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**Issue 321**

**January/February 2025**



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Rabbit**

**B.A.S.S.  
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## Attention Bass Fishermen!

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## Cover Photo

Scottie Thompson, from Madison, had been watching this double drop tine buck on his trail camera. It's a main beam 10 point with 2 drop tines - 12 points. Drop tines are very rare in WV. He used a compound bow for this trophy of a lifetime.

Have a big buck or other big game photo from the 2024 season? Send your pic in. A form is on page 38.

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# Monster Trout Contest

CHARLESTON, W.VA. — Gov. Jim Justice today announced the winners of the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources' (WVDNR) third annual Monster Trout Contest.

“Congratulations to these lucky anglers for reeling in some truly incredible catches,” said Gov. Justice. “As a lifelong angler, I also want to thank everyone for sharing their monster trout photos during our fall trout stockings and showing the world that West Virginia is a premier fishing destination.”

The five lucky anglers each caught a tagged monster trout, which were stocked during the weeks of Oct. 21 and Oct. 28.

Those stockings included 35,000 pounds of trophy-size trout and 6,500 pounds of monster trout, 100 of which received a pink tag. Anglers who caught a tagged monster trout had until November 22 to submit a photo of their catch with the tag number to win a prize.

## 2024 West Virginia Monster Trout Contest Winners

- Steve Davis of Lashmeet, W.Va. – State Park Cabin Stay
- Donavan Miller of Saulsville, W.Va. – Cabela’s Prize Package
- Katie Rice of Morgantown, W.Va. – Cabela’s Prize Package
- Caleb Shelek of Dallas, W.Va. – Cabela’s Prize Package
- Kenneth McIntosh of Crown Point, Ind. – Cabela’s Prize Package

continue to the next page



Katie Rice, from Morgantown, was a winner in the state contest.



Caleb Shelek, from Dallas, was a winner in the state contest.

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Donovan Miller, from Saulsville, was a winner in the state contest.

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In addition to these five winners, 38 verified anglers who caught tagged monster trout and uploaded a photo will also receive a WVDNR water bottle and tackle box.

### SPECIAL ELK RIVER FALL TROUT STOCKINGS

Gov. Justice also reminded anglers that the WVDNR stocked trout on the Elk River in Webster County in November as part of a pilot program to evaluate the economic impact of trout stocking in the area. The stocking occurred at the usual stocking locations and included 750 rainbow trout. A second stocking will take place later in December and include another 750 rainbow trout.

### 2025 FISHING LICENSES NOW AVAILABLE

All anglers 15 years and older are required to have a West Virginia fishing license, trout stamp and a valid form of identification while fishing for trout. Anglers who want to get a head start on planning their 2025 fishing adventures are encouraged to renew their license early online at [WVfish.com](http://WVfish.com).



Kenneth McIntosh, from Indiana, was also a trout contest winner.

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## Winter Jerkbait Fishing For Bass

A lot of people think a suspending jerkbait is just an early spring, prespawn lure. Nowadays, especially with forward-facing sonar, it's a year-round bait. Some of the best jerkbait days take place right now in December.

My favorite jerkbait is Booyah's new Flash Point. What separates it from other jerkbaits is an integrated gold or silver reflector in the head of the lure.

The Flash Point's reflector returns a strong sonar signal, which makes it easier to see on a forward-facing display. It also reflects light, which gives the bait a little different flash and flair.

It comes with premium hooks, so you don't have to swap them out. And, it has a casting system that helps with distance and accuracy.

Jerkbait shines for me in the wintertime because bass are in all stages. The bass can be shallow around docks and grass or suspended over 50 feet of water re-

lating to schools of shad.

When the water is in the mid to upper 50s, I start shallow and work my way deeper.

The bass may not be deep when the water is in the high 40s to low 50s, but they'll be suspended over deeper points, brushpiles and things of that nature.

Wintertime jerkbait retrieves

continue to the next page



Chris Meadows brought in a Nicholas Co. buck. Photo courtesy of WV Wild Outdoors in Birch River.



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When the water is above 50 degrees, you can retrieve it with a quick twitching cadence and short pauses.

You need to slow down when the water drops below 50 degrees. The bass are not as lethargic as most people think in cold water. They can still move quickly, but the shad do slow down.

I slow my retrieve to mimic the natural sluggish motion of a shad in cold water. Instead of erratic twitches, I almost pull the bait and let it sit for two to three seconds or longer.

Bass in cold water swim toward your bait slowly. You can see that on Lowrance Active Target. It's critical that you give them enough

time to react to your jerkbait. Getting deeper The Flash Point gets down 6 to 8 feet on 12-pound Seaguar InvizX fluorocarbon. I can get it a foot deeper by dropping to 10-pound InvizX.

continue to the next page



Brad Evans hooked/released a 47" musky on Christmas Day.



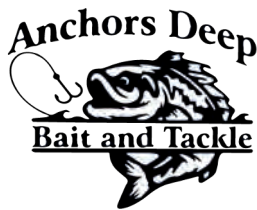
Josh DeBord hunted in Lincoln Co. for his muzzleloader buck.



Brian Enoch arrowed a huge Wirt County whitetail buck.

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When the bass are 15 to 25 feet deep, you need to get the bait down 10 to 15 feet so they can see it.

I do that by taping lead strips in front of the forward hook hanger. Another option is wrapping lead wire around the hooks.

The Flash Point suspends perfectly out of the package. It doesn't take much weight to make it sink slowly like a shad dying in winter.

If you overweight the bait, it sinks too fast to look natural. Too much weight also kills the bait's left

right darting action. Colors

I carry jerkbaits in a variety of colors. That lets me adjust to the weather, the water clarity and the mood of the bass.

Sometimes I find what the bass prefer by trial and error. They rarely want the same color pattern two days in a row.

In clear water on a bright, sunny day, I'll start with a natural shad coloration. If the bass are 15 to 25 feet deep, I'll opt for a bright white color.

In cloudy conditions, I like bright white and chartreuse colors. I also like white in dirty water. Shad turn more of a white, pale color in dirty water, no matter if it's sunny or cloudy.



Madison Wills, from Ripley, had gun success with a fine buck.



Steve Woods used his rifle for a quality whitetail buck.

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# Minerals For Antler Growth

As gamekeepers, one of the first chores on your list for the spring and summer is to refresh your mineral sites. Overall use of minerals for antler growth usually tapers off when the acorns begin to fall and antlers harden, and it generally picks up again intensely when the turkeys start to gobble in the spring and antler genesis begins again. These times obviously coincide with antler genesis and when they harden during the

late summer/early fall and then begin to grow again during the late winter.

Deer need both protein and minerals to grow their antlers. This is in contrast to animals with horns that are made of keratin (like fingernails), that do not shed, and need only protein to increase the growth their horns. Appreciate too, that whitetails must grow a new set of antlers every year, while animals that have horns only need to add gradually to their existing growth.

There have been countless studies conducted to determine whether mineral supplementation leads to any measurable increase in antler growth in whitetails - most of them come back showing little to no measurable difference

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or are inconclusive. The three foot "craters" in the ground created by whitetails lead most of us to believe there is more to a mineral site than just an attraction to the sodium generally found in most products, both natural and man-made. So do mineral supplements

continue to the next page



Young Jacob Huffman has a nice buck. *Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.*



Kylie Cross hunted a fine Monroe Co. buck. *Photo courtesy of Tyler Outdoor Supply in Middlebourne.*

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## Ravin - Barnette

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actually work?

According to the University of Missouri, the difference between 8-percent and 16-percent protein in a deer's diet at 4 years of age can cause a 20-inch (or more) dif-

ference in antler size. Although the effects of mineral levels on antler size have not been scientifically documented, calcium and phosphorus levels are known to be important to antler development.

The exact amount of each nutrient can vary by region and by which study you happen to quote, but velvet antlers are made up roughly of 80-percent crude protein, 22-percent calcium, and 11-percent phosphorus. Hard antlers are closer to 40-percent crude protein, 25 to 35-percent calcium and about 18-percent phosphorus. There is no question that a good protein-rich food plot will do more for antler growth than a mineral site, but minerals do have an impact.

Mineral use by a whitetail's body

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typically exceeds mineral intake during the antler growing cycle as well as when the does are carrying and nursing fawns. It only makes sense to provide them with a mineral supplement that contains all

continue to the next page



Jimbo Paynter got a great buck in a WV bow county.



Devin Shaw, from Morgantown, bow hunted a fine 11 point buck.



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the essential nutrients and trace minerals they could need during these critical stages of growth and development.

As far as whether or not the mineral works, much depends upon the make-up of the specific mineral product and the science and technology behind it. Yes, mineral supplements work, but how well each performs varies product to product.

Quality mineral products like P & R Whiteail Supreme minerals available in Buckahnnon, WV will also have nutrients and trace minerals other than sodium, calcium and phosphorus that aid in other whitetail bodily functions; like

metabolizing fats and proteins. So even if a mineral supplement didn't have anything to do with antler growth, these ingredients help your whitetails take the forage they're consuming and turn it into antler, energy and protein rich milk for newborns.

A buck in velvet is exceedingly protective of his antlers. Bucks will not spar when still in velvet, and if provoked they will rise to strike with their hooves instead, which are every bit as deadly. If you watch a buck in velvet slipping through the brush you will see him delicately twist and turn to avoid scraping his antlers.

The vast amount of new green

forage that is available during continue to the next page



William Schultz used his compound for a Jefferson Co. buck.



D Ray White bow hunted in Wirt County for a wide rack buck.

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spring green-up is a huge part of a deer's diet. This new growth is very high in water and potassium content and causes deer to operate on a somewhat deficient level of sodium (salt). This constant flushing of a whitetail's system from the increased intake of green forage causes them to seek out areas with high sodium content and makes a readily available mineral source that contains everything their bodies need all the more vital.

I think maybe the easiest way to explain the positive benefits of mineral supplementation for your deer herd is to look at it as if it might pertain to humans. It is well documented and prov-

en in medical studies that a diet full of wholesome fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and good fats leads to a more fit, immune, and overall healthier person. You can survive off of junk food...but you don't thrive, there's a big difference. Many times people that are on the best of diets still feel the

need and see benefits from supplementing with a multi-vitamin to fill any gaps in their daily diet. If we are doing our job in the areas of maintaining a healthy deer density, providing high-quality, year-round food plots, and improving habitat for cover and

continue to the next page



Joel McDonald has an unusual side racked buck fro bow hunting.

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safety, providing minerals is just another tool for you to utilize for an overall healthier herd.

During the velvet or growing stages, antlers are comprised of around 80-percent proteins and the remaining 20-percent mostly macro minerals, chiefly phosphorous and calcium.

It only makes sense that if we are going to plant food plots and improve native browse to increase the protein percentage in their diet, we should also provide our deer with a mineral supplement

that mimics their antler make-up and skeletal needs. Chelated and organic minerals are more efficiently absorbed through the use of high quality yeast to improve rumen function. e.

By improving digestibility and retention of protein and minerals, more key nutrients are available for antler growth and body health. Directions for using are pretty straightforward. Typically heavier soil is better than sand and a shaded area is better than full sun. Clear the ground of debris and dig a small trench 3-6 inches deep and around 2 feet in length, pour in the minerals and blend with dirt that was removed.

These mineral sites should ideally be established during the late winter before spring green up, but can be applied anytime. Your deer will use it when they need it.

There are rare cases where a buck does not shed his antlers, and instead keeps a velvet-covered rack that continually grows throughout the year. The condition is referred to as cryptorchidism. These "cactus bucks" are usually the result

of an injury or castration of the testes which alters their testosterone levels. An older-aged buck that has a testes injury or castration while he is hard antler will likely shed his antlers early due to the sharp decrease in testosterone production. The following season the buck can grow a rack that is permanent and stays velvet-covered.

Look on page 14 for the P & R Whitetail Supreme ad. Numerous locations are listed in the ad for dealers carrying their products here in WV.



Jordan Hicks used a bow in Wayne Co. for a tall tined buck.



Justin Crockett, from Wayne, arrowed a huge 14 point buck.

# Snowshoe Hares In WV

In the quiet, snowy forests of West Virginia, the elusive snowshoe hare can be found hopping across the landscape. Known for their white seasonal coat and oversized feet, this remarkable small game species plays an important role in our state's high-elevation ecosystems. However, little is known about their population here. That's why WVDNR biologists and researchers at West Virginia University have teamed up to shine a light on this secretive species.

## THE UNIQUE TRAITS OF SNOWSHOE HARES

Studying the unique characteristics and behaviors of snowshoe hares is the first step in understanding their story. Snowshoe hares are uniquely adapted to their high-elevation habitats, which helps them stay warm and evade predators in the winter. These creatures have a seasonal white coat and large, fur-covered hind feet that help them move across snowy terrain. They inhabit forested spruce areas with dense understory vegetation like rhodo-



Aden Edwards shot a nice 8 point buck in Wirt County.



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dendron thickets, relying on these for cover instead of burrows. Their nocturnal diet shifts with the seasons, ranging from green leaves and berries in summer to twigs and buds in winter.

Snowshoe hares play a vital role

in their ecosystem as both a prey species and a habitat indicator. They support predator populations, including bobcats, foxes, and birds of prey, and help shape plant communities by feeding on

continue to the next page

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vegetation, which promotes forest regeneration. Tracking their populations provides insights into the health of high-elevation ecosystems, as changes in hare numbers can indicate shifts in habitat conditions or broader environmental changes.

### A LEGACY OF CONSERVATION

Snowshoe hares are native to West Virginia, inhabiting the southernmost extent of their range. Conservation efforts began as early as 1949 when hares were

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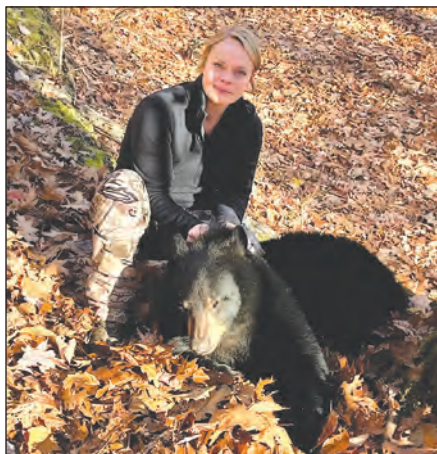


restocked from Wisconsin to bolster populations. Mapping projects in the 1960s provided a historical baseline for tracking their distribution.

Today, however, there are still many unanswered questions about the population density and

habitat use of snowshoe hares in the state. WVDNR and WVU are addressing these questions through an ambitious multi-year research project aimed to understand the species.

Game propagation and restock-  
continue to the next page



Emma Carr used her bow for a Randolph County black bear.



Bentley Armstrong hunted in Gilmer Co. for his 9 point buck.

## SPORTSMANS EXPO

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Guest Speaker - Bass Legend



Jimmie Houston

ing was a normal practice by natural resource agencies in the early 20th century. The West Virginia Wildlife Center was established to support that practice so such restocking wasn't unique for snowshoe hares and other game species such as quail, turkey, and deer. By the mid-20th century, a shift to focusing on protection and enhance-

ment of wildlife habitat eliminated the practice of restocking..

Snowshoe hares at the trailing edge of their range likely always existed at naturally low densities, and therefore, may not be subject to the same population boom-bust cycles seen in the rest of its range. **MODERN RESEARCH TECHNIQUES UNVEIL NEW IN-**

**SIGHTS**

Since January 2023, researchers have employed innovative methods to learn more about snowshoe hares. By analyzing fecal pellets collected from historic habitats throughout the year, scientists can estimate hare populations using genetic markers. These genetic signatures reveal individual hares, giving a clearer picture of their numbers and locations. Habitat data was also collected from many locations during a variety of seasons. This data helps researchers better understand the availability of resources and any effects of change to the understory. Combined, these techniques offer

continue to page 20



Snowshoe hares are found in WV.

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an in-depth look at the species' distribution, genetics and habitat preferences.

Understanding the basic population trends of a culturally significant small game species, like hares, is crucial when tackling broader challenges such as climate change and disease outbreaks. One such concern is Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus serotype type 2 (RHDV-2), a highly contagious virus that affects both wild and domestic rabbits. While lab studies suggest hares might be less vulnerable to this disease compared to cottontails, this hasn't been studied in wild populations. RHDV-2 was first identified in U.S. domestic rabbits in 2018 and in wild rabbits in the southwestern U.S. by 2020. Although the virus hasn't been found in West Virginia, stepping up disease monitoring could help detect it early and guide effective management strategies.

Population density studies are also essential because they show how animals use their habitat and how available resources meet their needs. This information



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helps wildlife managers create and improve young forest habitats, which benefit hares and other game species. Additionally, knowing where these animals live helps managers anticipate how they might react to future climate changes, ensuring better long-term conservation strategies.

**BE PART OF THE CONSERVATION STORY**

West Virginia's snowshoe hares are a vital part of our state's natural heritage, and understanding their story helps us protect their habitats for generations to come. Stay updated on WVDNR's research efforts and consider sup-

porting wildlife conservation initiatives through license purchases and donations.



Richard Sprouse used a muzzle-loader for a Wood Co. buck.



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# 2025 Hunting, Trapping & Fishing Licenses

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.VA. — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) today announced that annual hunting, trapping and fishing licenses and stamps for the 2025 seasons are now available to purchase online at [WVhunt.com](http://WVhunt.com).

“A West Virginia hunting and fishing license is your ticket to unforgettable adventures in the Mountain State,” said WVDNR Director Brett McMillion. “Whether you’re renewing your annual license and stamps or pur-

chasing a lifetime license for your kids or grandkids, buying your hunting, trapping and fishing licenses and stamps has never been more convenient.”

Annual hunting, trapping and fishing licenses and stamps are good for the calendar year and may be purchased online at [WVhunt.com](http://WVhunt.com). All licensed hunters must carry a valid form of photo identification while hunting and trapping. To learn more about the WVDNR’s 2025 license products, visit [WVdnr.gov/2025-license-guide](http://WVdnr.gov/2025-license-guide).

WVDNR Promotes Gift the Outdoors Holiday Guide

In addition to encouraging hunters, trappers and anglers to renew their 2025 licenses and stamps early, the WVDNR is promoting digital gift certificates, online lifetime licenses and collectible license cards as part of its annual Gift the Outdoors holiday campaign.

The gift guide includes the following hunting, fishing and outdoors-related gift ideas:

**WVDNR Gift Certificates:** Can be used to purchase licenses, stamps and other hunting and fishing privileges.

**West Virginia Lifetime Licenses:** A timeless gift for children and grandchildren, providing a lifetime of hunting and fishing adventures.

**Wonderful West Virginia Magazine Subscriptions:** This flagship publication of the WVDNR features immersive storytelling and breathtaking photos that celebrate the natural beauty of West Virginia.


To learn more about these holiday gift options, [WVdnr.gov/gift-2024](http://WVdnr.gov/gift-2024).



Stephanie Birchfield used a gun in Mason County for her buck.



Zayn Hooper got a 9 point buck in Wood County.



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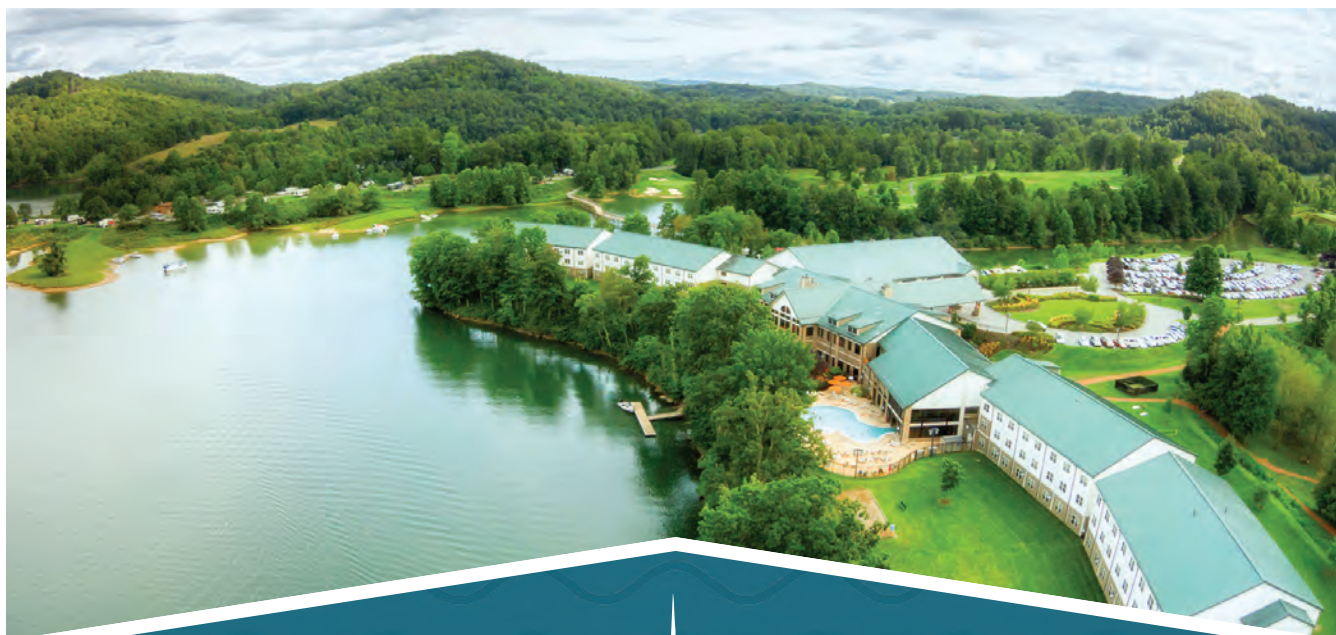
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# Hard Lessons Learned On Gun Safety

When I was a little boy, my dad was always teaching me gun safety, and when you are small, you really don't pay a lot of attention. When I was a teenager, dad made the point a little stronger. He said boy, if I ever come by and we're

hunting and your safety is off your gun, you are going to have a very very bad day. Was that tough love, probably, but believe me, I checked my safety often and I taught it to my grandchildren.

Dad was from the old school, where actions, speak louder than words.

I remember when I was a teenager, and we did not have any heat in the house. The water in the water bucket was froze, but you could always get a little out. My dad said Donnie, time to get up for school. I just laid there and went back to sleep. The next thing I know I have ice cold water going down the back of my neck. That was the worst feeling that I had ever had. He took a dipper of that half frozen water and just let a few drops go down the back of my neck. From then on all he had

By Don Lilly, Sutton WV to do was just rattle the dipper in the bucket and I jumped to my feet.

Dad probably taught me the  
continue to page 26



Hannah Hughes had gun buck success in Jackson County.



Cy Watterson hunted in Mason County for an 11 point buck.

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the greatest object lesson about gun safety accidentally. I learned a lesson that I would never forget. Let me tell you the story.

My father kept me in the woods or fishing almost every weekend and sometimes even during the week until I was in my 20s. Finally, one day, I said dad, I'm not going with you this weekend and it like shocked him. I told him, you know, I'm 20 years old and basically never had a girlfriend, I have spend it all with you out-

doors. Dad looked at me and said, boy, are you afraid you're going to miss out on something, and I said yes.

He never said another word. I got on with my life and most of it was getting in trouble. He continued with his, just like he had done since he was a little boy, trapping, hunting and fishing. He was a avid outdoorsman and was that way up into his death at 87 years old.

What was the great lesson I learned?

When I was a teenager, dad and I were hunting late one evening, we were in a huge field with trees, he said you go over there about 100 yards away and find a good spot and I will go this way to where we can still see each other. We'll see if we can get us a nice buck.

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I could see him setting over in the field, with his favorite gun, continue to the next page

**Send In Your Big Game  
Photos from 2024  
Form Is On Page 38**



Jessica Shutts used a crossbow for an 8 point Wood Co. buck.



Alexa Cunningham has a great buck. Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.



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he nicknamed it "Old Sweetie." For some reason, my dad always thought that gun just fell out of heaven one day. It was a 6 MM, Model 742 auto Remington. I probably could not count all the deer that he and I put on the ground with it.

We were hunting in a place called Sugar Grove, WV.

It was about dark and I heard what sounded like a incoming mortar round, it made the weirdest sound. There was a little bang and then a big bang, I looked over in the middle of the field and there was my dad laid out on his back. I felt sure he was dead. I was dreading going to see.

Running over there I discovered that he was out cold and his face and eyes were full of dirt, I wallered him around and finally got him setting up. I tried to clean the dirt out of his eyes so he could see and he was bleeding from the explosion.

What happened was, he had put the barrel of the gun in or near the ground and was bent over facing

the ground, he used it as a cane to get up, and evidently with the safety off, pulled the trigger. It blowed him about 4 feet away, there was a hole in the ground about the size of a water bucket

To make things worse, it had blown a rock about the size of two of your feet out and was laying about 5 feet away. It appeared it had hit him in the upper body, but didn't look like anything was broke.

Once I got him where he could

talk, the only thing he could say was, can you believe what a hole Old Sweetie blowed, just imagine if that was a deer. Yes, Old Sweetie had done it again. He was so proud of that gun. lol

Far as I know, we never mentioned it again, not even to mom.

Before he died, I had the gun engraved with a gold tag that said, "Old Sweetie"

I often wondered what he would've said, if I would've said, how's that safety dad!!!!!!



Cameron Hurst's 1st buck came from Wood County.



Mathew Owens hunted in Wood County for a great buck.



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# French Creek Freddie Groundhog Day

WEST VIRGINIA'S 2025 GROUNDHOG DAY CELEBRATION IS SCHEDULED FOR FEB. 2

You might know French Creek Freddie as West Virginia's most popular weather-predicting groundhog, but do you know the story of how Freddie started forecasting or how he got his name? Get ready for the Groundhog Day celebration at the West Virginia State Wildlife Center on Feb. 2 by checking out these interesting facts about Freddie.

THE FIRST GROUNDHOG

DAY PREDICTIONS WERE MADE BY BADGERS

The origins of Groundhog Day traces back to Candlemas Day, the traditional conclusion to the Christmas-Epiphany season when clergy would bless and distribute candles. Due to Candlemas occurring at the beginning of February, many people used the holiday to predict spring's arrival. The Germans added to the tradition by giving the weather-predicting du-

ties to the badger. They believed that if the sun appeared on Candlemas Day, the badger would cast a shadow and that six more weeks of bad weather would follow. It wasn't until German settlers came to America that the groundhog became the weather-predicting animal of choice.

WEST VIRGINIA'S GROUNDHOG DAY STARTED IN 1978

The modern Groundhog Day

continue to the next page



Young Chase Martin got a buck in Braxton Co. *Photo courtesy of WV Wild Outdoors in Birch River.*



Mike Murray hunted in Wirt Co. *Photo courtesy of Crossroads General Store in Walker.*

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celebration was started in the 1800s by German farmers living in Pennsylvania, not far from where Freddie's cousin, Punxsutawney Phil, makes his own prediction each year.

West Virginia's French Creek Freddie didn't come onto the scene until more than a century later. In 1978, Freddie's weather-predicting career started when former West Virginia State Wildlife Center Superintendent Bill Vanscoy responded to a reporter on Groundhog Day if there was a groundhog on site and if it had seen its shadow.

"I don't remember what I told him, but it was whatever was appropriate to the weather we were having. Anyway, he asked me what the groundhog's name was. I don't know what possessed me to do it but I skipped the usual lecture on why we don't name animals and said his name was French Creek Freddie. It went out on The Associated Press wire and soon we were getting calls from all over the county. Every year now, people from newspapers and TV stations come out on Groundhog Day and we kick a groundhog out of its den for the cameras.



Clayton Mills used a muzzleloader in Wirt Co. for a huge buck.

It's harmless fun and it comes at a time of the year when people need some cheering up."

**FRENCH CREEK FREDDIE'S PREDICTIONS ARE 50-50**

In the past 40 years, Freddie's forecasts have an accuracy rate of about 50 percent. On Groundhog Day 2024, the weather was cold, cloudy and snowy. So, Freddie did not see his shadow when he emerged from his den and predict-



Doody Cook hooked a huge spotted bass at RD Bailey Lake.

ed an early spring. While the average daily high in February 2024 was 39 degrees, the temperature didn't warm up until May. The average daily temperature was 46 degrees in March and 54 degrees in April.

Freddie also has the help of the National Weather Service, which has an official weather observation station at the West Virginia State Wildlife Center. The NWS has high-tech instruments to measure rain or snow and temperature recordings in the area, which are recorded and submitted daily by wildlife center staff.

**FUN FACTS ABOUT GROUNDHOGS**

Groundhogs, also known as woodchucks or whistle-pigs, are the largest animal in the squirrel family. They whistle when alarmed and in the spring when they begin courting. Groundhogs

continue to the next page

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have short ears, a short tail and short legs, but are surprisingly quick. And their jaws are exceptionally strong. Their teeth never stop growing. Groundhogs eat grass, berries, vegetables, grasshoppers, insects and snails.

Groundhogs are one of the few animals that truly hibernate, a deep sleep or coma-like state where an animal's body temperature drops to a few degrees above freezing and their heart and breathing nearly stops.

Groundhogs are excellent swimmers, tree climbers and burrowers. They can move more than 700 pounds of dirt when digging a burrow or den used for sleeping, hibernating and caring for cubs.

Young groundhogs are usually born in mid-April or May. By July they can go out on their own. The size of the typical groundhog litter is four to nine.

**VISIT FRENCH CREEK FREDDIE AT THE WEST VIRGINIA STATE WILDLIFE CENTER**

The West Virginia Wildlife Center in Upshur County is home to French Creek Freddie and nearly 30 different species of West Virginia mammals, birds and reptiles.

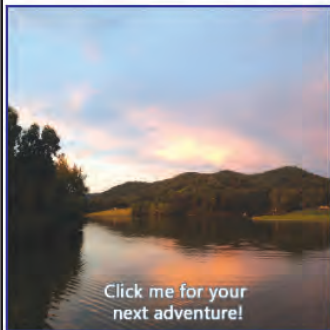
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Cecily Groves, from Morgantown, has a quality buck.

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Form Is On Page 38**

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You must have Adobe Acrobat Reader Version 7.0 or later to view the Sportsman Magazine. If you don't have it, click the image below to get the latest version.



# 2024 Buck Season Results

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) today announced preliminary harvest numbers for the state's buck firearms season.

According to preliminary data, collected through the WVDNR's electronic game check system, hunters in West Virginia harvested 41,090 antlered deer during the state's two-week buck firearms season, which ran from Nov. 25 to Dec. 8. The 2024 total harvest is slightly below the five-year average of 43,143.

The top 10 counties for the 2024 buck harvest were Greenbrier (1,742), Randolph (1,564), Preston (1,557), Pendleton (1,317), Jackson (1,277), Pocahontas (1,259), Ritchie (1,219), Hampshire (1,218), Hardy (1,178) and

Grant (1,169). Counties where buck firearms season harvests increased compared to 2023 include Barbour, Cabell, Doddridge, Hancock, Hampshire, Jackson, Mason, Mineral, Morgan, Pocahontas, Preston, Putnam, Ritchie, Tucker, Tyler, Upshur, Webster, Wetzel and Wood counties.

Additional Deer Hunting Opportunities

The WVDNR reminds hunters that the Mountaineer Heritage Season for deer, bear, and turkey will take place from January 9 to January 12. This special season offers hunters an additional opportunity to pursue big game while celebrating the outdoor traditions that have shaped West Virginia's culture and history. The season is open statewide in all 55 counties. Hunters may only use primitive-style weapons, such as longbows, recurve bows, and muzzleloading black powder rifles or pistols with flint-lock or percussion cap actions. However, in Logan, McDowell, Mingo, and Wyoming counties, only longbows and recurve bows are

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permitted. Modern muzzleloaders equipped with scopes are prohibited statewide during this season.

To learn more about Mountaineer Heritage Season and other hunting opportunities, hunters are encouraged to consult the 2024–2025 Hunting and Trapping Regulations Summary, available to download at [WVDnr.gov/hunting-regulations](http://WVDnr.gov/hunting-regulations)

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Griffin Beaver used his crossbow for his whitetail buck.



Mathew Pierce hunted in Wyoming Co. for a quality 13 point.

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Fall turkey harvest numbers are influenced by hunter participation, but also depend on the  
coninue to the next page

## 2024 Fall Turkey Hunting Results

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.VA. — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) announced today that hunters harvested 17 percent more fall turkeys in 2024 compared to last year.

“West Virginia is truly a top destination for turkey hunting, and our thriving turkey populations are a testament to the success of sustainable wildlife management,” said WVDNR Director Brett McMillion. “These efforts ensure that hunters, whether seasoned or just starting out, can continue to enjoy abundant opportunities for years to come. We encourage everyone to experience the incredible hunting opportunities our state has to offer by purchasing a 2025 license and planning a trip in the new year.”

According to preliminary hunting data from the WVDNR’s electronic licensing and game checking system, fall turkey hunters harvested 1,130 birds in 2024

compared to 967 birds in 2023. The fall 2024 harvest was also 17 percent above the five-year average (968 birds) and similar to the 10-year average (1,132 birds). Although fewer counties have a two-week season this year due to a lower spring harvest, the fall harvest was consistent with long-term averages.



Kiarra Collins brought in a 10 point. Photo courtesy of Crossroads General Store in Walker.



Mike Persinger hunted in Clay County for a nice 8 point buck.

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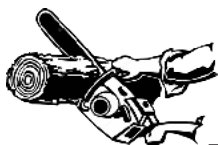
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current year's brood production and mast conditions. This year's brood survey results were 4.5 percent above last year's and 5.1 percent above the five-year average, indicating that the 2024 harvest might be slightly above last year's harvest.

Five out of six districts reported increased fall turkey harvest compared to last year. District 3 had the highest harvest with 289 birds, followed by District 1 with 191, District 4 with 180, District 2 with 169, District 5 with 160 and District 6 with 141.

Counties with the most harvests were Randolph County (77), Nicholas (66), Greenbrier (57), Pocahontas (53) and Mason (41). All of these counties except Mason County had a four-week season.

All hunters 15 and older are required to have a valid West Virginia hunting license and valid form of identification while hunting, which can be purchased at license agents across the state or online.



Cooper Hall bagged a nice 9 point buck in Ritchie County.

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## Updated Fishing Regulations

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.VA. — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) today announced the availability of the state’s 2025 Fishing Regulations Summary, which can be downloaded for free at [WVdnr.gov/fishing-regulations](http://WVdnr.gov/fishing-regulations).

“Reviewing the updated Fishing Regulations Summary each year is an important step for anglers to stay informed about the rules that preserve the quality of our state’s world-class fisheries,” said WVDNR Director Brett McMillion. “As we approach the new

year, I encourage everyone to download a copy and renew their licenses early, so they’re ready to cast their lines come January 1.”

West Virginia’s updated fishing regulations will go into effect on Jan. 1. Anglers are encouraged to review the full updated summary and make note of new regulations, which include:

The daily creel limit on Elk Fork, North Bend, O’Brien and Woodrum lakes is six for black bass (smallmouth, spotted and largemouth). Only one fish may ex-

continue to the next page



Brayden Higgenbottom got his first deer with a gun this season.



Jeb Short had success with a rifle for a nice whitetail buck.

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Colt Leshar used a bow in Fayette Co. for a dandy whitetail buck.



Katlyn French got a monster buck in Putnam County.



Lester McLaughlin, 77 years old, scored a nice Clay County buck.



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Keith Holland used a compound for a huge Pleasants Co. black bear.

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