



West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

## Furbearer Management Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2012/2013

Wildlife Resources Section

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By this time, we trust you are filling your fur sheds and reminiscing about some good hounds. Many positive changes have been wrought in the past two years through our combined efforts. We hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter. As usual, feel free to contact us with any questions regarding your trapping and furbearer hunting concerns. 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 2012/13 Preliminary Results

West Virginia's second modern-day otter trapping season has thus far seen an almost identical number of animals checked in at game checking stations as last year. Last year, approximately 40% of the total harvest was reported prior to the new year. If this winter does not see a lot of frozen water, the total harvest should be similar to, or slightly less than last year.

As noted last year, we need female otter reproductive tracts and canine teeth from male and female skulls. Please make the effort to bring otter carcasses to any WVDNR District Office. Data collected will be used to improve the model used to monitor otter populations and guide biologists regarding future seasons and bag limits. Without this data, there will be little chance of seeing the otter bag limit increase in the near future.

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### Raccoon Harvest – Trap vs Hunt

For the past three seasons, fur dealers have been keeping track of the number of raccoon pelts purchased from trappers versus hunters. This data has never been collected in West Virginia and produced some interesting, although not unexpected results. Percent of raccoon pelts sold were analyzed by Raccoon Field Trial Survey regions and are presented

below. These regions contain counties similar in habitats and raccoon hunting pressure. According to past surveys, the southern counties have the least favorable raccoon habitat and the highest number of coon hunters in the state. In contrast, the eastern panhandle has the best habitat and the fewest number of coon hunters. Percent of the total raccoon harvest attributable to hunters clearly reflects these facts as shown in the table below. These findings will in no way have an impact on seasons or bag limits.

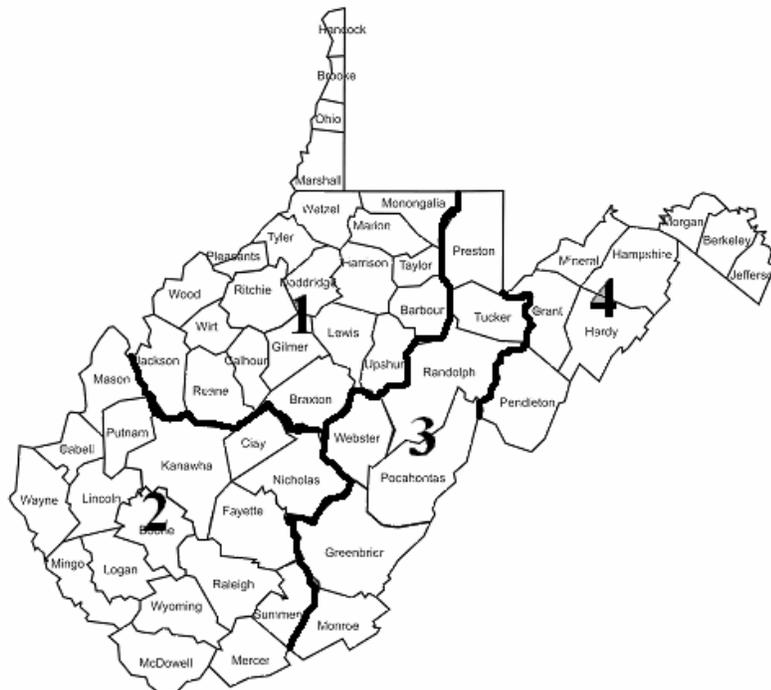


Figure 1. Raccoon Field Trial Survey regions.

<b>% Raccoon Pelt Sales Attributable to Hunters</b>				
<b>Region</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>3 Year Average</b>
1	57	31	14	34
2	71	32	53	52
3	30	15	3	16
4	44	10	1	18
State	36	17	10	21

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## Furbearer Harvest Trends in West Virginia

Things just aren't what they used to be. This seems to be ever on the lips of many of our older trappers. There are always reasons for change. The elusive answer is to why is this so. In the past decade, trappers have noticed a marked decline in numbers and harvests of certain furbearers, while a few others seemed to be increasing. Examination of harvest over time, as shown in the graphs below, sheds some light on what may be happening.

The graphs show harvests of beaver, bobcat, and fisher; and pelts purchased by fur dealers for all other species from 1970-2011. As West Virginia's forests have matured, it makes perfect sense that species better adapted to older age forests, such as bobcats, and fishers have increased in numbers. Generalists, such as the coyote, have also benefitted. Confounding this conclusion are the facts that bobcat bag limits were increased several years ago, fisher range expansion has occurred, and coyote numbers were in all probability going to increase no matter what. Trapper ability to catch coyotes has also increased dramatically over the past ten years.

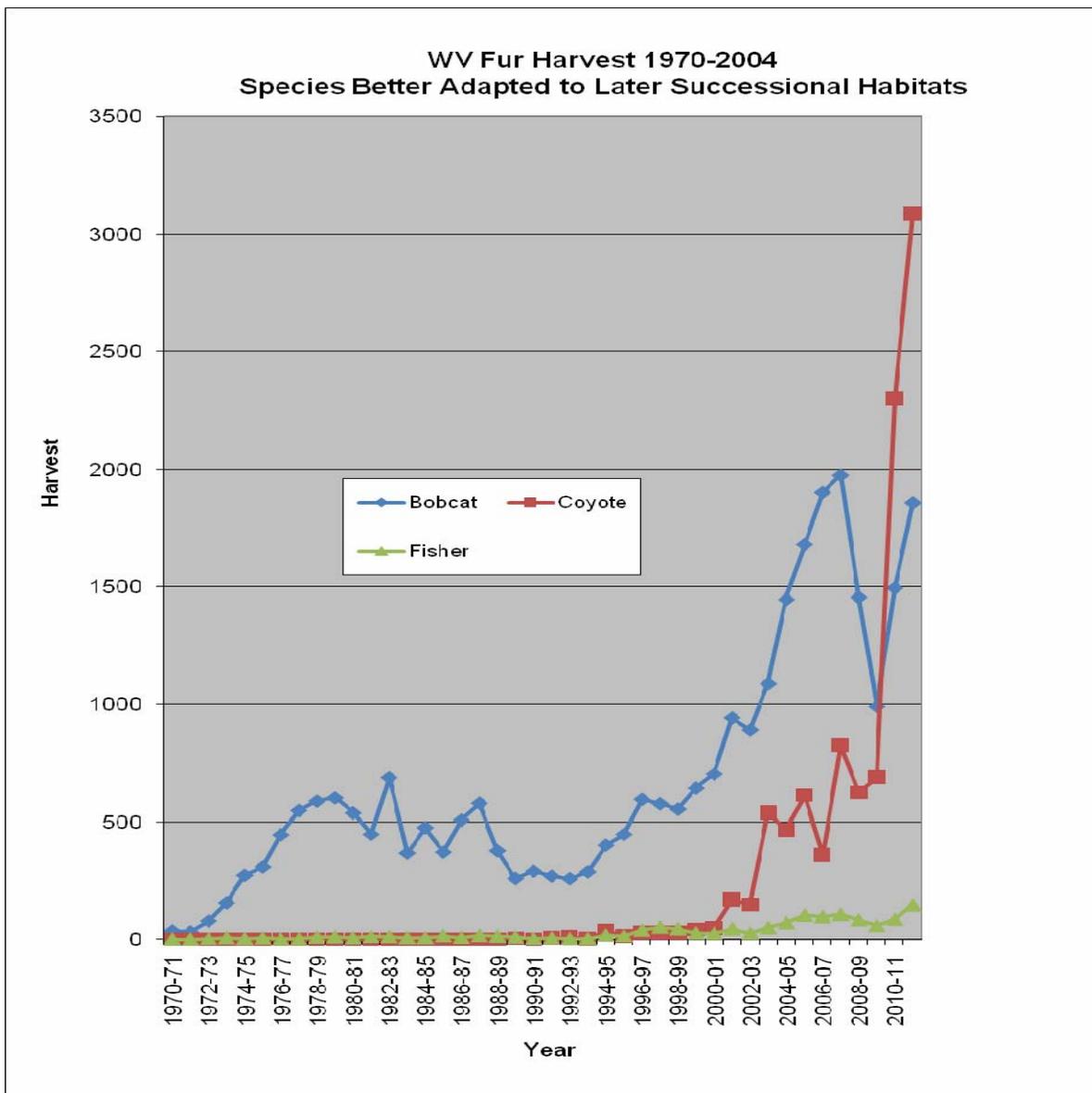
All other species are better adapted to earlier successional habitat types such as old farms and habitats with a lot of edge. Edge is the scientific term used to describe the border area where two habitat types meet and is usually associated with a greater diversity of plant life. Think of the edge of a field where it meets the woods.

The only odd man out is the beaver. Beaver are better adapted to our rivers and streams than other semi-aquatic mammals with the exception of otter. Beaver harvests remaining stable further point to habitat changes and not trapping pressure as a more important factor in current furbearer numbers and concurrent harvest trends when comparing species.

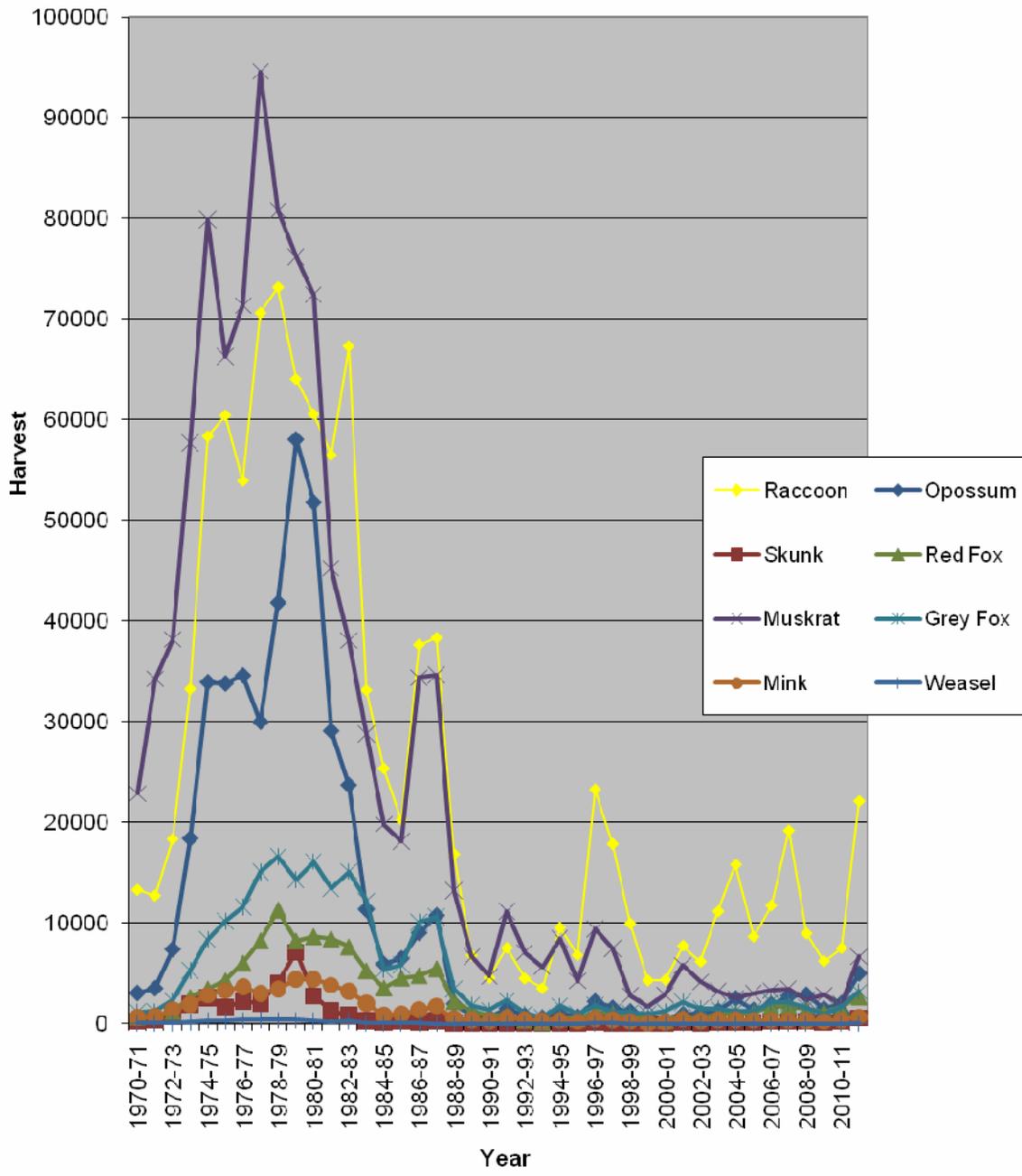
On a much finer scale, when comparing all species, peaks and valleys in all species occur at the same time reflecting trapper pressure and fur market influences. Note that all species show a peak in the late 70s and early 80s during the last big fur market boom. This is

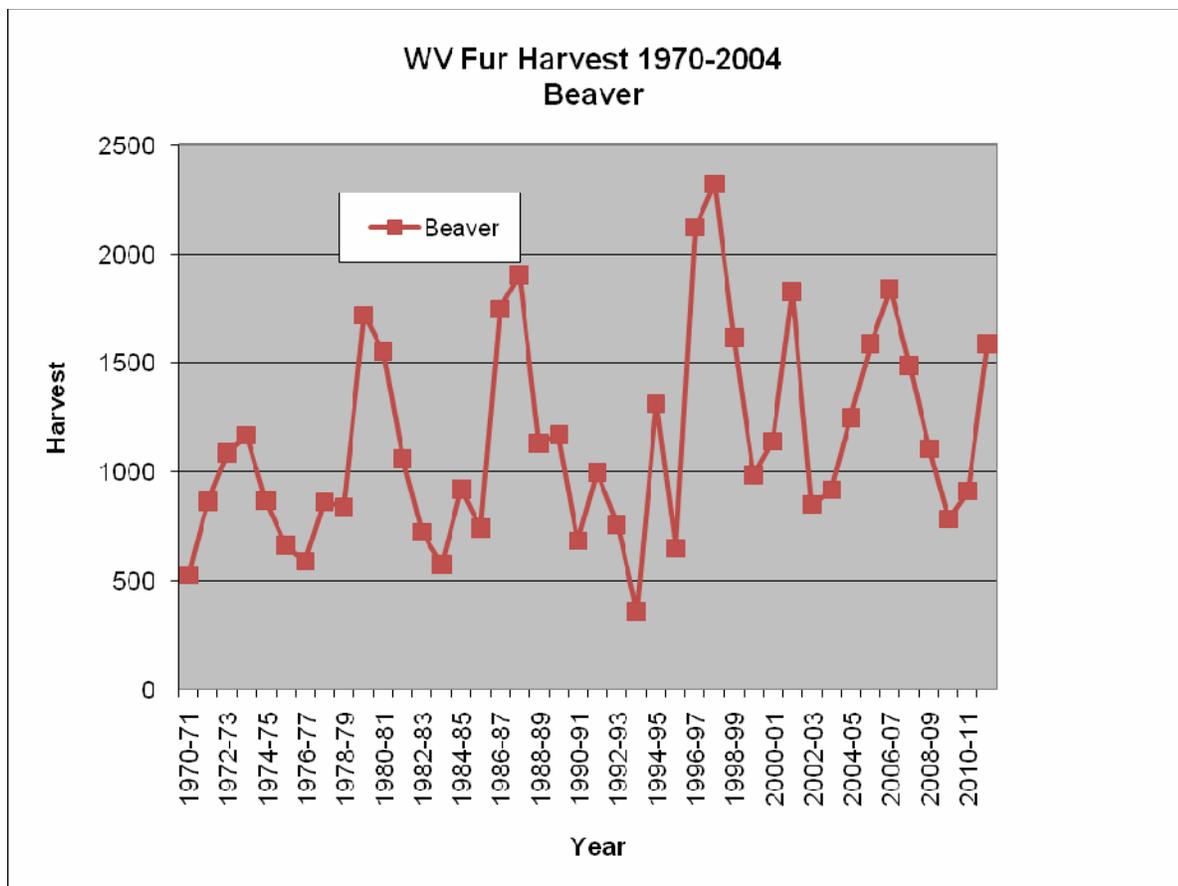
followed by a general decline for all species through the 90s. At this point, bobcats, coyotes, and fishers begin to increase at a disproportionate rate when compared to other species.

Such data may have an impact on how we manage some of these species in the future. Good data are always needed to make appropriate management decisions regarding season lengths and bag limits. But, for the foreseeable future, it is expected that fairly low trapper pressure will continue to allow liberal seasons and bag limits for trappers.



**WV Fur Harvest 1970-2004**  
**Species Associated With Early Successional Habitats**






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## WV to Host Southeast Fur Meeting

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources will be hosting the 2013 Southeast Furbearer Managers Workshop this spring. State wildlife agency furbearer biologists from Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia will be meeting to discuss furbearer management issues of regional concern. State trapper association representatives are usually asked to attend part of the meeting. The meeting location is yet to be determined.

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## Trapper Survey

The WVDNR is once again asking trappers to participate in the Trapper Survey now in its second year. Last year's participation was good, but could have been better. Results are

used to gauge trapping pressure and provide furbearer harvest/population trend information. Survey forms may be obtained from any WVDNR District Office, [www.wvdnr.gov](http://www.wvdnr.gov), the West Virginia Trappers Association web site, or simply use the one provided at the end of this newsletter.

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## Fur Shipping Tags and Landowner Permission Cards

Fur shipping tags are now available and may be printed from [www.wvdnr.gov](http://www.wvdnr.gov). In addition, at the suggestion of a recreational trapper, we are working on making landowner permission slips available online as well. They will be available by this spring or summer in time for next season. Hopefully, this service will make it easier for trappers and hunters to comply with the law regarding use of private property.

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## Commonly Asked Legal Questions

Q: Is it legal for a friend to buy a raw pelt from me?

A: No. Anyone buying raw pelts must have a valid fur dealer license even if for one pelt.

Q: Is the legal yearly bag limit for bobcats based on a calendar year. In other words, can I trap 3 bobcats in 2012 and 3 more in 2013?

A: No. There is a season bag limit, not a yearly one. You may harvest 3 bobcats during a season, such as from November 2012 through February 2013.

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## Links

West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

[www.wvdnr.gov](http://www.wvdnr.gov)

West Virginia Trappers Association

[www.wvtrappers.com](http://www.wvtrappers.com)

Guide to State Game Depts.

[www.identicards.com/links/statednr.html](http://www.identicards.com/links/statednr.html)

Assoc. of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Furbearer Resources

[www.fishwildlife.org/furbearer.html](http://www.fishwildlife.org/furbearer.html)

National Trappers Association

[www.nationaltrappers.com](http://www.nationaltrappers.com)

Fur Takers of America

[www.furtakersofamerica.com](http://www.furtakersofamerica.com)

Conserve Wildlife

[www.conservewildlife.org](http://www.conservewildlife.org)

Furbearers Unlimited

[www.furbearers.org](http://www.furbearers.org)

CITES

[www.cites.org](http://www.cites.org)

**2012-2013 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.