



West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

## Furbearer Management Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2011/2012

Wildlife Resources Section

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By the time you read this newsletter, we will be well into the new trapping season. The usual challenges of trapping and furbearer hunting continue to be compounded by weather, recalcitrant landowners, and bad press. While we can't change the weather, we certainly can do something about those other two factors. The image we present to the public as trappers and hunters remains of utmost importance. Remember that the eyes of the next generation and your neighbors are on you. How you behave will influence how the next person enjoying our sport is treated. We hope your fur sheds are full this winter and, more importantly, that you are enjoying each day on the line or in the woods! Please direct correspondence to: Rich Rogers, WVDNR, 1 Depot St., Romney, WV 26757, [Rich.E.Rogers@wv.gov](mailto:Rich.E.Rogers@wv.gov).

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### River Otter Trapping Season Off to a Modest Start

The first river otter trapping season in recent times in West Virginia opened on November 5, 2011. Judging by game tags collected thus far, it has been estimated that 50-60 otters have been harvested by West Virginia trappers during the early part of the season. This harvest should pick up a bit as beaver trapping pressure increases in January and February. To date, the harvest is well within predicted harvest rates for this first season and will in no way endanger the state's otter population.

Trappers are reminded that the season bag limit is one otter. See the previous issue of the Furbearer Newsletter for tips on how to avoid catching otters in beaver traps. Uninitiated trappers should also be aware that skinning and fleshing an otter is every bit as difficult as that of a beaver. Trappers not willing to take on this task should pass on trapping otters.

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## Trapper Survey Started in West Virginia

For furbearer biologists to properly manage the many species they are charged with being responsible for, it is necessary to monitor changes in densities of these animals from year to year. Prior to this year, the only species with fairly accurate harvest data in West Virginia are those species that must be checked at official game checking stations – beaver, bobcat, and fisher. All other furbearing species are monitored using fur dealer purchase/sales records. These records are strongly influenced by fur markets and trapper pressure, and do not always accurately reflect changes in animal densities.

To get a better picture of what is going on in the natural world of furbearers, biologists in many states use something known as catch per unit effort (CPU). This method involves the use of data from trapper log books to yield information on how many trap nights it takes to catch an animal of a given species. A trap night is defined as one trap being used for one twenty-four hour period. Thus, twelve traps used for three nights would equal thirty-six trap nights. If one raccoon was trapped, this would yield 1 coon/36 trap nights. If three raccoons were caught, this would yield 3 coons/36 trap nights or 1 coon/12 trap nights.

Collecting data on numbers of traps used throughout the season yields the most informative results. However, this would also involve very detailed record keeping on the part of overly busy trappers. With this in mind, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources has designed its trapper survey using number of days trapped per county for each species, and will not be incorporating numbers of traps used by each trapper. If trappers express a willingness to collect more detailed data, number of traps may be added to the survey in the future. This first survey incorporates 2011-12 trapping season catches.

The following two pages contain a copy of the trapper log data sheet, with instructions, that is currently in use. It may be printed off and used as is. Copies may also be obtained from the West Virginia Trappers Association and Division of Natural Resources websites. Please consider helping with this important survey to help better manage our beloved furbearer resources.

**2011-2012 TRAPPING REPORT FORM**  
**West Virginia Division of Natural Resources**  
**Wildlife Resources Section**

Read instructions on back side before completing this report.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ **Hunting License #** \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

SPECIES	County:									
	# OF DAYS TRAPPED	# KILLED								
Beaver										
Bobcat										
Coyote										
Fisher										
Gray Fox										
Mink										
Muskrat										
Opossum										
Otter										
Raccoon										
Red Fox										
Spotted Skunk										
Striped Skunk										
Weasel										
Other:										

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## 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.
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.

## 2010-2011 Furbearer Harvest Statistics

WEST VIRGINIA FUR HARVEST											
Season	Beaver	Bobcat	Fisher	Gray Fox	Mink	Muskrat	Opossum	Raccoon	Red Fox	Skunk	Coyote
1999-00	988	644	27	933	97	1734	504	4283	359	33	43
2000-01	1140	705	26	1213	183	2857	463	4350	334	31	49
2001-02	1829	943	45	2147	448	5785	922	7733	747	130	169
2002-03	849	891	26	1533	267	4160	1048	6148	610	51	149
2003-04	917	1090	50	1480	374	3210	1277	11160	957	160	539
2004-05	1247	1447	72	1238	382	2523	2506	15794	969	159	467
2005-06	1589	1682	105	1316	325	2978	1358	8641	1117	124	613
2006-07	1839	1902	98	2115	335	3293	1925	11726	1683	235	360
2007-08	1487	1976	108	2164	331	3477	2704	19189	1746	225	108
2008-09	1107	1456	84	1631	318	2331	2866	8949	1472	222	624
2009-10	783	992	60	988	237	2850	1487	6201	1152	103	691
2010-11	911	1495	87	1703	357	1920	2029	7495	1752	278	2302

Furbearer harvest statistics for the 2010-11 trapping season are included in the table above. Columns in grey are species harvests tabulated from checking tags. All others are from fur dealer reports.

All species showed increased harvests/sales over last year except muskrats. Coyotes showed the most notable increase in sales and may have been primarily due to a favorable market for this item than past years.

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## Coyote Pelt Samples Needed From Eastern Panhandle

USDA Wildlife Services biologist, Lauren Mastro, is requesting help collecting coyote pelt samples in specific sections of West Virginia. Biologist Mastro is researching the genetic background of coyotes in the state and needs a small piece of fresh hide from two different coyotes caught in the following counties: Berkeley, Boone, Braxton, Brooke, Cabell, Clay, Doddridge, Fayette, Grant, Putnam, Raleigh, Summers, Taylor, Tucker, Tyler, Upshur, Wayne, and Wyoming. She needs samples from one coyote in each of the following counties: Gilmer, Greenbrier, Kanawha, Mason, Mercer, Mineral, and Webster.

Samples need to be kept fresh and frozen. Dried pelts will not work. Trappers can remove a square inch of fresh pelt and place it in a plastic bag marked with the county in which it was caught. Shot or road killed animals are acceptable as well, as long as they are fresh.

Call Lauren Mastro at (304)636-1785 or (435)890-9724 (cell) to arrange picking up your samples. She can also be emailed at [lauren.l.mastro@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:lauren.l.mastro@aphis.usda.gov).

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## Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee Meeting

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources hosted the 2011 meeting of the Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee this past fall. The meeting was held at Blackwater Falls State Park in Davis and included furbearer biologists from state wildlife agencies in Delaware, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia. West Virginia University and USDA Wildlife Services representatives presented programs. West Virginia Trapper Association President, Janet Hodge was also in attendance and spoke on the history and goals of her organization. Most of the meeting was spent discussing state furbearer program strengths, weaknesses, and research needs. Regional issues including furbearer surveys, density estimates, coyote predation, muskrat decline, and potential impacts of climate change were discussed.

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## Commonly Asked Legal Questions

Q: Where can I legally trap in or along a river bank without asking permission?

A: The answer to this question depends on individual land titles. Some include the river bottom and most include the river bank at various points. Some waterways are legally floatable with no permission needed as long as you do not get out of the boat or canoe, while others require permission to float. Individuals not willing to do tedious courthouse records checking, should simply ask permission from anyone on whose land they intend to trap on or along. In summary, this is an extremely complicated legal matter with no easy answer and trappers should always seek permission when not on their own land.

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## Links

West Virginia Division of Natural Resources	<a href="http://www.wvdnr.gov">www.wvdnr.gov</a>
West Virginia Trappers Association	<a href="http://www.wvtrappers.com">www.wvtrappers.com</a>
Guide to State Game Depts.	<a href="http://www.identicards.com/links/statednr.html">www.identicards.com/links/statednr.html</a>
Assoc. of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	
Furbearer Resources	<a href="http://www.fishwildlife.org/furbearer.html">www.fishwildlife.org/furbearer.html</a>
National Trappers Association	<a href="http://www.nationaltrappers.com">www.nationaltrappers.com</a>
Fur Takers of America	<a href="http://www.furtakersofamerica.com">www.furtakersofamerica.com</a>
Conserve Wildlife	<a href="http://www.conservewildlife.org">www.conservewildlife.org</a>
Furbearers Unlimited	<a href="http://www.furbearers.org">www.furbearers.org</a>
CITES	<a href="http://www.cites.org">www.cites.org</a>