



West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

## Furbearer Management Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2009

Wildlife Resources Section

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Welcome to the third issue of the Furbearer Management Newsletter. It is our goal to continue to provide timely information and news pertaining to furbearer management in West Virginia. We hope you enjoy this issue and would appreciate hearing from you. Please direct correspondence to: Rich Rogers, WVDNR, 1 Depot St., Romney, WV 26757, [richrogers@wvdnr.gov](mailto:richrogers@wvdnr.gov).

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### River Otter Surveys and Data Collection

One hundred and five 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. Otter tracks, scats, toilets, or slides were detected at 35 (32%) of the bridges surveyed which is similar to last year (Figure 1).

Although reported observations indicate otter presence in most counties and drainages of the state, bridge surveys indicate lower otter numbers in all southwestern counties; the Monongahela, West Fork, Tygart, and Cheat drainages in the north-central counties; and northern portion of the Potomac drainage in the eastern panhandle (Figures 1,2&3).

Occupied range appears to be well-utilized by otters. Otter have been observed or collected in all but 14 of West Virginia's 55 counties (Figure 3). The first report of an otter sighting in Mingo County was reported in March of 2009.

Recent research has confirmed that bridge surveys are of no value in determining abundance of otters. The surveys are simply tools for determining presence/absence of otters in an area. The current survey, being the fifth such one, indicates that otter range

expansion has slowed, possibly due to lack of habitat suitability in unoccupied areas. The good news is that based on increased numbers of reported observations, otter numbers seem to be increasing in better portions of their range.

This past March, forty-four female otter reproductive tracts collected over the past 16 years were examined for evidence of breeding. These otters were obtained in West Virginia as incidental catches and road kills. Twenty-one of these tracts had ovaries that contained corpora lutea. Of these, eight had uteruses containing fetuses. Corpora lutea are light colored bodies in ovaries that indicate that an egg has been passed and the female did come into heat. They do not necessarily mean the female was bred and fetuses would have to be microscopically detected in such cases. When compared to similar data in Virginia, findings indicate a higher average number of corpora lutea and fetuses found in the West Virginia otters. Reproductive rate seems to be a bit higher in West Virginia, but more data is needed to make a conclusive statement regarding this.

Additionally, seventy-nine otter canine teeth were sent to a lab to determine age. Otter teeth, like those of bears and many other species, accumulate a new layer of cementum annuli each year. When a tooth is softened in acid, cross-sectioned, stained, and examined microscopically, it looks like a cross-sectioned tree. The rings are counted in much the same manner to determine age. This data will help in construction of a population model sometime in the future.

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.

Figure 1. Bridges surveyed for the 2009 river otter bridge survey showing otter activity by district and water drainage.

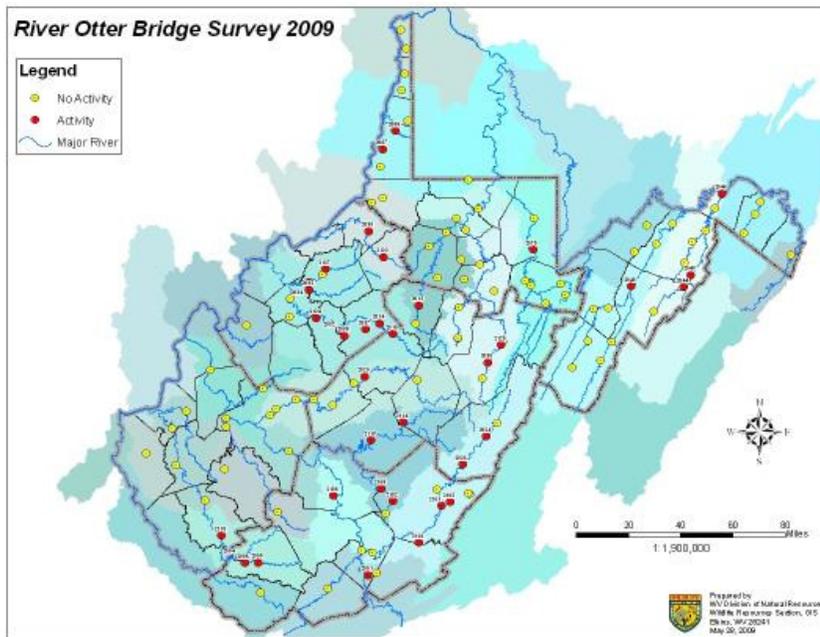


Figure 2. Number of years otter activity was observed at bridges surveyed since 2004 by district and water drainage.

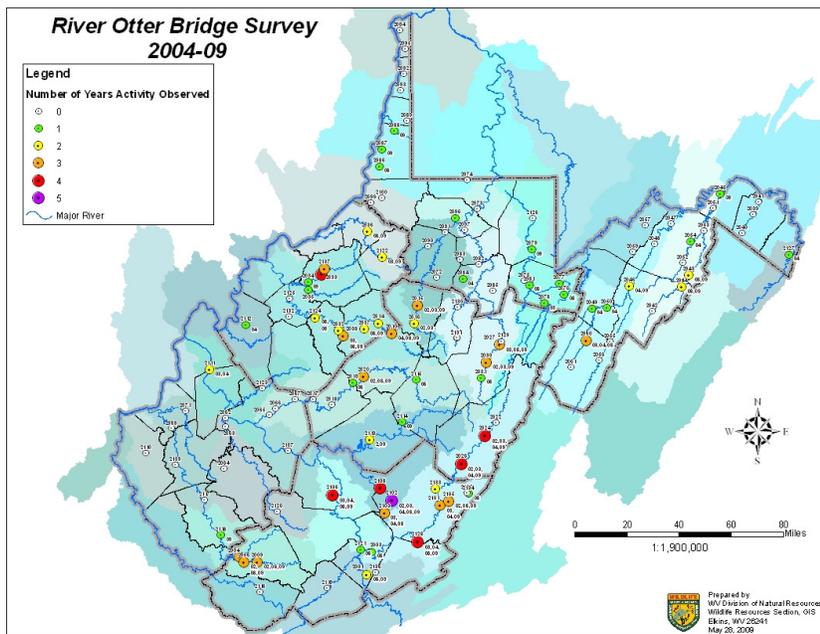
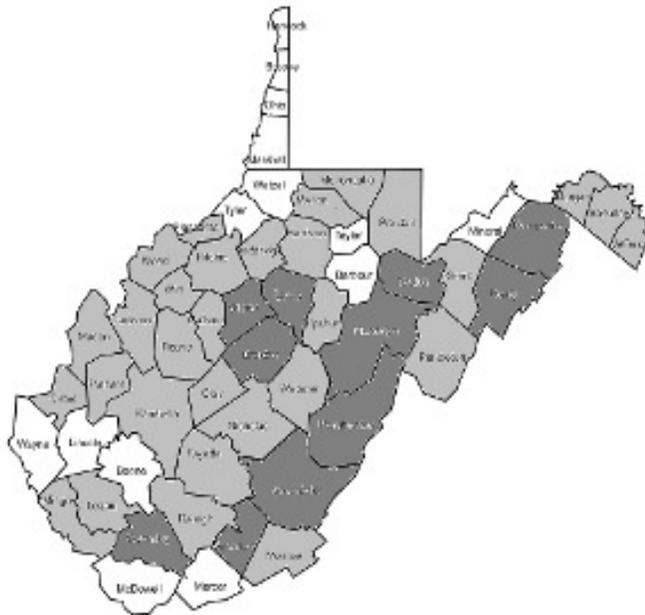


Figure 3. Shaded counties are counties where otter have been observed. Darkly shaded counties are counties in which otter were reintroduced.



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## Raccoon Field Trial Survey

The WV Raccoon Field Trial Survey is now in its seventeenth 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 2007-08 survey indicated that coon hunting success again remained stable from the previous year. The overall trend in raccoon abundance has leveled off statewide and in most regions. The north-central counties are showing a slight decline in hunting success (Figures 4&5). Depressed fur markets may lead to more coons in the woods as fewer people actually harvest them in the coming year.

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 and validity of the survey is being hurt by lack of participation.** The 2008-09 survey results are being compiled and should be available by the beginning of summer.

Figure 4. Raccoon field trial survey regions. Shaded counties are counties for which data was available for the 2007-08 survey.

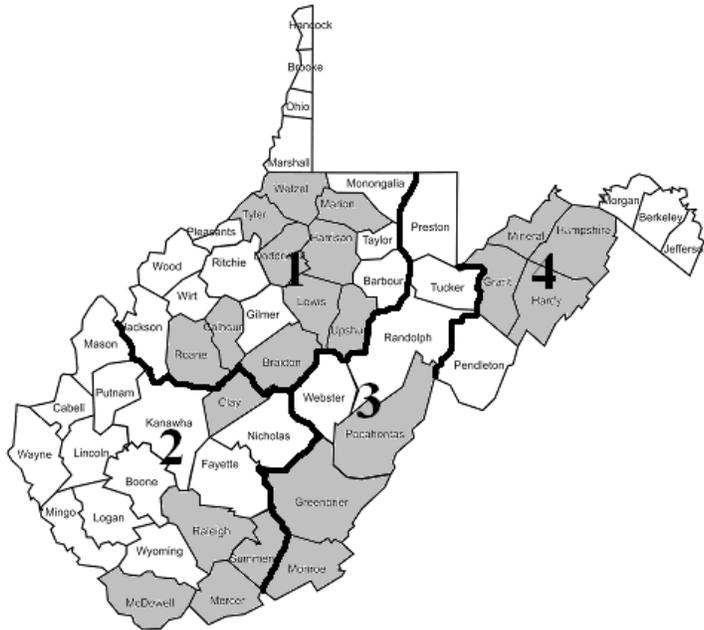
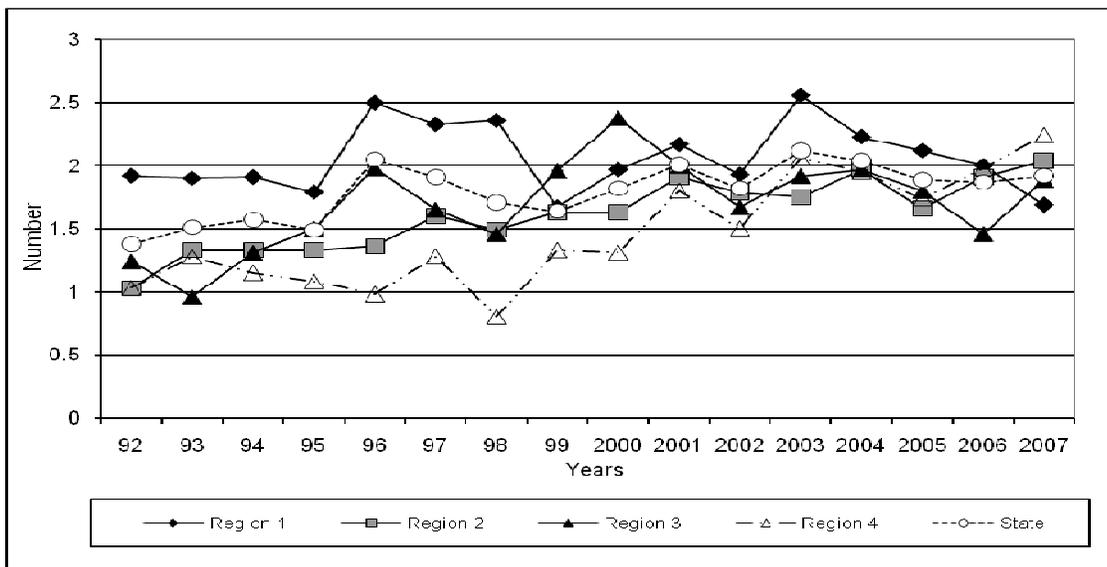


Figure 5. Number of raccoons treed per 2 hours of hunting time by region and for the entire state, 1992-2007.



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## Muskrat Pelt Data

Muskrat sex and age data were again collected from pelts sold at the West Virginia Trappers Association January and March fur sales.

### Muskrat Sex and Age Data 2009

#### WVTA Fur Sale 1/09

No muskrat pelts examined.

#### WVTA Fur Sale 3/09

758 muskrat pelts examined:

Adults:	1.30 males/female	(48/37)
Juveniles:	1.53 males/female	(282/184)
Total:	1.54 males/female	(457/296)
Total:	1.68 males/female	(593/353) Includes 136 and 57 unknown age males and females, respectively. These were muskrats caught late winter with prime pelts (sex ratio=2.39).
Males:	4.97 juvs/adult	(282/48)
Females:	4.97 juvs/adult	(184/37)
Total:	5.48 juvs/adult	(466/85)

These results are fairly consistent with healthy muskrat populations reported in the scientific literature. These results are also very similar to data collected last year with the exception that a few more juveniles are represented in 2009 figures.

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## Spotted Skunk Reporting

The Wildlife Resources Section is still interested in obtaining information on spotted skunks from trappers. Since last year we have only received two reports. Are these skunks that rare, or are people simply not taking the time to report trapping them? Only two or three make it to WVTA fur sales each year. 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.

## Furbearer Harvest Statistics

Final figures for the 2008-09 season are currently being tabulated. Beaver, bobcat, and fisher totals are from all animals checked at game checking stations. All other species are strictly numbers of pelts that have been recorded and moved through the market. Results tabulated from checking tags and fur dealer transactions are presented up to the 2007-08 season below:

WEST VIRGINIA FUR HARVEST											
Season	Beaver	Bobcat	Fisher	Gray Fox	Mink	Muskrat	Opossum	Raccoon	Red Fox	Skunk	Coyote
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
2007-08	1487	1976	108	2164	331	3477	2704	19189	1746	225	108

## Regional Coyote Food Habits Study Planned

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) is funding a WVU graduate student to conduct research on regional food habits of the coyote in West Virginia. Additional funding is being provided by USDA Wildlife Services. It is the goal of this study to determine and quantify food items of coyotes in three different ecological regions of West Virginia during three different biological seasons: breeding, pup-rearing, and dispersal.

Food items will be determined through analysis of stomach contents obtained from carcasses of trapped animals, and scat. This study will help biologists further understand the ecological role of this predator in West Virginia. It is important to have as many coyote trappers as possible participate in collections of carcasses. Trappers will be asked to keep carcasses or digestive tracts frozen until they can be picked up by the researching student or WVDNR personnel. Contact numbers will be provided in the near future and will be made available on WVDNR and WVTA websites.

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## USDA Wildlife Services Studying Coyote Movements

USDA Wildlife Services is conducting a coyote movements and home range study in West Virginia and Virginia. The purpose of the study is to help biologists and managers better understand coyote movements to assist in removal of nuisance animals. It will also help biologists understand how coyotes disperse into new areas and assist in identifying such areas as high or low risk in agricultural areas. This study involves radio-collaring and tracking movement of coyotes. Several collars have already been placed on coyotes in Virginia. Trapping efforts are underway in West Virginia. For more information, contact: Lauren Mastro, USDA WS, Elkins, WV (304) 636-1785.

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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>