



West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

Furbearer Management Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2008

Wildlife Resources Section

The purpose of the Furbearer Management Newsletter is to provide information and news to those interested in furbearer management in West Virginia. It is our desire to provide you with timely articles and data, and to encourage feedback on important issues. It is our plan to publish the newsletter twice a year. We hope you enjoy this first issue and would appreciate hearing from you. Please direct correspondence to: Rich Rogers, WVDNR, 1 Depot St., Romney, WV 26757, richrogers@wvdnr.gov.

River Otter Surveys

One hundred river otter bridge surveys were conducted this past spring throughout West Virginia to detect presence of otters. Surveys were conducted by Wildlife Resources Section personnel between February and April. Analysis of past surveys indicated that survey route length was shorter than necessary to accurately determine presence/absence of otters. As a result, routes were lengthened accordingly. This year's data is yet to be analyzed, but results look similar to the last surveys which were conducted in 2004. Results will be made available in the next issue of this newsletter.

The surveys are being conducted as part of a plan to determine if an otter trapping season will be feasible in the near future. Additionally, twenty-two otter carcasses were sexed, jaws removed for age analysis, and female reproductive tracts removed in February. Several more carcasses are due to be examined this summer. These data and tissues will be added to those already collected in past years to reproductive status and potential of West Virginia's otters.

Eastern Kentucky, Ohio, and the western counties of Virginia all have otter trapping seasons that have opened in recent years. Results from these seasons indicate no adverse effects of trapping on their respective otter populations.

Trappers and others are encouraged to continue to send sighting and incidental catch reports to the address at the beginning of this newsletter. Trappers accidentally catching otters should turn carcasses in to their nearest District wildlife office.

Raccoon Field Trial Survey

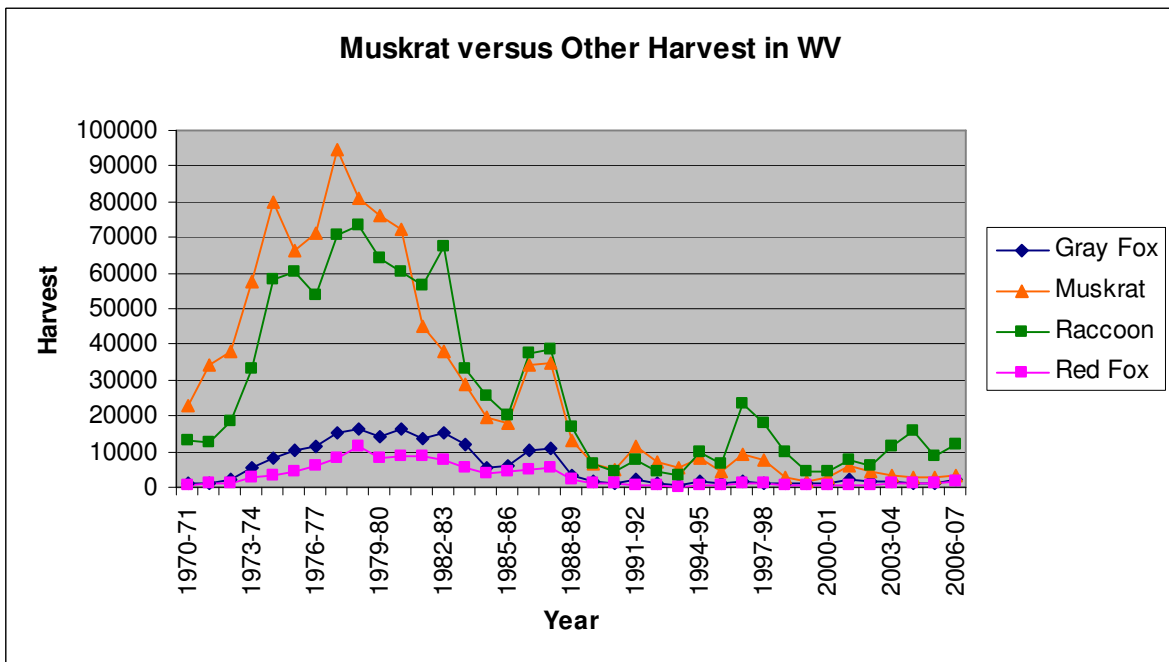
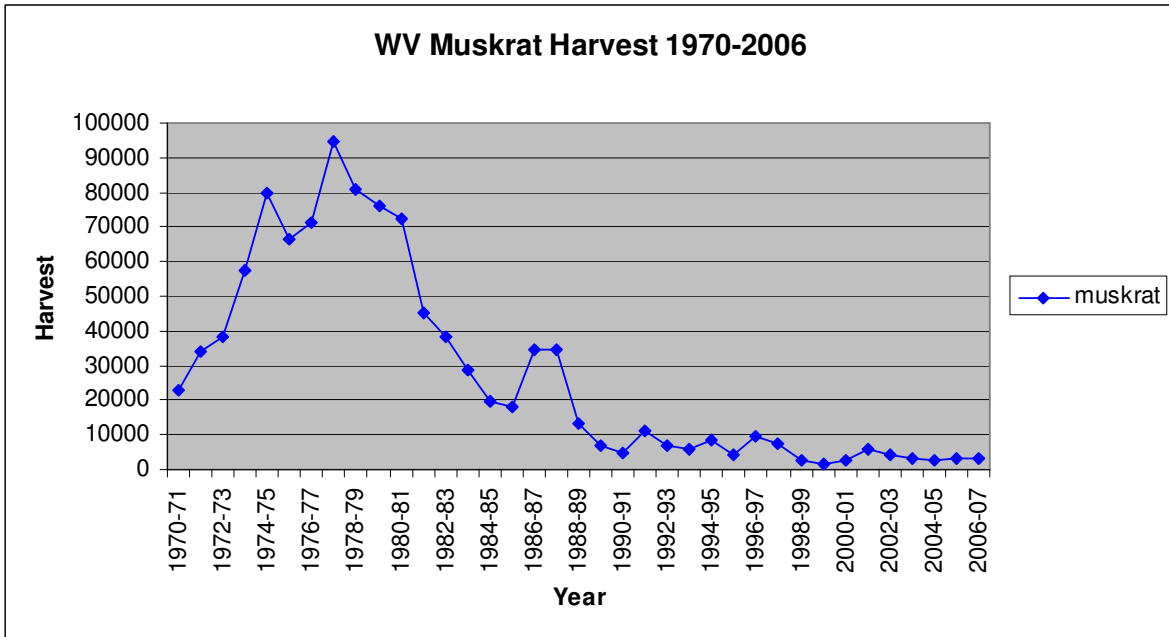
The WV Raccoon Field Trial Survey is now in its sixteenth year. Number of raccoons treed per hour of hunting time is collected from competitive hunts to yield a handy index to raccoon abundance in different areas of the state. The 2006-07 survey indicated that coon hunting success remained stable from the previous year. The overall trend in raccoon abundance seems to have begun to level off statewide with slight variations in different regions of the state. With raccoon pelt prices rising, we may see a downward trend in the near future.

Write to the address at the beginning of the newsletter for a copy of the last survey or if you would like your club to participate. Participation is sorely needed. The 2007-08 survey results are being compiled and should be available by the beginning of summer.

Muskrat Pelt Data

Muskrat sex and age data were collected from pelts sold at the West Virginia Trappers Association January and March fur sales. There is a consensus among furbearer managers and trappers that muskrat numbers have been declining over the past couple of decades in excess of that which has been observed historically in North America. Sex and age data are lacking in most states and Canadian provinces. Such data may reveal what role reproduction is playing in the decline. So far, speculation includes climate change and loss of wetland habitats. Most managers agree that there is probably a combination of factors

involved. What role declining muskrat trapping effort has played in perceptions of the decline remains unknown. Overall trends follow those of other species in West Virginia.



Totals From Both Fur Sales In 2008

1,231 muskrat pelts examined:

Adults:	1.78 males/female	(87/49)
Juveniles:	1.53 males/female	(457/299)
Total:	1.56 males/female	(544/348)
Total:	1.74 males/female	(781/450) Includes 237 and 102 unknown age males and females, respectively. These were muskrats caught late winter with prime pelts (sex ratio=2.32).
Males:	5.25 juvs/adult	(457/87)
Females:	6.10 juvs/adult	(299/49)
Total:	5.56 juvs/adult	(756/136)

These results are fairly consistent with healthy muskrat populations reported in the scientific literature.

Spotted Skunk Reporting

The Wildlife Resources Section is interested in obtaining information on spotted skunks from trappers. In past years, spotted skunk range seems to have diminished in West Virginia as well as other states. In West Virginia, they seem to be confined to the Allegheny front and high mountain areas. Years ago, reports commonly came from farm country as well. There are several pelts brought in to fur dealers each year, but reports indicate that some trappers are not selling many pelts of these animals. Large-scale habitat changes and changes in predator/prey dynamics are the most likely culprits. It is recognized that trapping has a minimal, if any, affect on spotted skunks.

There is no desire to curtail trapping of this species. Currently, trapping and pelt sales are the main sources of data for spotted skunks. Please report any catches of this small skunk to the address at the beginning of this newsletter.

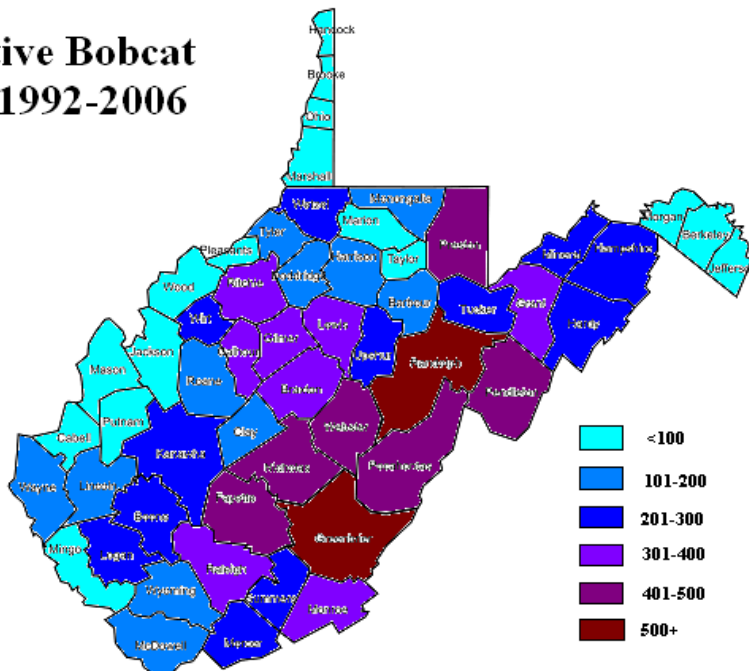
Beaver Tagging

Be reminded that the method for filling out checking tags for beaver changed last year. This change was enacted to simplify the procedure for filling out multiple tags until a better system is devised. When filling tags out for beaver on a given day, only the first tag needs to be filled out in its entirety. Subsequent tags only need to have check station, species, trapper name, license number, date, and county of kill filled out. This is the same for checking two or two hundred on a given day.

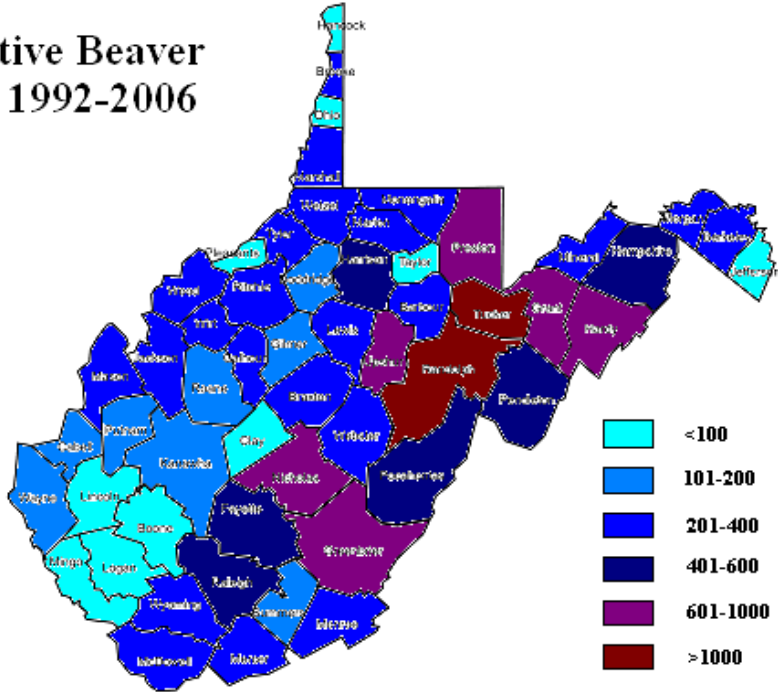
Furbearer Harvest Statistics

Final figures for the 2007-08 season are currently being tabulated. Results tabulated from checking tags and fur dealer transactions are here presented up to the 2006-07 season:

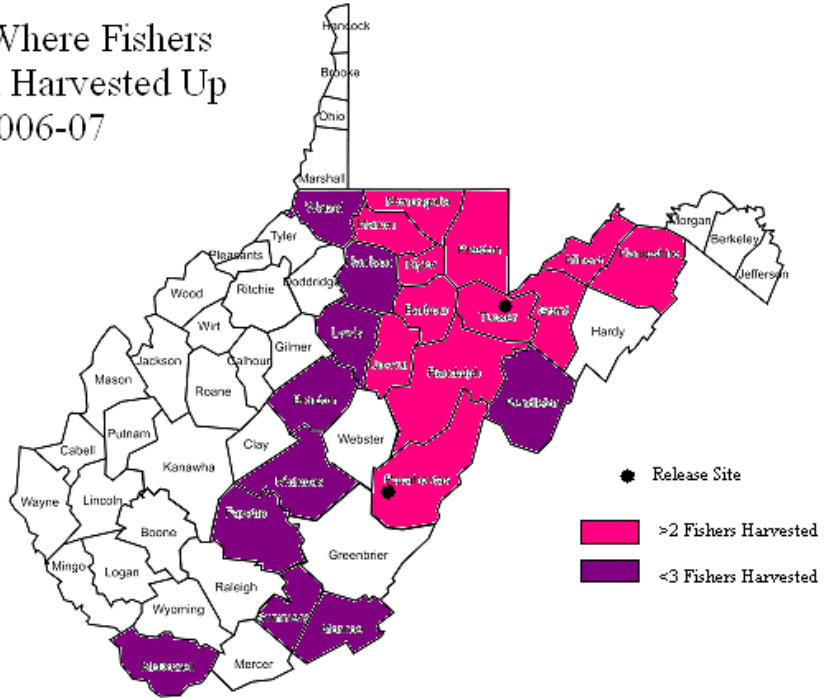
Cumulative Bobcat Harvest 1992-2006



Cumulative Beaver Harvest 1992-2006



Counties Where Fishers Have Been Harvested Up To 2006-07



WEST VIRGINIA FUR HARVEST

Season	Beaver	Bobcat	Fisher	Gray Fox	Mink	Muskrat	Opossum	Raccoon	Red Fox	Skunk	Coyote
1997-98	2322	577	53	1180	393	7474	1553	17846	1019	79	29
1998-99	1616	554	45	1111	211	2833	1201	9939	671	40	29
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

Best Management Practices for Trapping

New and updated Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Trapping in the United States are now available for the following species: eastern coyote, western coyote, red fox, raccoon, gray fox, bobcat, opossum, nutria, river otter, muskrat, fisher, and beaver. BMPs were developed to assist trappers in selecting and using equipment and methods best suited for the various species they pursue. In states with a strong anti-trapping lobby, BMPs have been used to strengthen wildlife manager and trapper arguments in favor of trapping sports. The new BMPs are available at www.fishwildlife.org.

New Fur Dealer Report Forms

New fur dealer report forms will be in use this coming season. There will now be only one form to use instead of two. The form has been somewhat simplified and now includes space to tally raccoon hides bought from hunters versus trappers. This information has never been collected in West Virginia and may prove useful in future management programs. Fur dealers are to continue using the old forms until this coming fall.

Links

West Virginia Division of Natural Resources	www.wvdnr.gov
West Virginia Trappers Association	www.wvtrappers.com
Guide to State Game Depts.	www.identicators.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