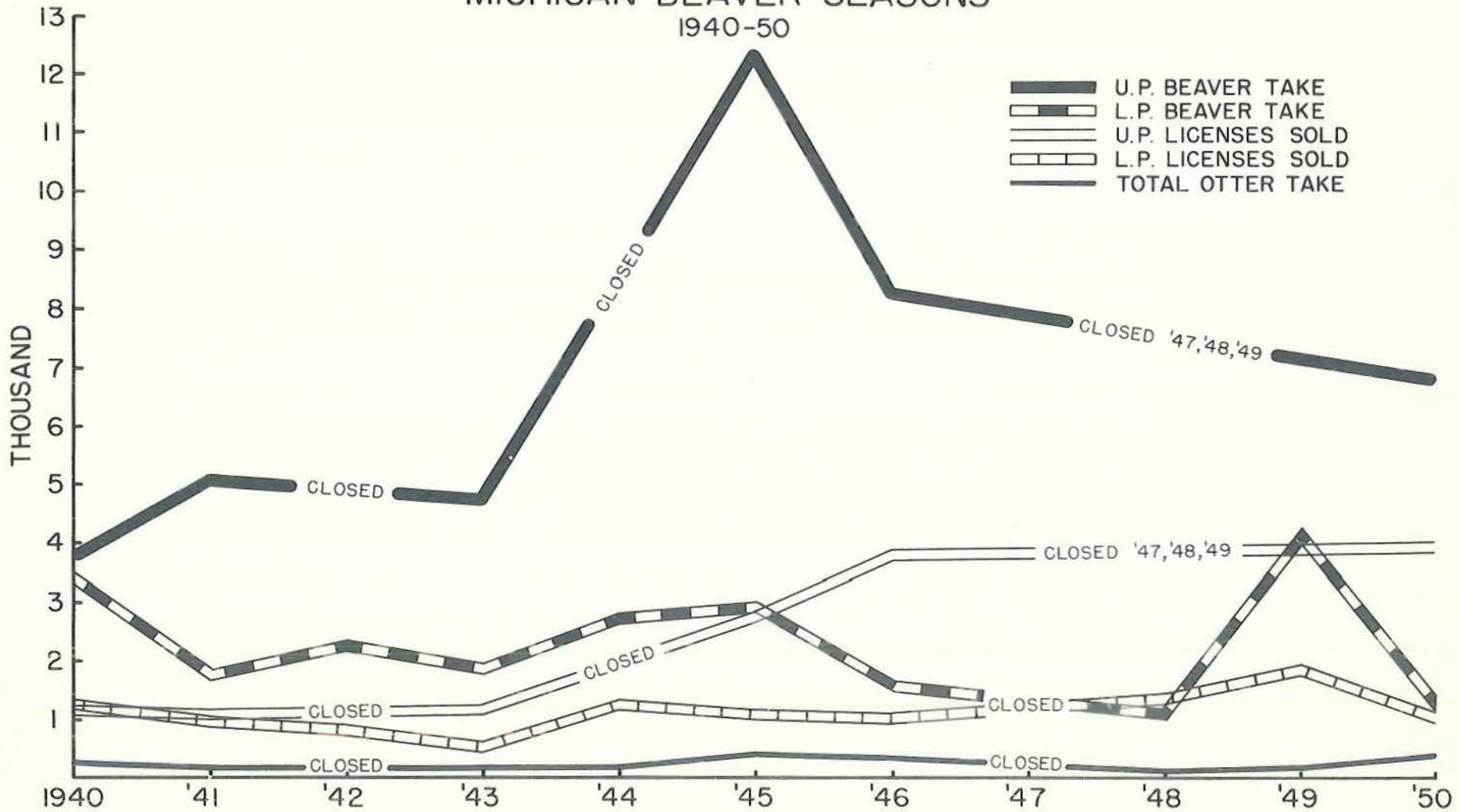
Generally speaking, reactions of trappers and landowners to the 1950 regulations throughout the southern counties, were favorable or at least neutral. Control of trapping in Region III is more a function of the individual landowners than it is in the north. This together with the relatively low beaver population, eliminates much of the controversies that are common in Regions I & II.

Residual populations in the south-central counties are low; probably less than 50 animals are present. It is felt that about one-third of the total population was trapped out.

There were no known beaver colonies present in the eastern counties prior to the open season although there have been reports of beaver in Genesee County. No beaver or otter were taken in this area.

D. H. Jenkins

MICHIGAN BEAVER SEASONS 1940-50

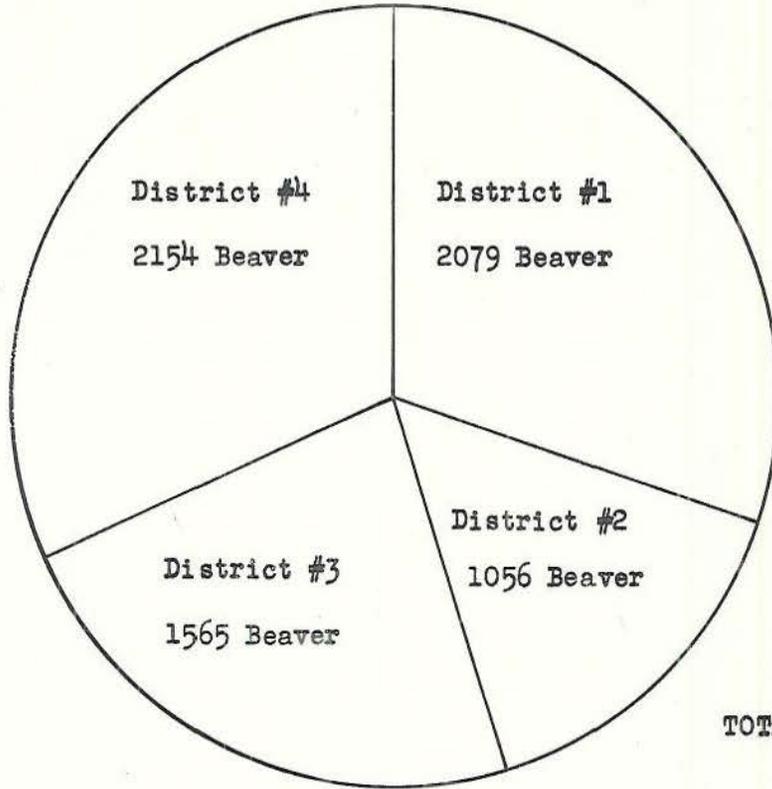


| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|--------|-------------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| U.P. SEASONS | APR 1-15 | APR 1-15 | CLOSED | APR 1-15 | CLOSED | APR 1-15 | APR 1-10 | CLOSED | CLOSED | CLOSED | MAR 25-APR 9 |
| L.P. SEASONS | MAR 20 APR 10 | MAR 20 APR 3 | MAR 19 APR 1 | MAR 15-31 | MAR 15-31 | MAR 17-31 | MAR 27 APR 5 | CLOSED | MAR 1-7 | MAR 20-31 | MAR 20-31 |
| SEASON LIMIT | 8 & 2 OTTER | 8 & 2 OTTER | 8 & 0 OTTER | 8 (2 OTTER) | 8 (2 OTTER) | 8 (2 OTTER) | 6 (1 OTTER) | | 4 & 2 OTTER | 5 & 2 OTTER | 6 & 2 OTTER L.P. 3 & 2 OTTER |

Fig. 1

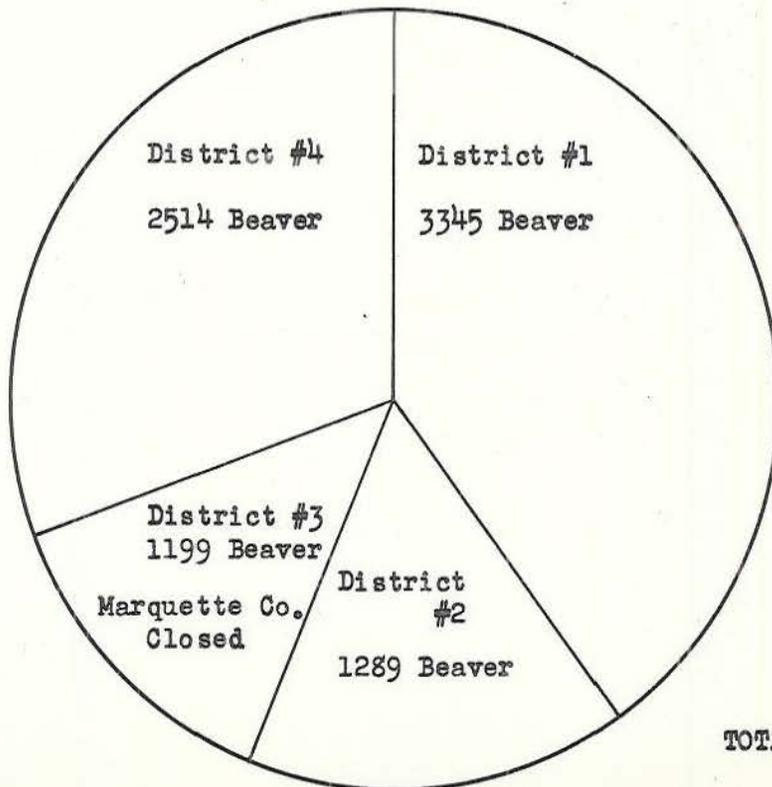
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
Game Division

1950 BEAVER TAKE
Region I



TOTAL TAKE: 6854 Beaver

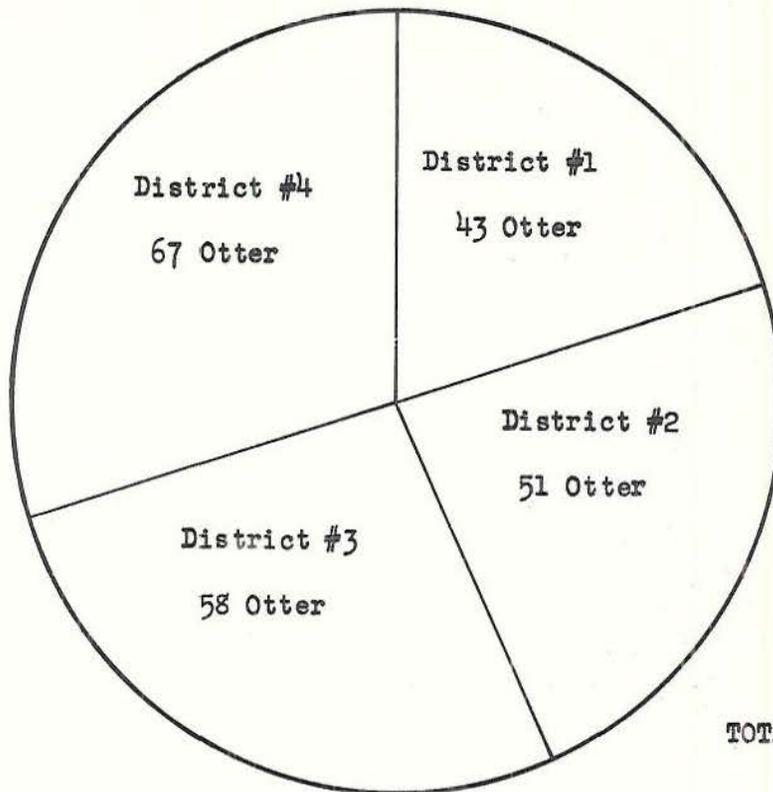
1946 BEAVER TAKE
Region I



TOTAL TAKE: 8297 Beaver

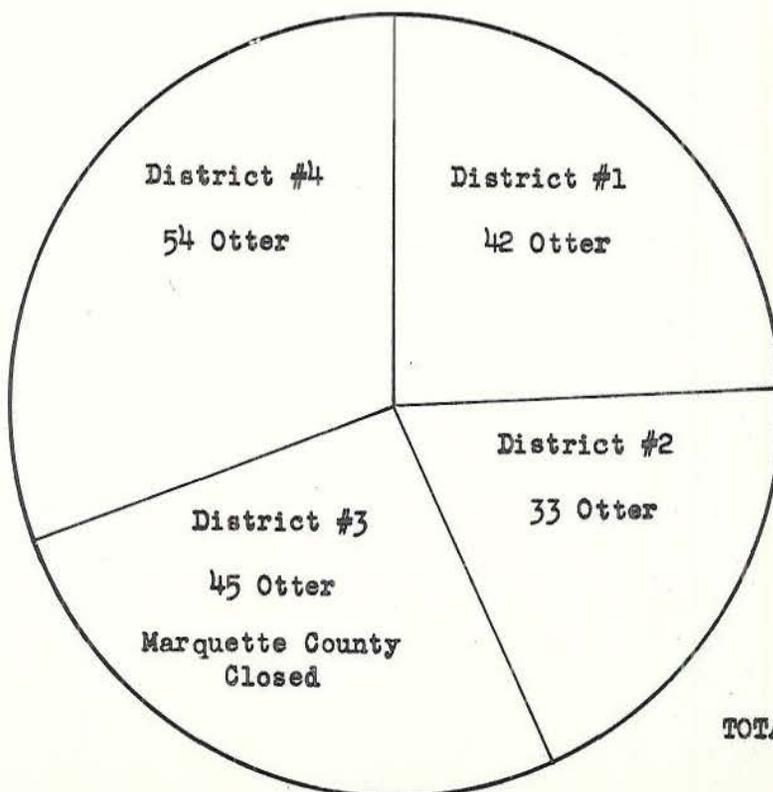
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
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1950 OTTER TAKE
Region I



TOTAL TAKE: 219 Otter

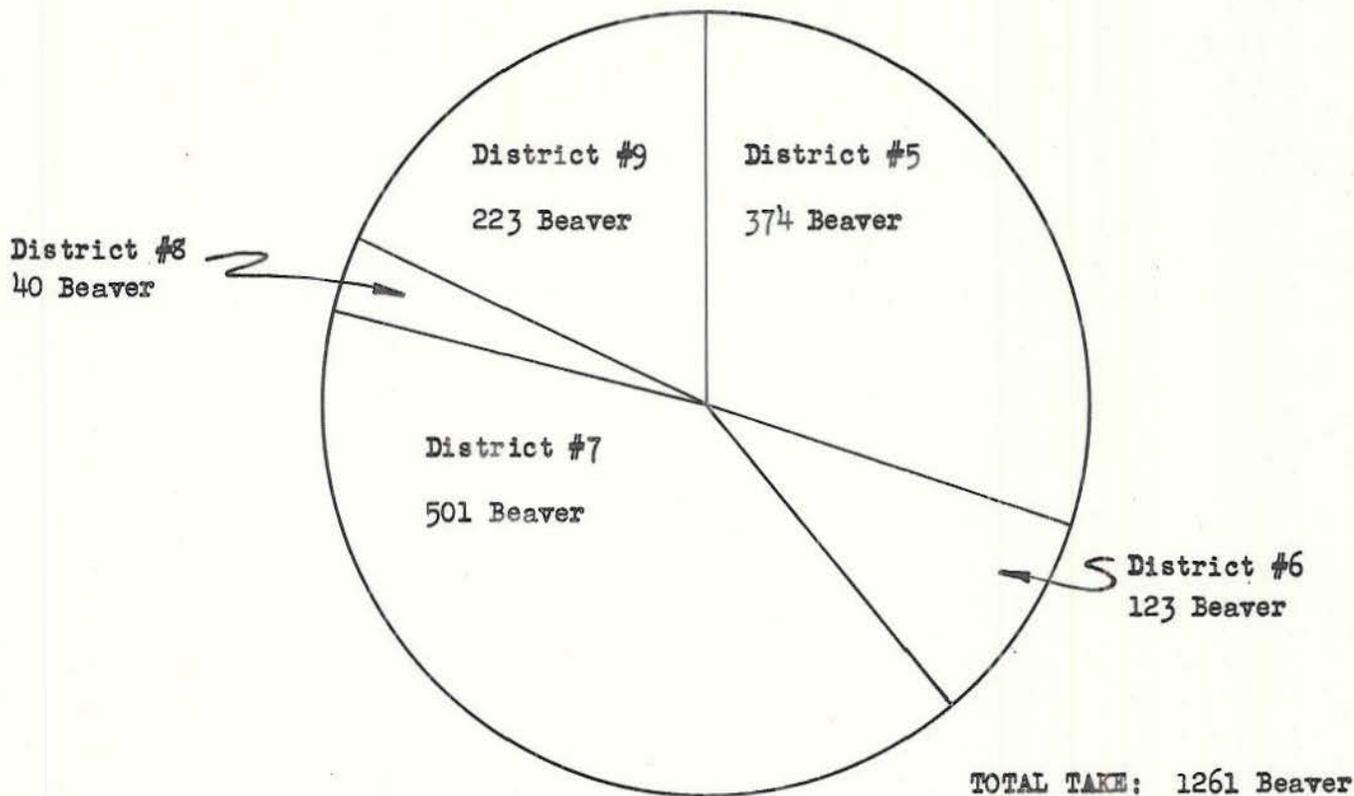
1946 OTTER TAKE
Region I



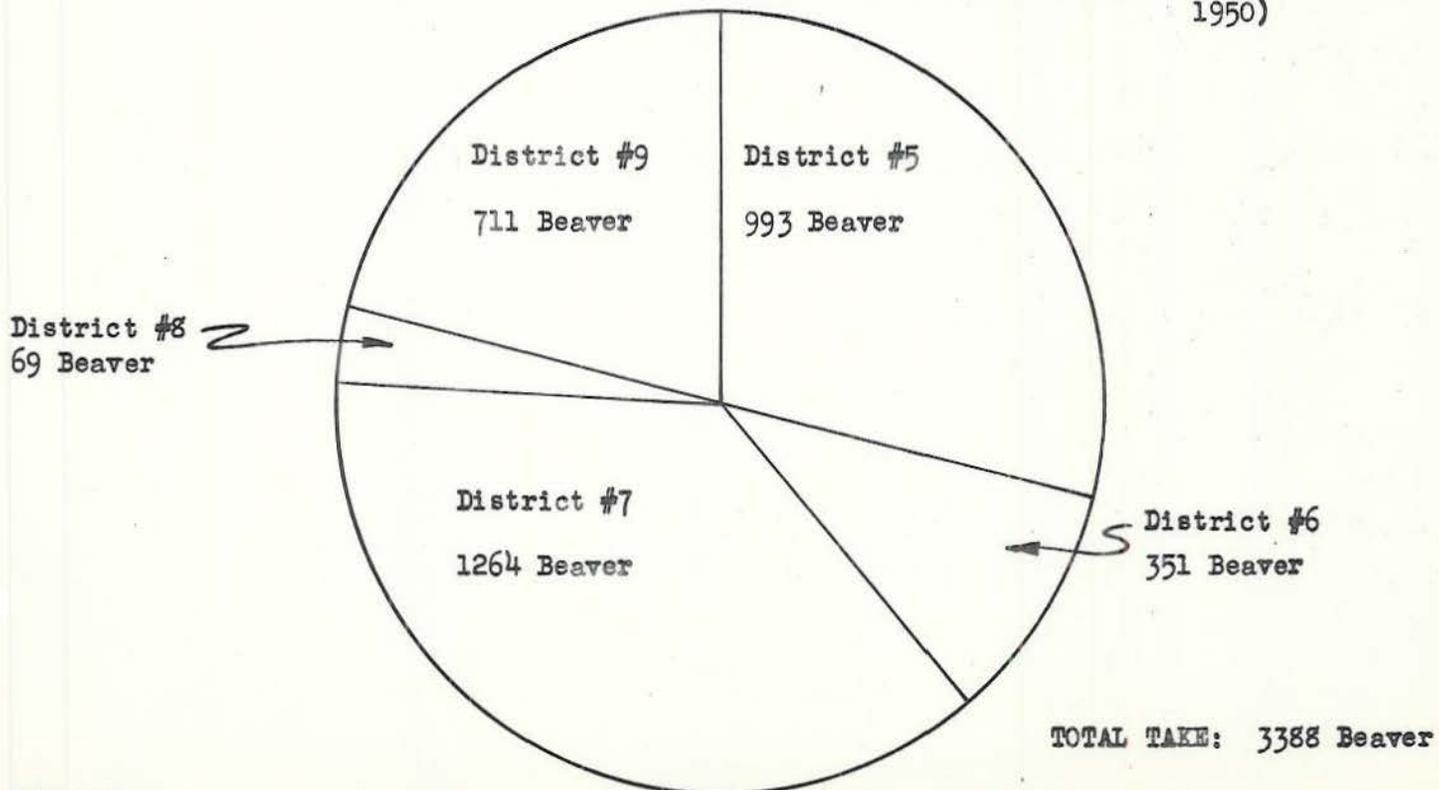
TOTAL TAKE: 174 Otter

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
Game Division

1950 BEAVER TAKE
Region II



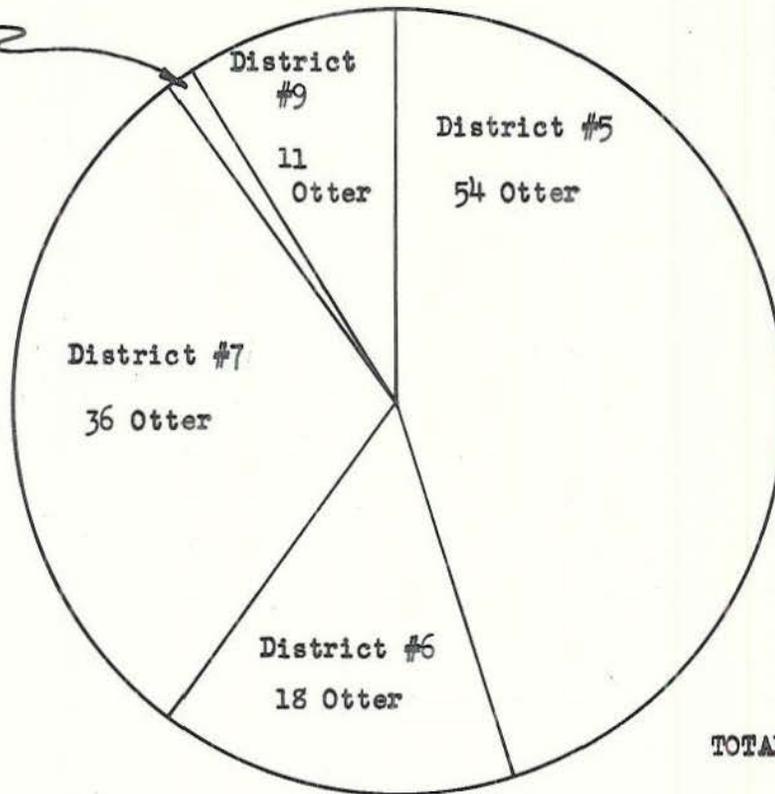
1949 BEAVER TAKE
Region II (For same counties that were open in 1950)



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
Game Division

1950 OTTER TAKE
Region II

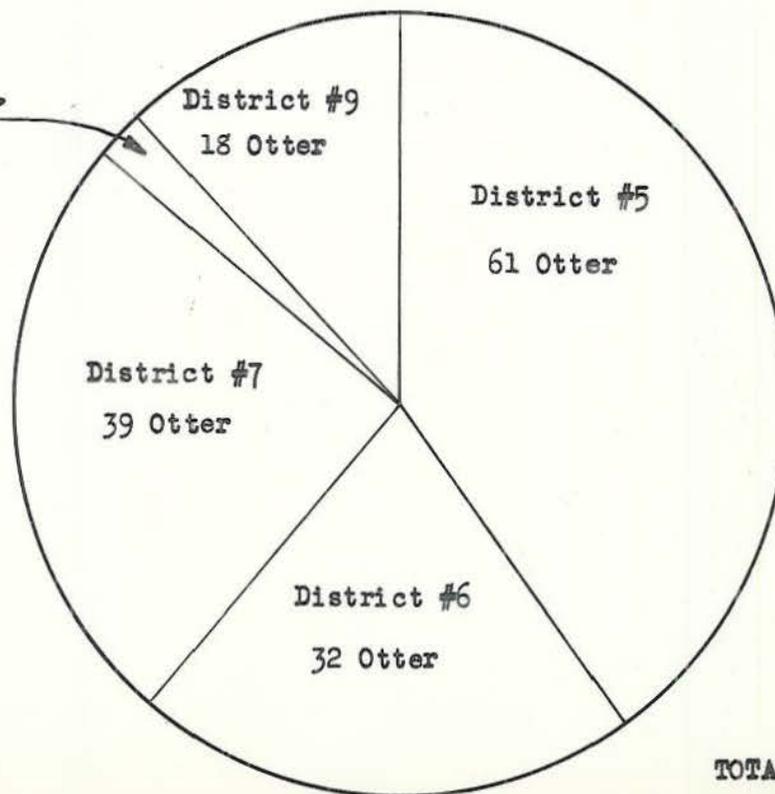
District #8
1 Otter



TOTAL TAKE: 120 Otter

1949 OTTER TAKE
Region II

District #8
2 Otter



TOTAL TAKE: 157 Otter