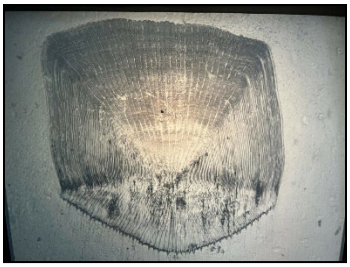
West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

Furbearer Management Newsletter

Fall 2025 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: Holly Morris, WVDNR, 2006 Robert C. Byrd Drive, Beckley, WV 25801 holly.n.morris@wv.gov .



Another Research Project Complete – River Otter Diet

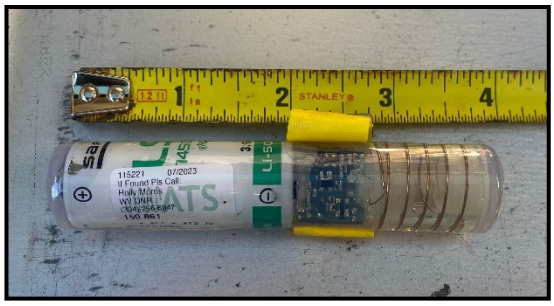
The river otter diet study at Frostburg State University was completed in the spring of 2025. This study used microscopes to determine the diets of 85 stomach contents from harvested otters, roadkill, and damage permits from 1993-2023 and 1,104 scats collected from latrines in 5 study areas from March 2021-May 2023. A primary objective of the study was to address public perceptions that river otters primarily eat game fish, particularly trophy class game fish. Using microscopes, the student analyzed the bones and scales in the stomach contents to determine fish species and size of fish consumed. Fish and crayfish were the most and second most common prey items, except for 2 study areas where crayfish were the most common prey items. Fish were most consumed prey item in the spring and winter, whereas crayfish were the primary prey in the summer and fall. Average fish prey ranged from 3.5” to 4.3” and average weights ranged from 1.38 ounces to 2.19 ounces depending on the stream surveyed. Smallmouth bass in the diets were larger than average size, ranging from 6.6” to 10.2” and weights ranged from 1.5 ounces to 11.3 ounces. No smallmouth bass observed in the diet exceeded 20”, which is considered trophy size.

Fish like minnows, sunfish, catfish, darters, and common carp were selected for in proportion to abundance for most seasons. Fast swimming fish like smallmouth were less frequently consumed, except for in fall where they were eaten in proportion to their abundance. River otters capture fish prey in accordance to their abundance and inversely to swimming ability. In agreement with the genetic diet study at West Virginia University, this research also supports that river otters do not work any harder than they have to – they eat what is easily caught and abundant!

River Otter Survival Project – The Finish Line is Near!

The survival monitoring portion of the river otter research project is complete. We radio-tagged 36 river otters and recorded 6 mortalities. One of these mortalities was an illegal kill – the otter was shot. The MS student at WVU is working on spatial and survival data analysis at this time and should be completing her thesis by the end of December 2025. Upon analyzing the survival and population data, **if** the data supports a change in river otter bag limit, this change will be proposed in January 2026 for consideration for the 2027-28 trapping season.

Radio-tagged otters are still on the landscape and are legal game during trapping season. If you harvest a radio-tagged otter, please call Holly Morris at the District 4 office at (304) 256-6947 to report the tag number and return the transmitter. Transmitters will be located inside the abdominal cavity. Your participation is essential to the success of this project.



Internal VHF Transmitter

Ear Tag on River Otter

Otter Carcass Collection Program

The otter carcass collection continues, and data is being used in current survival study to assess population structure and reproductive rate. I received 24 carcasses from trappers last year. We will be collecting carcasses at the WVTA Fur Sale. You may also contact any WVDNR district office if you would like to submit a carcass. Thank you!

Gray Fox & Fisher Health Study

We will be collecting carcasses again this year, so please consider donating your skinned catch. Last year, we collected 4 fisher and 13 gray fox carcasses. You may drop off carcasses at district offices or bring them to the WVTA Fur Auction in March 2026.

Preliminary testing results indicate that half of the fisher and nearly half of the gray fox tested from WV have been exposed to anticoagulant rodenticides. These rodenticides are poisons used to control rodent populations and are found in products such as rodent blocks and pellets. These rodenticides poison any animal (mouse, rat, dog, squirrel) that consumes the block/bait and can become ill and die if enough if consumed. These bait blocks poison mice, which in turn, predators such as foxes and fisher are consuming and getting secondary exposure to the poison. At this time, we do not know the level of effects rodenticides have on fox and fisher populations, but it is assumed that rodenticide poisoning compounded with other factors (i.e., mange, distemper, injury, etc.) can compound issues. I encourage everyone to abandon these types of non-target baits and switch to more direct means of controlling mice and rats by setting traps. Running your own mouse trap line is better for the environment, rather than poisoning anything that may consume the bait.

Reminders…

WMA Permits & Trapper Surveys

Don’t forget to contact DNR District offices for your WMA trapping permits!

At the end of the newsletter, you’ll find the voluntary trapper survey for this year. These surveys help us collect trapper effort data, such as how many trap nights it takes on average to catch target animals and how many furbearers are harvested on WMAs.

Introduce someone to hunting or trapping!

Links

West Virginia Division of Natural Resources	www.wvdnr.gov
West Virginia Trappers Association	www.wvtrappers.com
WV DNR Licensing & Game Check	www.wvhunt.com
Guide to State Game Depts.	
https://www.identicards.com/productcart/pc/State-DNRs-d39.htm	
Assoc. of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Furbearer Resources	
https://www.fishwildlife.org/afwa-inspires/furbearer-management	
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

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TRAPPING REPORT FORM

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

1. Optional: Fill in your name, full address, and phone number

2. During the trapping season, fill in columns for # of days trapped, animals caught, and animals killed for **EACH COUNTY** that you trap during the legal trapping season. Three columns are provided for each county.

3. Use more than one sheet if you trap more than 4 counties.

4. Try to accurately record number of days trapped. If in doubt, give the closest approximation of number of days trapped.

5. Send your data sheet in to:

   Holly Morris
   Trapper Survey
   West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
   2006 Robert C. Byrd Drive
   Beckley, WV 25801

6. If you have any questions, call Holly Morris directly at (304) 461-0067 or email at holly.n.morris@wv.gov .

7. **Send all completed forms in by April 30 of each year.**

8. **DO NOT** include animals caught on Animal Damage Control licenses or on nuisance wildlife permits.

2025-2026 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												