



West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

Furbearer Management Newsletter

Summer/Fall 2019

Wildlife Resources Section

This newsletter is specifically written to keep trappers, hunters, and the general public informed regarding the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources furbearer management program. We would appreciate any suggestions on how to improve this newsletter for your use. Please direct correspondence to: Rich Rogers, WVDNR, 1 Depot St., Romney, WV 26757 Rich.E.Rogers@wv.gov.

Update - Fisher Study at WVU

Fishers were reintroduced into West Virginia in the late 1960s from source populations in New Hampshire. Results from the first year of data collected for the WV fisher genetics study being conducted by Caroline Harms at West Virginia University, indicate that West Virginia's fisher population has become genetically distinct from these source populations. They also appear to be distinctly different than fishers in our neighboring state of Virginia, which indicates that fishers in Virginia may not have entirely originated from West Virginia's population expanding across the state line.

Why is this important? A lack of genetic diversity leaves a population less able to withstand changes in biological and environmental factors which may affect a population's ability to reproduce and survive into the future. A population with very little genetic diversity, or heterozygosity, may benefit from introductions of animals from an unrelated source to increase vigor, reproductive capacity, and survival of the population in question.

This study will continue through the current trapping season, 2019-20. Successful fisher trappers are asked to contribute a small piece of pelt or tissue for DNA analysis which is used to determine population genetic health. Pieces of pelt or tissue from fishers taken in past seasons will be accepted as well. Contact Caroline Harms at ceh0038@mix.wvu.edu,

Dr. Amy Welsh at (304)293-0718, or Rich Rogers at (304)822-3551 to get instructions and materials for sending samples.

West Virginia Bobcat Research Update

Trappers will once again be eligible to receive a \$100 gift card for each live bobcat radio-collared as part of the home range study being conducted out of West Virginia University. We will only be using bobcats caught in the following counties: Berkeley, Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Jefferson, Mineral, Morgan, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Randolph, and Tucker. The goal is to collar at least 30 bobcats during the current trapping season. Trapped animals will not count against a trapper's bag limit. See previous issues of this newsletter for details regarding the purpose of the study.

If you catch a bobcat and would like to participate, contact one of the following:

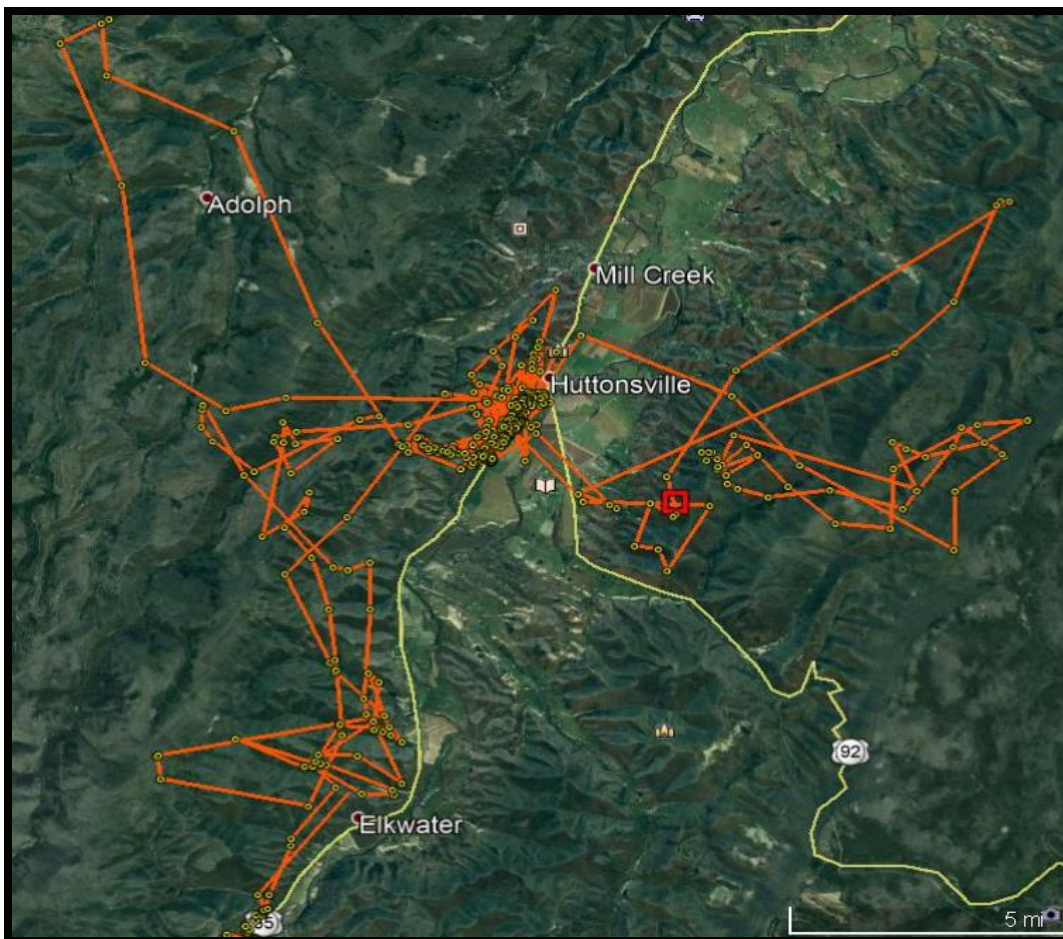
Kirsten Belcher	(304)293-0050
Rich Rogers	(304)822-3551
District 1 Office	(304)825-6787
District 2 Office	(304)822-3551
District 3 Office	(304)924-6211

For more information, contact kmbelcher@mix.wvu.edu or call (304)216-8482 and ask for Kirsten.

All bobcats are ear-tagged as well as radio-collared. If you catch an animal that has an ear tag or a collar, please contact Kirsten Belcher or Rich Rogers. You are free to harvest the animal if you like, but please call **after** you do so. If you are planning to release the animal, call **before** you do so.

Last trapping season resulted in 29 bobcats being radio-collared. Many thanks to the trappers who participated. One trapper actually contributed eight animals to the study. Kudos!

Preliminary results indicate home ranges are within area bounds defined by previous studies in similar habitats in other states, with males having larger home ranges than females. During this study, average male and female breeding home ranges have been calculated as approximately 14.64 square miles and 9.41 square miles, respectively. Collars transmit a location every five hours to satellites that can then be tracked by researchers using computer software to monitor movements. A tracking map of a single bobcat is shown below.



This map shows home range movements of an adult male during a portion of the 2019 breeding season (February-May). Each dot represents a transmitted location.

Otter Research Update

In order to determine otter population size and affect of harvest, WVDNR will continue to collect otter carcasses this trapping season. Last year, 45 carcasses were turned in with 31 being useable from the 2018-19 trapping season. A \$20 gift card is being offered for any useable carcass turned in to WVDNR. Carcasses may be brought to any district wildlife office or arrangements can be made to have them picked up by WVDNR personnel. Rewards are only being offered for otters obtained from 2018-19 through the current season. Canine teeth and female reproductive tracts will be used to collect demographic data. Population age structure, survival, and reproductive rate from year to year will be determined to give biologists a picture of population health and determine whether the bag limit needs to be changed.

Contact any WVDNR district office if you would like to turn in a carcass. You can also call: Rich Rogers, Furbearer Program Coordinator, at 304 822-3551.

Muskrat Carcasses Still Needed in the Eastern Panhandle

Seventy more muskrat carcasses are needed for analyses of liver samples for evidence of cyanotoxin damage in waters of the eastern panhandle. Call the District II office at (304)822-3551 if you have any carcasses you would like to donate. Wildlife Resources staff will come and pick them up. Freeze carcasses with a piece of paper or card marked with county, body of water, date, and name. Do your part to help solve the mystery of muskrat decline in the eastern U.S.

Red Wolf Proposal

There has been concern generated by an article in the Charleston Gazette regarding a proposal by a group called the Center for Biological Diversity to reintroduce red wolves into available suitable habitats in several states including West Virginia. Rest assured that this is not under consideration by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. The following points outline why this is not a good idea:

- Being that there are only 14 red wolves left in North America, future genetic health and viability of these animals is extremely unlikely. Inbreeding and genetic bottle-necking are inevitable. With only 14 captive animals left for a breeding program, success is highly unlikely.
- Although open to some debate, it has been established by some geneticists that the remaining animals are already hybridized with the eastern coyote. Genetically, they are no longer pure red wolves. Further hybridization has occurred upon releases. Sterilizing coyotes has shown promise but is extremely cost prohibitive in the long-term.
- Adding an additional large predator to the forests of West Virginia would likely not be received well by the hunting public and the farming community.
- Red wolves are indistinguishable from eastern coyotes in the field to all but the most trained individuals. This will result in the necessity of closing coyote hunting and trapping seasons in red wolf habitats as has occurred in NC against the wishes of local farmers and hunters.
- The red wolf program in NC is largely considered a failure by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. The NC Wildlife Resources Commission also documented 64 unauthorized releases of red wolves by the US Fish & Wildlife Service onto private land during the course of the original reintroductions in that state.

- The reintroduction proposal notes deer as a key prey species. With some of our lowest densities of deer being located on National Forest properties, it is unlikely that wolves will remain on the forest. This will lead to increased wolf human interactions and conflicts.
- The eastern coyote has filled the niche once occupied by red wolves. Ecological benefits of reintroductions have been overstated in the proposal.

Although this proposal may have been well intended, it remains a very bad idea.

Otters and Trout

Recently, concerns have been raised by some in the sport fishing community that otters are responsible for depleting game fish in certain waters of West Virginia. Unfortunately, an otter spotted eating a trout or two in a favorite stretch of water can cause more of an emotional rather than a rational response. This has resulted in requests for increasing the otter bag limit in the state. Currently, WVDNR is collecting biological data to determine otter population density and abundance as well as affects of harvest on survival, reproduction, and population stability. Five years of data will be needed before a science-based decision can be made. However, based on past data the current harvest is most probably at the upper limit of what the state's otter population can withstand without potentially serious declines. Numerous research projects in the past have shown that otter populations do not recover easily from overharvest with densities increasing at a very slow rate. Reintroducing otters to WV was an expensive and time-consuming endeavor. Growing the population to the point where harvests were finally justified took approximately 20 years. That being so, biologists are reluctant to increase bag limits without just cause.

Research has also repeatedly shown that river otters primarily consume crayfish and rough fish, quite often in that order depending on season and prey availability. Like most other predators, they will expend less energy pursuing and capturing slower moving fish like sunfish, suckers and fallfish than game fish species. Prey availability and ability to avoid

capture are of key importance. This is not to say that stocked trout in smaller streams are not, at least occasionally, easy prey. They most certainly can be depending on water depth and flow. But, native brook trout have coexisted with otters for thousands of years and not been extirpated from any waters due to otter predation. Jim Hedrick, the state's coldwater fisheries biologist, noted that the affect of otter predation on trout is negligible. A study conducted in Pennsylvania on otter predation in a heavily stocked trout stream showed no increase in predation on trout during the stocking season. Rough fish and crayfish dominated otter diets throughout the course of the study. Earlier studies in Massachusetts and Michigan showed that when adequate numbers of forage fish were present, predation on trout was minimal. Simply put, when other species are available, trout are not at the top of the menu.

Damage to stocked fish in private ponds can be a different story, entirely. These problems have been, and will continue to be, successfully resolved with the use of nuisance wildlife permits. These permits can be obtained outside of trapping seasons from any Natural Resources Police Officer or wildlife biologist by calling any district office. Protecting ponds with a low strand of electric fencing is quite effective and recommended for any pond where there is the possibility of nuisance otter activity.

Let's not endanger this ecologically important and most interesting species by jumping the gun and lobbying for increased bag limits without evidence that such an increase will not endanger the future of otter populations in the future.

New Rules for Sale of Furbearer Parts

Beginning with the 2019-20 trapping season, it is now legal to sell furbearer skulls, claws, bones, carcasses, teeth, urine, and glands in West Virginia. Purchasers of unfinished parts must have a fur buyers license and report all purchases to WVDNR on appropriate forms along with pelts. Finished or bottled products may be sold to customers.

2018-19 Furbearer Harvests and Sales

Below are the current and previous four year's tallies of pelts purchased by licensed fur dealers and reported harvests of species required to be legally checked. Harvests remain somewhat low. With projected fur market prices expected to remain low, sales and harvests this coming season will follow suit.

Pelts Purchased						
SPECIES	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Shipped 2019
Muskrat	3664	1557	1900	1081	900	71
Opossum	1890	707	746	660	794	13
Raccoon	11520	4681	3459	4980	3373	1949
Mink	365	192	160	247	109	10
Red Fox	3037	1739	1059	1717	3251	77
Gray Fox	1390	667	549	536	705	32
Bobcat	1805/1971*	573/1430*	732/1339*	863/1328*	775/1421*	64
Beaver	871/1107*	303/998*	377/996*	366/712*	366/780*	127
Weasel	14	11	30	13	21	0
Skunk	199	81	49	107	135	4
Coyote	2353	1188	1686	2103	1324	575
Fisher	90/166*	51/102*	24/91*	50/106	50/89*	2
River Otter	0/156*	0/109*	0/105*	0/90*	0/106*	0

*Number after slash mark is actual harvest as determined from mandatory game check.

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

National Trappers Association

Fur Takers of America

Conserve Wildlife

Furbearers Unlimited

CITES

www.fishwildlife.org/furbearer.html

www.nationaltrappers.com

www.furtakersofamerica.com

www.conservewildlife.org

www.furbearers.org

www.cites.org

Take a kid hunting or trapping!



2019-2020 TRAPPING REPORT FORM
West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
Wildlife Resources Section

Read instructions on back side before completing this report.

Name (It is not necessary to include your personal information) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____ Phone _____

Species	County:			County:			County:			County:		
	#of days trapped	#Caught	#Killed	#of days trapped	#Caught	#Killed	#of days trapped	#Caught	#Killed	#of days trapped	#Caught	#Killed
Beaver												
Bobcat												
Coyote												
Fisher												
Gray Fox												
Mink												
Muskrat												
Opossum												
Otter												
Raccoon												
Red Fox												
Spotted Skunk												
Striped Skunk												
Weasel												

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TRAPPING REPORT FORM

This is a voluntary report that will be used to help West Virginia Division of Natural Resources biologists collect more accurate data regarding trapping success and numbers of animals harvested each year.

1. Fill in your name and full address **only if you wish to include this information.**
2. Provide your phone number only if you would like to.
3. During the trapping season, fill in columns for # days trapped and # animals killed for **EACH COUNTY** that you trap during the legal trapping season. Two columns are provided for each county. Do not include animals that you release.
4. Use more than one sheet if you trap more than 5 counties.
5. Try to accurately record number of days trapped. If in doubt, give the closest approximation of number of days trapped.
6. Sign and date your data sheet before sending in to:

**Rich Rogers
Trapper Survey
West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
1 Depot St.
Romney, WV 26757**

7. If you have any questions, call Rich Rogers at (304)822-3551.
8. **Send all completed forms in by April 30 of each year.**
9. **DO NOT** include animals caught on Animal Damage Control licenses or on nuisance wildlife permits.