



West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

Furbearer Management Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2011

Wildlife Resources Section

Welcome to the current issue of the Furbearer Management Newsletter. Hopefully, you had a productive trapping and hunting season. This year will bring some welcome changes including clarified trapping regulations and the addition of an otter trapping season. During the coming year we will continue working on clarifying and simplifying trapping regulations to protect the resource and increase your enjoyment of the same. Final harvest figures for the 2010-11 trapping season are currently being tabulated and will be in the next issue of the newsletter. Please direct correspondence to: Rich Rogers, WVDNR, 1 Depot St., Romney, WV 26757, Rich.E.Rogers@wv.gov.

River Otter Trapping Season to Open November 5, 2011

The new statewide season will open on Saturday, November 5, 2011 and close February 29, 2012. The season bag limit is one otter per trapper. Trappers will be required to check their catch at an official game checking station. CITES seals will be required to sell otter pelts on the international market. These are the same type of seals that are currently affixed to all bobcat pelts for the same purpose. CITES export authority has been applied for by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources and has been granted.

Trappers will be asked to voluntarily bring the skinned carcasses of their trapped otters to a DNR District Office or contact a biologist to arrange for a pick up. Otter age and sex data will be collected to refine the population model that will be used to monitor population response to the harvest. In this way, we will assure that the harvest is not detrimental to the state's otter population.

How Not to Catch an Otter!!

With the coming of West Virginia's first modern day otter trapping season this fall, most trappers are focusing on learning how to trap one. Very few are also trying to learn how to NOT trap an otter. A large number of otters are caught in beaver traps. Since the yearly bag limit is currently set at one otter per trapper, trappers need to learn how to modify and set traps so they will decrease their chance of catching otters when desired or necessary.

Tips to avoid catching otter:

1. Avoid trapping any crossovers and beaver dams.
2. Avoid trapping abandoned beaver lodge or den entrances.
3. When using body-gripping traps, do not use anything smaller than a 330 with triggers straight and offset completely to one side of the open trap allowing otter to pass through without triggering the trap.
4. Avoid setting traps in channels and underwater runs.
5. Avoid blind sets. Use baited sets and realize that male otters may be attracted to castor mounds in the spring. Baited foot hold sets should have traps placed in 8-10 inches of water for hind foot catches on beaver. Beaver food lures hold almost no attraction for otter.
6. When beaver trapping, get in and out of the area as quickly as possible avoiding long periods of time with traps set in the same location.

Finally, make sure you take a sufficiently strong catch pole with you whenever you trap to help in releasing otters you do not want to harvest. Unintentional catches resulting in a dead otter must be reported to the WVDNR and the carcass must be turned in as in the past.

Hunter/Trapper Raccoon Pelt Sales

Last year was the first year that fur dealers were required to report whether raccoon pelts purchased were obtained from either trappers or hunters. First year results indicated that 36% of all pelts purchased in West Virginia were obtained from hunters. Past data from other states have shown that, in states with a strong hunting hound tradition, hunters harvest larger proportions of raccoons during years of high pelt prices. Thus, 36% is still a high percent of the total considering the recent history of subpar fur markets. Percent of raccoon pelts sold by hunters in Virginia is less than half of West Virginia's. Obviously, West Virginians still retain a strong bond with their hunting dogs.

Spotted Skunk Sightings

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources is continuing to document distribution of spotted skunks in the state. The majority of reports in the past have come from trappers. Recently, spotted skunks have been caught on trail cameras at sites that have been baited to catch eagles for another, approved study. Carcasses used for bait at these sites attract a number of furbearers that have been caught on film. Trappers are still being asked to email locations of their spotted skunk catches to the address at the top of this newsletter.

Below are a few of the more recent photos from Grant, Pendleton, and Greenbrier Counties. Deer carcasses used to lure eagles are road killed animals. Be reminded that setting traps within 50 feet of a carcass is illegal. The main reason for this law being to avoid catching and fatally injuring federally protected birds of prey.

Spotted skunk range and numbers have decreased dramatically over the past few decades. Most spotted skunks are now found at higher elevations. Biologists have hypothesized that predation and changing habitat may be major factors involved.

Regional Coyote Food Habits Study Update

The coyote food habits study being conducted by Geriann Albers at West Virginia University is being wrapped up. Close to 300 stomachs have been sampled over the past year. Preliminary analyses have indicated that there may be very few differences in food items consumed between seasons and regions of the state.

For further information, contact Geriann Albers at (304)293-0050, galbers@mix.wvu.edu, or Rich Rogers, WVDNR Furbearer Program Coordinator at (304)822-3551, Rich.E.Rogers@wv.gov.

West Virginia to Host Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee Meeting

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources will be hosting the 2011 meeting of the Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee this fall. The purpose of the meeting is to serve as a forum for furbearer biologists to share information and provide guidance on regional furbearer related issues. West Virginia biologists actively serve on both the northeast and southeast committees. Exact location and dates for this year's meeting are yet to be determined.

2010-11 Raccoon Field Trial Survey

The 2010-11 Raccoon Field Trial Survey has been completed. Results indicate raccoon hunting success is statistically similar to last year in all regions of the state. Central and southern counties reporting showed over 1 raccoon/hour of hunting time. Mountain and eastern panhandle counties showed just over 0.5 raccoon/hour of hunting time. The abbreviated hunter's summary is provided below:

WV RACCOON FIELD TRIAL SURVEY 2010-11

Hunter's Summary

What it is

In 1992, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources and the West Virginia Coon Hunter's Association started a survey to monitor raccoon populations by using nite hunt scorecard information. Keeping a check on raccoon numbers is an important step in identifying problems if and when they should occur. This survey has been a way for houndsmen and biologists to work together for the good of the raccoon resource.

How it works

The state has been divided into 4 regions based on similarities in hunting pressure and habitat. Average numbers of raccoons seen on a cast are calculated for each region. The survey begins in April of each year when most young are born.

What we learned

Although there are numerical changes, coon hunting success (#coons seen/2 hrs. hunting time) and cast success (% casts where coon are seen) are statistically unchanged from last year. Results from 37 hunts were used in this year's survey which is well below half of the registered hunts and includes a few non-registered hunts. *This continues to show a poor level of participation by most clubs! Please have your club participate in this survey!*

Statewide coon hunting success remained stable and was similar to last year. Championship casts saw more coons than registered casts in all Regions.

Now refer to the figures on the next page. For the third time Region 2 is similar to Region 1 showing highest number of coons seen per cast. Mast conditions in 2009 were poor-fair throughout the state and probably contributed little to recruitment of young the following year. Pockets of good mast production were reported and it is possible that this contributed to good hunting success. Extremely harsh winter conditions may also have contributed to lower survival.

Region 3 produced the lowest hunting success in the state this year. Insufficient data from this region last year made it impossible to compare to this year.

Region 4 showed a 26% decrease in hunting success over last year which may have been due again in part to, at best, only fair mast conditions having led to lower than normal survival and reproduction.

Our conclusions

Raccoon numbers were statistically similar to last year, but numerically lower for the whole state. The best hunting reports came from Regions 1 and 2. Poorest reports came from Regions 3 and 4.

Our predictions are: 1) hunting success will be up this year due to higher recruitment of young as a result of bumper mast conditions in 2010, 2) hunting success will rise statewide in all regions.

All hunts are used for this survey. If you would like forms for your club, contact: *Rich Rogers, Wildlife Biologist, WV Division of Natural Resources, 1 Depot St., Romney, WV 26757; (304)822-3551.*

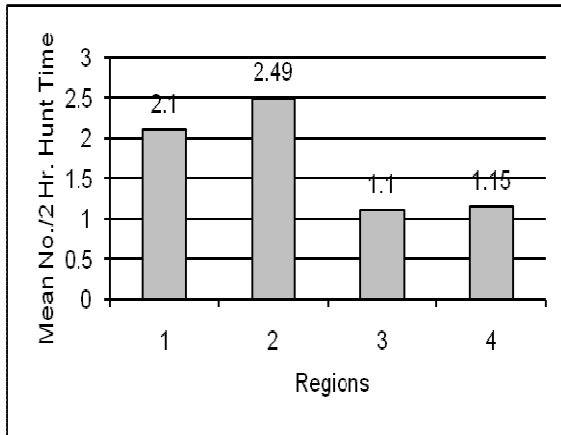
Additional Notes

Positive raccoon strain rabies cases continue to occur in the eastern and northern panhandles, and Greenbrier County. Feeding and moving raccoons can lead to spread and increased incidence of rabies.

PLEASE HAVE YOUR CLUB PARTICIPATE IN THIS SURVEY!!!

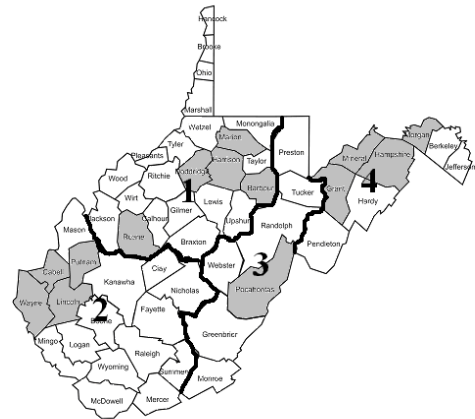
This 2 page summary was provided for those wishing to know the highlights of this survey. Read the following pages for a more detailed report.

Average number of raccoons seen per 2 hours hunting time by region.



Raccoon Field Trial Survey regions. Counties with data are shaded.

- Region 1 – Northern WV Hills
- Region 2 – Southern WV Hills
- Region 3 – Allegheny Plateau
- Region 4 – Allegheny Ridges



Fur Shipping Tags Available Online

Thanks to the request of an eastern panhandle trapper, the fur shipping tags required to ship pelts out of state are now available online at www.wvdnr.gov. Print a copy off and follow the instructions. We always appreciate ideas from the public that make life more enjoyable for everyone.

Commonly Asked Legal Questions

In this new section of the newsletter, we will periodically answer questions are commonly asked by trappers and furbearer hunters. The source of all answers provided will come directly from regulations books, Chapter 20 law, and code of state regulations. When necessary the WVDNR Law Enforcement Section will be consulted regarding their policy on how a law is interpreted and will be enforced.

Q: Are muskrat colony traps legal in West Virginia?

A: Yes, these traps are legal. According to law, box traps are a legal trap to use during open seasons in West Virginia. Colony traps are a form of modified box trap.

Q: Is the Collarum snare device legal in West Virginia?

A: No, Collarum devices are currently illegal in West Virginia. Any device that assists in closing the loop of a snare is illegal. Even though the device may be modified so that it does not assist in tightening the loop, and until both law and policy are clarified, the device is considered an illegal trapping tool.

Links

West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

www.wvdnr.gov

West Virginia Trappers Association

www.wvtrappers.com

Guide to State Game Depts.

www.identicards.com/links/statednr.html

Assoc. of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Furbearer Resources

www.fishwildlife.org/furbearer.html

National Trappers Association

www.nationaltrappers.com

Fur Takers of America

www.furtakersofamerica.com

Conserve Wildlife

www.conservewildlife.org

Furbearers Unlimited

www.furbearers.org

CITES

www.cites.org