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Issue 203 December 2010



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Buy 2009 When You Can Buy 2010 Or 2011?

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Power Steering



M.S.R.P\$7,349	ALUEI
LMCS CHRISTMAS	CAULI
CASH \$852	MARKET
H.B.B \$400	VALL

New '10 Honda Big Red



M.S.R.P	\$11,699	AII
LMCS CHRISTN	IAS 🕴	
CASH	\$1,255 *	ІМЦЦ
H.B.B	\$500	// / 77

New '10 Honda 420 Rancher 4x4



M.S.R.P.	\$6,399
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H.B.B..... \$600

New '11 Honda Foreman 4x4



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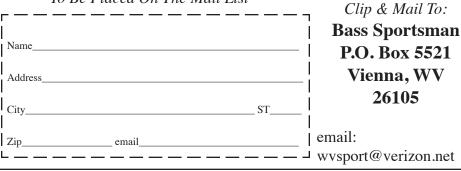
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Magazine

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Contributing Editors West Virginia Division Of Natural Resources

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Cover Photo

11 year old Damien Moore entered Jerry's Sorting Goods big buck contest and was the winner with this 11 point buck. He won \$2,250 plus a free rifle for also winning the youth contest.

The buck season results are apparently down. Weather and a possible deer kill from last winter were factors.

This magazine each month online: www.wvasportsman.net. Photo courtesy of Jerry's Sporting Goods in Horner.

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Elk River Musky Study

BACKGROUND

Muskellunge angling opportunities in West Virginia are a cornerstone of the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) warmwater fisheries management program. Self-sustaining native populations are available to anglers in tributaries of the Ohio River such as the Elk River and Middle Island Creek. A variety of streams, rivers, reservoirs, and small impoundments with introduced or enhanced populations are also maintained by the WVDNR through stocking efforts under varying strategies and regulations. The Elk River has historically been a favorite angling destination in West Virginia yielding among other state records, Lester Hayes Jr.'s 1955 state record muskellunge (52 1/2-inches, 43 lbs). This fish remained a state record for nearly 50 years. In 2008 the WVDNR began a multi-year study on Elk River muskellunge due to angler interest, the desire to investigate the potential of riverine By Jeff Harsbarger, DNR Biologist

trophy fisheries, and a general lack of current survey data. Through a tagging study, muskellunge will be followed over a five year period (2008-2012) to determine their distribution, growth, and movement patterns throughout the Elk River watershed below Sutton Dam to Charleston (101.2 miles). The goal of the project is to establish current baseline information on Elk River muskellunge.

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METHODS

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Jeff Harsbarger is releasing a tagged (black mark on dorsal fin) musky.

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ellunge are captured, measured for total length, and tagged with an internal PIT (passive integrated transponder) tag and an external metal dorsal fin tag. Each tag bears a unique number. The PIT tag is only read using a hand held scanner by WVDNR crews once a fish is captured to determine if it has been handled before. Since we can't give out scanners to everyone we



Jasaon Brown hooked a 12 pound striper on the New River. Photo courtesy of Three Rivers Edge in Hinton.



80 ACRES **WASHINGTON COUNTY**

Timber - Building Area City Water \$125,000 304-679 5744 - 304-588-1067 also use the secondary metal tag. The tag is easily read by anglers for about a year, after which skin grows over the tag making it more difficult to read. Anglers should carry a small sharp pocket knife to help scrape skin away to expose the tag if needed. For the first two years of the study, a fin clip was taken from all captured muskellunge for genetic analysis. Prior to release, we also take a piece of a fin for aging. The piece of fin is cataloged and placed in a coin envelope to be processed at a later date. Once back in the lab, we section the fin allowing us to count rings similar to a tree, and assign an age estimate to that fish. Age and growth data allows us to model what actions might or might not be needed to successfully manage a particular fishery.



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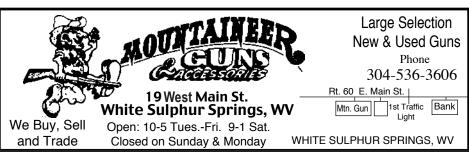
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Data collected from recaptured fish supply movement and growth information. Successful anglers are asked to provide the 3-digit tag number located on the left side of the metal tag, total length, if the fish was harvested or released. the location of where the fish was caught, their name, address, and phone number. Posters alerting anglers to the project are located at access points, tackles stores, and gas stations along the Elk River from Sutton to Charleston. Anglers may contact the WVDNR (Jeff Hansbarger) at 304 675 0871, or at fishtags@wvdnr.com to report recaptures or to find out further information about the project. We would continue to the next page

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Dec. 2010 ~ Page 5

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also like to collect specific parts of harvested Elk River muskellunge (both tagged and untagged) to aid the study. If an angler wishes to contribute to the study this way we would be grateful and he or she can do so by using the contact information given.

RESULTS

From 2008 to December 2010, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources crews have captured 110 muskellunge and 39 recaptures. Anglers have supplied an additional 22 recaptures. A number of interesting recaptures occurred during 2010, they include:

- 1) An angler caught and released fish no. # 628 (46" female) fourtimes over a 5 month period during the summer/early fall from the same pool.
- 2) Fish no. # 658 was recaptured on 4/14/10, 7-miles upstream of her original tagging location on 4/23/09. A week later (4/20/10) she was recaptured again 20.1 miles downstream.
- 3) Fish no. # 673 has been caught and released by two different anglers and re-captured twice during WVDNR surveys since his initial capture in the fall of 2009.
- 4) Fish no. #655 initially tagged on 4/23/09, was caught and released by an angler on 11/21/10, approxi-



Tom Harris bowed a nice Ohio buck in Athens Co..

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mately 55 miles downstream. Another fish was also caught by this angler almost 60 miles downstream of her original tagging location during 2009.

Elk River muskellunge growth appears to be very good in comparison to other WV waters. More sampling and recapture events will help answer this objective further.

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Trappers And Hunters Tagging

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- Trappers harvesting beaver and fisher in West Virginia are reminded they must present the whole animal or pelt to a game checking station or Division of Natural Resources representative within 30 days after the close of the respective season. A tag, provided by the checking station, shall be attached to the whole animal or pelt until it has been sold, tanned or mounted.

The law requires bobcat hunters and trappers to field tag each bobcat before moving the animal from the location where it was killed. The field tag must remain on the carcass until it is retagged with an official game checking tag at an official game checking station. Hunters and trappers are to present the

unskinned bobcat when checking the animal.

Information provided by hunters or trappers on the checking tag is used to monitor harvest and assist in future management of these different species in West Virginia. Decisions regarding season length, opening and closing dates, and bag limits are reliant upon accurate data obtained from these tags.



Jason Priddy, from Hurricane, hooked a 6 pound, 11 oz. bass.

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Adam Kwiatkowski, from Bridgeport, shot an 8 point buck.



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Tim Blackstone went to Ohio for this bow buck.



Stephanie McClung, from Rainelle, got a buck.



Tim Flowers, from Williamstown, used a bow for this great buck.

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Mike Murray went out west to bag this 5x5 bull elk. Photo courtesy of Crossroads General Store near Newark.

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Using a bow, Gary Gibson took this very nice 10 pont buck. 4 counties in West Virginia are bow only. Quality bucks like this one are available. Photo courtesy of Uncle Sam's in Man.

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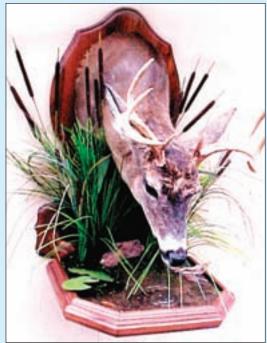


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A Whitetail taken by Andy Border, owner of the Great Outdoors in Ripley, shows the deer taking a drink of water. Just under the lilly pads is a small green frog. The piece was finished with ripples created from the water dripping from the deer's mouth. We added a crayfish claw for good measure.

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Chip Groves took a Wood Countybow buck. Photo courtesy of Crooked Creek Archery in Williamstown.

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Michael, Daniel & Mike Allen had great success buck hunting this year. Photo courtesy of Jarrett's Bait in Elizabeth.

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Drop Shot Rigging

This time of year, when the water temperatures fall back into the 60s and high 50s, shad schools in the big feeder creeks of some lakes will move deep before they start migrating on up the creeks. I use my electronics to find wads of shad, and the closer they are to the bottom, the better. Sometimes you'll actually mark bass feeding in the shad or close by. For these bass in 25 to 30 feet of water, a drop-shot rig with a leader of about 2 feet long really works well. My favorite bait is a 5-inch white Lake Fork Magic Shad on a 4/0 or 5/0 wide-gap hook and fished off a 7-foot flipping rod and 14- to 17-pound-test fluorocarbon.

What's different about my rig is how I fish it. I let the sinker and the bait get to the bottom, and I just leave the weight there and only pull the bait up and let it flutter back down on the slack leader. The purpose of the weight is just to get

By Anthony Gagliardi the drop-shot rig to the bottom fast. Once there, essentially I'm fishing a weightless soft jerkbait on a 2foot line. The bass love it.



Woody Minor, from Proctor, caught a 45 pound catfish. It took 25 minutes to reel in the big fish.



Brian Hill bowed an Ohio buck.



A nice buck was checked in. *Photo courtesy of Jerry's Sporting Goods in Horner.*.

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2010 Deer Season

The West Virginia firearm buck gun season opened Nov. 22 – Dec. 4. It is open in all counties except Logan, Mingo, McDowell and Wyoming.

Approximately 280,000 licensed hunters will be in West Virginia's woods during this season.

Hunters should review the 2010-2011 Hunting and Trapping Regulations Summary for detailed instructions concerning bag limits and season dates. The regulations are available at license agents, DNR district offices, or online at www.wvdnr.gov.

A list of wildlife checking stations in West Virginia can be found online at www.wvdnr.gov/hunting/ check_stations.asp

The firearm antlered deer bag limit during the two week buck season is two (one on the base license and one on an RG [resident] or RRG [nonresident] stamp). A hunter may take no more than three antlered deer per calendar year in all archery and firearms seasons combined.

The last day to purchase an additional deer gun tag (Class RG/RRG Stamp) is November 21. Class RG and Class RRG additional buck stamps can only be used to take an additional antlered deer in firearm buck season. Unused Class RG and Class RRG stamps may not be

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All private land in counties having a firearms antlerless deer gun season (Class N for residents and Class NN for nonresidents) will be open Nov. 22 – Dec. 11 and Dec. 29 - 31. All public lands having an antlerless deer season will be open continue to the next page

Get A BUCK

In 2010? Send In Your Pic.

Form Is On Page 38



Tashawna Rollins used a bow for this nice buck. *Photo courtesy of Ja*son's Country Corner in Mullins.



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Nov. 24 – Dec. 11 and Dec. 29 – 31. Bag limits vary among counties and will be one, two or four antlerless deer. Hunters may take only one deer per day; therefore, a buck and an antlerless deer may not be taken on the same day.

Black bear seasons have been expanded with 10 counties open Nov. 22 – Dec. 4 during the buck season and concurrent antlerless deer season. A hunter may bag one bear and one deer on the same day during the concurrent seasons in those counties. See the 2010-2011 Hunting and Trapping Regulations Summary for details.

All deer must be field tagged and checked in within 72 hours of the time of kill or within 24 hours of the close of the season, whichever comes first. Additional deer may not be taken until all previously taken deer have been checked.

continue to the next page



Wayne Harper shot a 13 point buck. *Photo courtesy of Reese's Country Store in Deerwalk.*



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BIG BUCK CONTEST

Only one deer may be taken per day during the buck season.

Deer hunting in West Virginia generates a total annual economic impact of \$233 million, much of it in the rural areas of the state that depend upon the deer seasons for a large portion of their annual income.

In 2009, deer hunters in West Virginia harvested 62,986 bucks during the two-week buck season, a decrease of 6.5 percent from the 2008 harvest. The 2009 antlerless season deer harvest decreased by three percent from 2008 for a total of 54,414.

WVDNR forecasts that buck hunters should experience a similar harvest in 2010. Some slight overwinter mortality may have localized impacts on populations but will not have a tremendous effect on the overall buck harvest. Buck seasons are less affected by hard mast conditions compared to other seasons due to the total number of hunters afield during that time. Therefore, the abundant mast crop of 2010 will have less of an overall impact on the harvest. However, hunters should scout and notice the acorn crop prior to hunting. Available mast during the gun season should still have deer feeding on

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Hunters are required to wear at least 400 square inches of blaze orange (about the size of a vest) as continue to the next page



Young Nickolas Milhoan, from Ravenswood, shot a nice 8 point buck

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P.O. Box 5521 Vienna, WV 26105

City__

an outer garment for visibility and safety. Blaze orange camouflage patterns are legal as long as 400 square inches of blaze orange are displayed on the garment. A blaze orange hat is not required, but the hunter must have blaze orange visible from both the front and the back.

Hunting licenses may be purchased online at any time and printed out on a home computer printer. Go to the goWILD! Web site at www.wvhunt.com, fill out the application, and purchase it over a secure server with a credit card.

Hunters who wish to donate deer meat or dollars to the Hunters Helping the Hungry program, which distributes deer meat through the Mountaineer Food Bank and the Huntington Food Bank, should call 304-558-2771 or visit the DNR website at www.wvdnr.gov to find a participating meat processor.

Advertise In The W. Va. Sportsman **Details On Page 3**



Jeff Douglas arrowed a bear in Fayette County. Photo courtesy of Crooked Creek Archery in Williamstown.

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GAME CHECKING



Jim Duckworth, from Parkersburg, went to Ohio for a bow buck.



Steve Scarbrough used a bow for this 7 point buck. Photo courtesy of WV WIld Outdoors in Fayetteville.

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Details on Page 38

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Bow Hunting Simulator Donated

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Because of the growing interest in bow hunting and archery shooting in general, a group of outdoors organizations have pooled their resources to purchase a bow simulator and software for the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. The simulator and software retail for approximately \$1,200, according to Lt. Tim Coleman, state coordinator for the West Virginia Hunter

Education Program.

The new bow simulator program will be used with the Laser Shot Firearm Simulator purchased last year by the Law Enforcement Section of DNR for training of Natural Resources Police Officers. It is also programmed to do hunting simulations for hunter education.



Kayla Bain shot a nice 9 pont buck. *Photo courtesy of Jarret's Bait in Elizabeth.*

Dec. 2010 ~ Page 18



A laser bow simulator was donated to the DNR.

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"This has been a popular attraction at several hunter education classes and other events, including a Boy Scout camp event in Virginia," Coleman said. "DNR thanks the following organizations for their generous donation: Consol Energy Inc., WV Bow Hunters Association, WV Hunter Education Association, and Elkview Kmart."



Kelly McFarland, from Walker, used a bow for this 10 point buck.





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Tom Berga landed a 5 pound smallmouth and a big largemouth in November. Photo courtesy of Backwater Bait in Newport, Ohio.



Mark Barney took a nice 10 point in Mason Co.. Photo courtesy of Tri-County Sports in Point Pleasant.



Tom Harris bagged a big Ohio buck in Athens Co. with a bow.

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Brandon Lilly used a bow for this quaility buck. Did the dog retrieve it? Photo courtesy of Cardianl Pawnbrokers in Beckley.

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David Williams got a 10 point with a bow. Photo courtesy of Bowlistic Archert=y in Chelyan



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Gary Stevenson used a bow for this 9 point. Photo courtesy of Crooked Creek Archery in Williamstown.



Misty Parsons shot an 8 point. Photo courtesy of Jarrett's Bait in Elizabeth.

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Keith Gibb went to Wyoming Co. for this nice bow deer. *Photo courtesy of Cardinal Pawnbrokers in Beckley*.



The walleye were biting for Ryan, John and Bill Hogue. Their fish were 6 - 4 oz., 4, and 7-2 oz. and were landed in the Ohio River. *Photo courtesy of Backwater Bait in Newport, Ohio*.

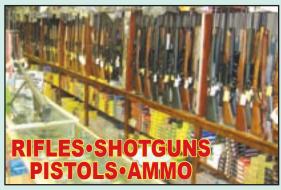
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ATTENTION ANGLERS

The WVDNR is conducting a multi-year muskellunge study on the Elk River. Muskellunge have been tagged with a metal tag at the base of the leading edge of their dorsal fin. Over time skin may grow over this tag making it hard to see but a distinct hump will be recognizable at the front of the dorsal fin. If you catch a tagged muskellunge please provide the requested information to the WVDNR.

Information will be used to better understand the muskellunge fishery of the Elk River and to help manage muskellunge statewide.

Requested Information

Your Name and Phone Number
Date and Location of Capture
If Fish was Harvested or Released
Total Length and Tag Number

Call 304-675-0871

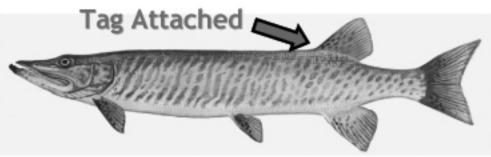
Or Send Information To:

West Virginia DNR 1163 Wildlife Rd.

Point Pleasant, WV 25550

E-Mail: fishtags@wvdnr.gov





READ THE ARTICLE ON PAGE 4 IN THIS ISSUE

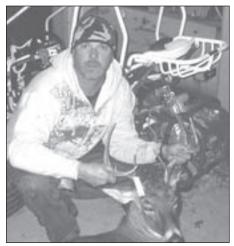
State Park Getaways

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va.

- Holidays and getaways brighten wintry days. Many of West Virginia's state parks remain open and welcome visitors to what many consider the best season in a year, winter. Take advantage of what the Mountain State offers for recreation, retreats and relaxation at these West Virginia state parks.

Beech Fork State Park

Part of winter fun at Beech Fork State Park is staying in the cabins and going outside to make a snowman or snow angel. "Beech Fork is known more for its 275 campsites,



Jimmie Hart used a bow for this 8 point buck. *Photo courtesy of MAD Sporting Goods in Boaz*.

but there are also six vacation cabins at the park that are open yearround," said Park Superintendent Matt Yeager. Beech Fork currently has three cabin rental promotions.

"For this Christmas we've relaxed the cabin rentals length and offer a two-night stay with a free consecutive third night during the Christmas week. The only limitation is check-in can not fall on Christmas Day," Yeager explained.

Individuals planning vacation during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays in 2011 also have an opportunity to save money by reserving cabins early and recognizing a hefty price reduction. Beech Fork also offers a Wildlife Watcher's cabin deal from November through March, which includes a 20 percent discount and an additional free night based on rental times.

For Beech Fork State Park information, call 304-528-5794 or visit www.beechforksp.com.

Blackwater Falls State Park With two state parks in Tucker County – Canaan Valley and Blackwater Falls – winter is nothing less than an outdoor recreation won-



derland with downhill and crosscountry skiing, sledding, and hiking. From December 1 – 19, 2010 and January 4 – March 14, 2011, <<Blackwater Falls offers a Crosscountry Ski, Stay and Play option at the park lodge. Mid-week lodge rates are reduced 20 percent during these dates and there is a two night continue to the next page



This hunter used a bow for this 8 point buck. *Photo courtesy of Jason's Country Corner in Mullens*.





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minimum.

"If you like winter and beautiful snow scenes, you'll find no better place to stay than at Blackwater Falls," said Park Superintendent Rob Gilligan. "It's just plain and simple, a wonderland."

Blackwater Falls State Park features a lodge and vacation cabins as well as a full-service restaurant, indoor swimming pool, hot tub, and work out facility, in addition to sledding, cross-country skiing and the close proximity to Canaan Valley State Park for downhill skiing options.

For package and events available at Blackwater Falls, call 304-259-5216 or visit www.blackwaterfalls. com.

> Send In Your **BIG GAME PICS** Form On Page 38 **Email Or Mail**

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Pipestem State Park

Frosty mornings break into great winter days at Pipestem State Park in Summers County. A popular winter discount offered for the first time last year is being repeated.

"Last winter we invited visitors to enjoy our winter mornings and, if they stayed on a Sunday or Monday

8 year old Jackson England, from Red House, got a deer on youth day.

night, we'd cut the standard winter rate by half. That was very popular, so we're doing it again," said Lodge Manager Dale McLaughlin. "The price break and the landscape in winter is a great combination for guests looking for a reason to visit us this time of year."

McLaughlin says that reservations made at Pipestem's McKeever Lodge for Sunday or Monday continue to the next page



Israel Smith shot a bobcat. Photo courtesy of Crossroadds general Store near Newark.

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nights receive 50 percent off standard McKeever Lodge room rates December 2010 through February 13, 2011.

For winter getaways and special events at Pipestem State Park, call 304-466-1800 or visit Pipestem State Park events and deals website, www.pipestemresort.com/deals.html.

West Virginia's state parks number more than 50 areas. Parks with lodges and/or cabins are generally open year-round. "You'll find parks with lodges and those lodge parks with cabins and cottages are open and are perfect places to enjoy winter getaways and vacations," said State Parks Chief Ken Caplinger. "Lost River, Beech Fork, and Watoga offer cabin rentals in winter months and generally offer discount winter cabin rates to encourage visitation in the winter months."

Tygart Lake State Park is an exception, as the lodge and cabin units are winterized from January through mid-April.

Visit www.wvstateparks.com under the title "A Long List of Deals & Packages" to find a variety of deals and packages at state park lodges and cabins across the mountain state.

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2011 Wildlife Calendars Available

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. – "The 2011 West Virginia Wildlife Calendars are now available for everyone to enjoy," according to Curtis I. Taylor, Chief of the Wildlife Resources Section of the Division of Natural Resources. "We apologize for the delay in distributing the calendars this year. We were expecting delivery from the printer by Oct. 20, but the printer has indicated that mechanical problems have kept them from delivering the calendars until now."

The cover of this wall calendar features an outstanding painting of an adult bald eagle. Other paintings



Austin Richards shot a nice buck. Photo courtesy of Reese's Country Store in Deerwalk.

include a gray squirrel, a buck running through a stream, and an English setter with a ruffed grouse. A rainbow trout, hooded merganser, Eastern chipmunk also grace the pages of this large-format calendar. A brief description of the subject accompanies each painting.

Feature articles highlight whitenose syndrome, which is causing large-scale die-offs of bats; ruffed grouse hunting; and a biographical continue to the next page

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Dec. 2010 ~ Page 26

LIVE BAIT

sketch of the late Tom Allen, along with 15 of his paintings which have been in the calendar over the years. The calendar also contains the 2011 hunting and fishing license fees.

"The calendar is full of interesting daily facts, best fishing days and times, and monthly helpful tips to help you fully enjoy the outdoors. Its \$10 price tag makes it a terrific bargain and a great holiday gift. Everyone who enjoys and ventures into the outdoors will find it beneficial," said Taylor.

The 2011 West Virginia Wildlife Calendar is available at WVDNR district offices, department stores, newsstands, convenience marts and food stores throughout the state or through the WVDNR, P.O. Box 67, Elkins, WV 26241, phone 304-637-0245. Make checks payable to WVDNR in the amount of \$14 for each calendar, which includes shipping and handling (W.Va. residents add \$.60 for tax; VISA, MasterCard, Discover and American Express are accepted).

Organizations, clubs and civic groups can also profit by selling the Wildlife Calendar as part of their fund-raising activities. Interested organizations should contact the WVDNR at the above address for more information.

www.wvasportsman.net



Terry Lamp shot a 7 point buck. Photo courtesy of MAD Sporting Goosd in Boaz.

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Sale Of Live **Fox Permitted**

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va.

- West Virginia trappers will be allowed to sell live foxes to hound coursing pens in West Virginia during the 2010-2011 trapping season, according to Curtis I. Taylor, Chief of the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Section. All foxes used in hound coursing pens must be live-trapped in the county in which the pen is located.

"This action will help to avoid any additional westward spread of

continue to the next page



Young Casey Stanley, from Elizabeth, got his 1st buck - an 11 point.

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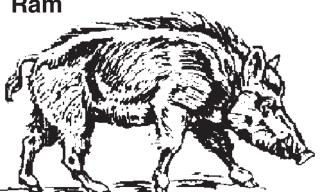
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Boar

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rabies and reduce the possibility of moving diseased animals across the state," Taylor said. "In addition, since raccoons are the primary carriers of the raccoon strain of rabies, the sale of live raccoon remains suspended for the 2010-2011 trapping season."

Hound coursing pens are licensed in West Virginia and regulated by



best management standards which are designed to promote humane treatment of the wild animals being pursued. Trappers are urged to use extreme care when handling live animals due to the dangers of exposure to rabies and other diseases. Live animals may only be held by trappers during the trapping season and 60 days thereafter. Live foxes shall be held according to temporary or permanent housing requirements as specified by law.

Please contact your local District Wildlife Biologist for more information about the sale of live foxes. Division of Natural Resources offices are located in Farmington (304-825-6787), Romney (304-822-3551), French Creek (304-924-6211), Beckley (304-256-6947), Point Pleasant (304-675-0871) and Parkersburg (304-420-4550).



Josh Harvey brought in a big buck. *Photo courtesy of Uncle Sam's Loans in Man.*









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Aly Blankenship, from Ripley, used a bow for this deer.



Forrest White used a bow for this nice Fayette Co. bear.

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Dakota Mathews brought in a nice 10 point buck. *Photo courtesy of Jarrett's Bait in Elizabeth*.



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Danny Frazier landed 2 big late season smallmouth bass. *Photo courtesy of Three Rivers Edge in Hinton*.



Ken Rose II, from Craigsville, gunned this Nicholas Co. buck



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Gary Blair got a nice 10 point buck. *Photo courtesy of Crossroads General Store near Newark.*



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Rebecca Stalnaker gunned this 10 point buck. *Photo courtesy of Cross-roads General Store near Newark*.



Keith Stacy used a bow for this 15 point buck. *Photo courtesy of Uncle Sam's in Man.*



Lewis Beverly used a bow for this 10 point buck. *Photo courtesy of Cardinal Pawnbrokers in Beckley*





Scott Morrison, DNR fish biologist, is releasing a tagged musky in the Elk River. Look for the musky study information on page 4 this month





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12 Rabbit Hunting Tips

Although most rabbit hunters bag a few cottontails or swamp rabbits on each trip afield, certain techniques can bolster your success. These 12 tips should help you better enjoy the experience of rabbit hunting this season.

Leapfrogging

As farming operations and urban development encroach on prime rabbit hunting areas, large contiguous blocks of hunting territory are harder to find. This has caused many rabbit hunters to abandon the traditional method of hunting all day in one large swath of brushy territory. Instead, many now opt for "leapfrogging," where hunters cover one brush patch or overgrown fencerow in an hour or so, then drive on to another rabbit hideout. By leapfrogging throughout the day, hunting first one spot then another, chances are good you'll locate more rabbits.

Farm help



Cameron Roberts hooked a 7 1/4 pound walleye. Photo courtesy of Three Rivers Edge in Hinton.

Farmers are an invaluable aid for finding cottontail concentrations. Since they work their land daily and see rabbits regularly, farmers know where huntable populations are likely to be. Most are eager to keep cottontails thinned out so they don't cause crop damage.

It's a simple matter to cultivate your own contacts in farm country. Remember these things. Ask permission before hunting, every time you visit. Follow all rules the landowner asks you to abide by, like passing up shots at the coveys of quail he's nurturing. Leave ev-

continue to the next page





A large buck was taken with a bow in Cabin Creek. Photo courtesy of Jason's County Store in Mullins.

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rything just as you found it, and always take time to thank the farmer personally. Offer to share your game, and follow up with a thankyou note and a token of your appreciation. Make these easy-to-follow guidelines part of all your farm visits, and you'll always have prime rabbit lands on which to hunt.

Sunrise and sunset scouting

Driving rural roads near dawn and dusk is another good way to find potential hunting sites. Cottontails are most active early and late in the day, especially along the fringes of fields and roadside cover, where briars and thickets provide sanctuary near favorite feeding areas.

Drive slowly, and note any spot where you see several cottontails. Then inquire at nearby homes for the name of the landowner so you can request permission to hunt.

Dress for success

Most good cottontail thickets have one thing in common -- thorns. Whether you're hunting behind dogs, kicking up rabbits yourself or retrieving downed game, some type of sticker will be clawing at your ears, fingers, thighs and other tender parts. Wearing protective



clothing can do wonders to make your trips afield more enjoyable and less painful.

Blue jeans are preferred by many rabbit fans, but offer little protection. A good pair of briar-busting breeches with thorn-proof material covering the front should be considered essential equipment no matter where and how you hunt. It also helps to wear a briar-resistant hunting coat, gloves and some type of hunting cap with flaps that can be pulled down over your ears.

Remember the orange rhino

A good pair of briar-busting breeches with thorn-proof material covering the front should be concontinue to the next page



Billie Blevins used a bow for a 7 point. Photo courtesy of WV Wild Outdoors in Fayetteville.

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Jesse Canterbery shot a 13 point. Photo courtesy of Reese's Country Store in Deerwalk.

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sidered essential equipment no matter where and how you hunt. It also helps to wear a briar-resistant hunting coat, gloves and some type of hunting cap with flaps that can be pulled down over your ears.

Remember the orange rhino

A good pair of briar-busting breeches with thorn-proof material covering the front should be considered essential equipment.

A buddy of mine often describes dense rabbit cover by saying, "You couldn't see a blaze orange rhino in there." In some locales we hunt,



Kirk Blankenbeckler, from Sutton, took a nice 9 point buck.

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Safety should be the foremost consideration on all your rabbit hunts. Remember the orange rhino, and make hunter orange clothing a must for everyone in your party.

Barrels and bullets

When stomping for cottontails in thick cover, use a shotgun with an improved cylinder choke and No. 6 or 7-1/2 shotshells. Since cottontails jumped in thick cover usually are close and moving fast, a wide, yet sufficiently heavy, shot pattern is needed to put a rabbit down without excessive damage to the meat.

When hunting cottontails with beagles, you may want to switch to a modified or full choke. A pack of dogs will push rabbits across fields and woodlots, and the shots you'll make are usually farther than those presented when you flush rabbits yourself. Use the tighter patterning choke and increase your shot size continue to the next page

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Julie Brown went to Ohio for this 10 point buck. *Photo courtesy of Boone's Bow Shop in Parkersburg*.



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Icy weather equals hot hunting

Cold, miserable days often provide the best gunning. Rabbit fur has poor insulating qualities, so rabbits are forced to take shelter from the weather, making them easier to find and less likely to flush wildly.

To find bad-weather bunnies, think like a rabbit. Where would you go to escape the cold if all you had to wear was a light jacket? Hunt places that are sheltered from wind and open to warm rays of sunshine, then move to other locales offering protection from adverse conditions.

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Stalking rabbits as they sit in their forms is great sport, especially when hunting with youngsters not yet adept at bagging running rabbits. The trick is to spot the rabbit before it spots you. Considering the rabbit's superb camouflage, this can be tough.

Old hands at this endeavor have a rule: look for their eyes instead of their whole bodies. A rabbit's round, dark eyes look out of place against the crisscross of cover, and are easily spotted by a hunter who walks slowly, carefully examining all brush and weeds. You may overlook rabbits huddled in their forms, but you'll also bag a few at close range after spotting the eye.

Watch over your shoulder

Look for cottontails and swamp rabbits in brushpiles, honeysuckle patches, fallen treetops, cane brakes and other forest cover.

In isolated patches of cover, a cottontail may head directly away, disappearing from sight, then circle well behind the hunter. Others sit tight until the gunner passes, then squirt out behind.

Look over your shoulder every few minutes, and you'll glimpse

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some of these renegades before they make good their escape. Snap shooting is a must, so be careful to continue to the next page



Aaron Moore had bow success in Ohio. *Photo courtesy of Boone's Bow Shop in Parkersburg*.

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to identify your target before shooting.

Stop-and-go hunting

A veteran nimrod taught me a rabbit hunting technique that has proven very effective over the years. It's based on the idea that rabbits are highly nervous animals, and suspense is something they can't handle very well. It works this way. Enter a covert and begin walking very slowly. Walk ten paces, then stop for at least a minute, then repeat the process. The sound of the approach is sometimes enough to make cottontails flush, but it's just as often the silent period. Apparently, the rabbits think they've been detected and decide to make a run for it.

Woodland rabbits

Most hunters think of thickets and field edges as the places to go for a rabbit race. Some fail to realize woods harbor rabbits, too. Look for cottontails and swamp rabbits in brushpiles, honeysuckle patches, fallen treetops, cane brakes and other forest cover. Because such areas usually receive less hunting pressure, they often hide extraordinary numbers of rabbits.

Take a kid hunting

To get the most out of your next rabbit hunt, take a kid with you -- a son, a daughter, a niece, a nephew, a grandchild or maybe a neighbor's child. It was in the cottontail fields most of us were trained as young hunters. We may have dreamed of deer or more exotic game like grizzlies and lions, but with cottontails, we learned the crucial basics about hunting, nature and ourselves.

Share these things with children. Share the fun and excitement, the triumphs and disappointments, the barrage of wonderful sensations experienced on a rabbit hunt. Our heritage of hunting is a treasure.



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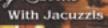
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