



**FREE**

Issue 319

October/November 2024

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Bass**

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**Mark A. Goudy**

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## Cover Photo

Hunter White caught a 5 1/2 lb. and an 8 lb., 2 oz. largemouth bass at the Stonewall Classic 2 day bass tournament. He fished with his dad, Chris, and they won the event with 32 lbs, 9 oz.

Crossbow and archery season opened on September 30. Time to get all your equipment ready for the season. Looking for archery buck pictures - form is on page 38.

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# Two Record Black Crappie

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Gov. Jim Justice announced that the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) has reported that two anglers fishing together on Aug. 8 caught state-record black crappie, setting records for both length and weight.

“I’m thrilled to celebrate this unprecedented fishing achievement and hope these new benchmarks inspire anglers from all over to come and explore West Virginia’s world-class fishing opportunities,” said Gov. Jim Justice.

At 7:30 a.m., Lindell Marker of Sod, W.Va., caught a 17.36-inch black crappie, surpassing the previous length record of 17.32

inches set by Craig Webb, also at Woodrum Lake. Marker’s catch tied the existing weight record of 2.85 pounds, also held by Webb. At 8:45 a.m., Dwight Priestley of Alum Creek, W.Va., caught a 17.76-inch, 3.15-pound black crappie that surpassed Marker’s shortly-held record and set new records for length and weight. Both fish were certified by WVDNR Fisheries Biologist Cory Hartman. These record-breaking crappies were caught using live minnows.

“These new records are a testament to the incredible fishing opportunities at Woodrum Lake,” said WVDNR Director Brett Mc-

continue to the next page



Darrell Hornbeck caught a 9 1/4 pound rainbow trout near Elkins.



Allen Marks hooked a 47” Tygart River musky and released it.



Jocelyn Murray, from Wood Co., got an early archery buck.

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Lydell Marker caught the state record black crappie 17.32” and tied the weight record of 2.85 pounds.



Dwight Priestley has the record black crappie with 17.76” and 3.15 lbs. that his fishing companion broke that same day.

Million. “We are thrilled to celebrate these outstanding achievements by Lindell Marker and Dwight Priestley. Their catches not only set new benchmarks but also highlight the quality of our continue to the next page

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state's fisheries."

With these catches, the WVDNR has reported eight record-breaking catches so far in 2024. A record-breaking channel catfish was caught in Wayne County in July, a record-breaking black crappie and redear sunfish were caught at Woodrum Lake in Jackson County and Plum Orchard Lake in Fayette County in June, a record-breaking bowfin was caught in March on the Ohio River in Mason County and a record-breaking redbreast sunfish and tiger trout were caught at New Creek Lake in Grant County in February. To

learn more about state fish record categories, visit [WVdnr.gov/state-records](http://WVdnr.gov/state-records).

All anglers 15 and older must have a West Virginia fishing license, which can be purchased online at [WVfish.com](http://WVfish.com). Anglers are reminded that a trout stamp is required when fishing for trout. They are also encouraged to upgrade their fishing experience by opting for a physical license card when they purchase their 2024 fishing license.



Landon Robertson got a 9 point bow buck in Wayne County.



Toby Murley arrowed a Marshall Co. buck. Photo courtesy of Tyler Outdoor Supply in Middlebourne.



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SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Gov. Jim Justice and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) today reminded hunters to get ready for the opening of archery and crossbow seasons for white-tailed deer, black bear and wild boar, which will opened on Sept. 28.

Hunters are encouraged to purchase their license and stamps at WVhunt.com before the seasons start.

“With the start of archery and crossbow seasons, West Virginia’s fall beauty will be on full display, giving hunters the perfect opportunity to experience the thrill of the outdoors,” Gov. Justice said. “I encourage everyone to get their licenses early and make the most of this incredibly exciting season. As a lifelong outdoorsman, I can

tell you this is one of my favorite times of the year.”

White-Tailed Deer

Hunters may harvest one deer with a base license and up to two additional deer with a Class RB or RRB stamp. Resident landowners hunting on their own property and Class DT license holders don’t need to purchase additional stamps. In nine counties, hunters must harvest an antlerless deer before taking a second antlered deer. In archery-only counties (Logan, McDowell, Mingo and Wyoming), hunters may take up to two deer, with only one being antlered. For more information about the deer archery and crossbow seasons, see pages 26–28 in the West Virginia Hunting Regulations Summary available to download at WVdnr.gov.

Black Bear

Hunters may take two bears annually if at least one is harvested in Boone, Fayette, Kanawha, Lo- continue to the next page

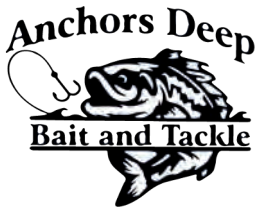


Tyler Bledsoe hunted in Mingo Co. for this female 6 point buck. They generally won’t lose their velvet. Once in a lifetime.



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gan, McDowell, Mingo, Nicholas, Raleigh or Wyoming counties. The daily bag limit is one. A base license and Bear Damage Stamp (Class DS) are required for residents, while nonresidents also need a Bear Hunting License (Class EE), Conservation/Law Enforcement Stamp (CS/LE) or Class EE-L and a National Forest Stamp (Class I) if hunting on national forest lands. For more information about the bear archery and crossbow season, see page 40 in the West Virginia Hunting Regulations Summary available to download at WVdnr.gov.

## Wild Boar

West Virginia's wild boar season is only open in Boone, Logan, Raleigh and Wyoming counties, with a season limit of one boar. A second split of the season is Feb.

7-9, 2025. To hunt in February, hunters will need a 2025 license, which will go on sale in December. For more information about the wild boar season, see page 45 in the West Virginia Hunting Regulations Summary available to download at WVdnr.gov.

## Bowhunter Survey

Bowhunters from last season are encouraged to participate in the WVDNR's annual bowhunter survey, which helps gather data for wildlife management. Survey invitations will be emailed the week of Sept. 23.

Hunters are also reminded that all big game must be tagged and electronically registered. Hunters harvesting two deer in one day do not need to check the first before taking the second.

All hunters 15 and older are re-

quired to have a valid West Virginia hunting license, unless hunting under resident landowner privileges. Hunters also must carry a valid form of identification. To purchase a hunting license and stamps or upgrade an existing license, visit WVhunt.com.



Morgan Spurlock used a compound bow for a Logan Co. buck.



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## 2024 Mast Survey

ELKINS, W.Va. — Hunters getting ready for fall hunting seasons may now consult the 2024 Hunting Outlook and Mast Survey, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) announced today.

The annual publication, which provides details about the abundance of wild fruits and nuts produced by 18 species of trees and shrubs, forecasts similar harvests for deer, black bear, wild turkey, squirrel and bobwhite quail compared to last year.

“On behalf of the WVDNR, I would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to everyone who helped us collect data and make this important survey possible,” said WVDNR Director Brett McMillion. “Every hunting season in West Virginia comes with unique opportunities and challenges, so I encourage folks to use this report to their advantage as they enjoy a great hunting season this fall.”

The report, which is compiled by active and retired staff from the WVDNR’s Wildlife Resources Section and West Vir-

continue to the next page



Brian Galloway reeled in a great summer largemouth bass.

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Hunter and Chris White won the Stonewall Classic bass event with a 2 day weight of 32 lbs., 9 oz. It was their 2nd Classic win.

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ginia Division of Forestry, may be downloaded at [WVdnr.gov/mast-survey](http://WVdnr.gov/mast-survey).

According to the report, which includes outlooks for individual



Gavin Carr had archery success on an 11 point. *Photo courtesy of Tyler Outdoor Supply in Middlebourne.*



Dianna Masters arrowed a Pleasants Co. 10 point. *Photo courtesy of Tyler Outdoor Supply in Middlebourne.*

game species, hard and soft mast production was mixed this year. White and chestnut oak acorn production is up compared to last year in some parts of the state, but production for red/black and scarlet oak is down, though results are near the long-term average. Beech, walnut and hickory mast is down compared to 2023 levels and from the long-term average.

“The availability of mast is mixed across the state this year, which can change where and how animals move and create new opportunities for hunters to have a successful harvest,” said Holly Morris, furbearer and small game project leader for the WVDNR’s Wildlife Resources Section. “As every year, we recommend hunters review the mast survey for more information on predicted wildlife harvests and mast pro-

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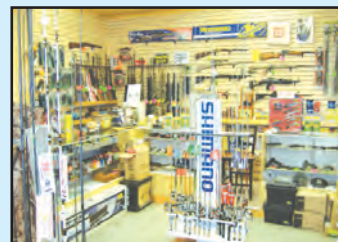
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duction in each West Virginia region as they plan their hunting adventures.”

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## Coping With The Fall Turnover For Bass

My 13-year-old son, Vegas, and one of his buddies fish a youth team bass tournament league that typically draws 30 to 40 boats. When I launched them at an event earlier this month, I noticed that decaying matter from the bottom had floated to the surface.

That told me the lake was turning over. I knew the young anglers who were fishing the tournament were going to struggle to get bites. Only one team caught a limit of bass. Vegas and his partner finished fifth with one bass, a 4-pounder. Most of the teams failed to catch a fish.

The dreaded fall turnover always makes for awful fishing. It has already started up north where I live and will soon be happening farther south. This phenomenon is basically a mixing of the upper

and lower layers of water.

During the summer, most lakes stratify into two layers that are demarcated by a thermocline. The



Josh Balsler caught the big bass (5-4 lbs. largemouth) on day 2 of the Stonewall Classic.

water above the thermocline is warmer and has sufficient oxygen content to support fish. The water below the thermocline is much cooler and lacking in oxygen.

In autumn, the surface layer eventually cools to the point that continue to the next page



Dave Riddle & Tim Wade had the big bag (19-7 lbs.) on day 1 of the Stonewall Classic. Finished 2nd.





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the thermocline disappears and the two layers begin mixing. This puts bass into a serious funk. I think of it in terms of when I have a headache. I still manage to function, but I'm not my normal, cheerful self.

Fortunately, the turnover is short-lived and is over in a week or two. The bass snap back, and they're hungry. Then again, you can catch bass during a turnover. It will be challenging, but it's not a lost cause. There are a number of things I do when I have to deal with a lake that's turning over.

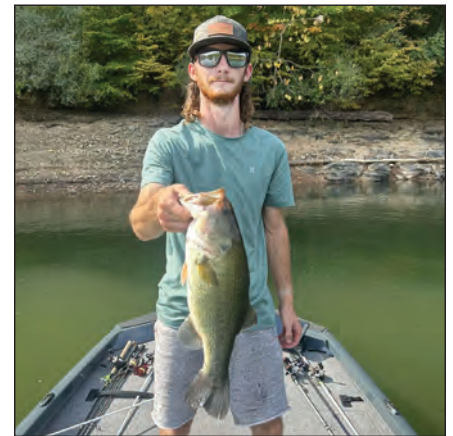
Run from the turnover: On large bodies of water, and especially on reservoirs, the turnover does

not happen all over the lake at the same time. If the turnover is happening on the upper end of the lake, run to the dam or vice versa. Even if you fish the same lake every week, you may be able to avoid bass that have a turnover headache.

Go shallow: You might have been on the best deep bite in the world prior to the turnover. But when this phenomenon happens, go shallow, bro. There is less mixing of water in the shallows, so bass living no deeper than 5 feet are not nearly as affected. There are always some bass in shallow water, and some of the bass in deep water will move shallow to

escape the turnover.

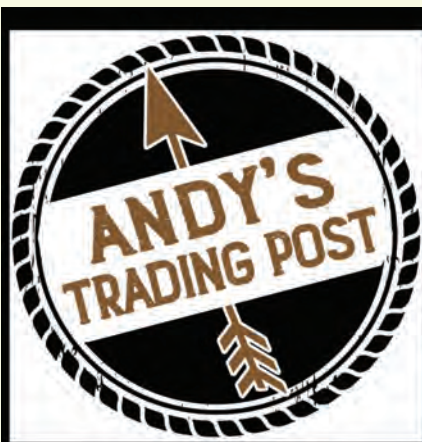
This is typically a power-fishing gig for me. I'll cover water with things like crankbaits, spinner-  
continue to the next page



Dalton Simmons landed a quality largemouth bass recently.



Mark Moran hooked a late season largemouth bass & released it.



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baits and swimming jigs. I don't expect to get a lot of bites, but I'll get enough to make it worthwhile.

Wind, wind, wind: You often hear fishermen say, "The wind is your friend." That's especially true during the fall turnover. When wind and waves are beating on the bank they quicken the water-mixing process. The conditions are more to a bass' liking, and the water movement also

makes for better feeding conditions.

This is another instance for power fishing. I love throwing jerkbaits and vibrating jigs when waves crash on the bank.

Current: Just as with the wind, a current enhances the mixing of water and reduces the impact of the turnover on fish. I look for moving water in feeder streams, and in creek arms that have wa-

ter running into them. A causeway that funnels water through a bridge is another place where you'll find bass taking advantage of a current.

Isolated ladder cover: This can be hard to find, but it's a good one. Ladder cover is anything that gives a bass something they can travel along from shallow to deep water. Two prime examples are a long dock and a large fallen tree. The water may be only 2 feet deep near the bank, but it could be 20 feet deep and the end of the dock or tree.

During a turnover, ladder cover gives a bass a comfort zone to follow from one depth to another. But this only holds true if the ladder cover is isolated. A bank with a string of long docks, for  
continue to the next page

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Danny Shanholz was pleased with this hue largemouth bass.





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example, spreads the bass out and makes them harder to find. A single dock or laydown on a bank is a bass magnet.

No matter what you do, the bite is going to be tough during a turnover. But if you take advantage of these tips, your day on the water is much less likely to be a lost cause.

You can learn more about how I fish during a turnover and under other conditions at [www.mikeiconelli.com](http://www.mikeiconelli.com) or [www.youtube.com/c/goingike](http://www.youtube.com/c/goingike).



Johnny Crockett landed this possible state record musky at the Stonewall Classic - 56" released.

## Hunting Through The Years

Archaic humans began hunting around 3 million years ago, and it has remained a part of our civilization since then. [

When archeologists discovered early evidence of our human ancestors' hunting activities, it became clear that adding meat to the diet meant big changes for early Homo sapiens. For example, skeleton size increased soon after, suggesting meat was important for evolution.

Researchers believed early humans waited in trees for their prey to pass underneath, rather than chase after animals the way hunters in the classical and Renaissance periods generally did.

Bows and arrows were a universal method of hunting, except in Australia.

### Hunting Men Facts

Weapon choices vary, but a bow and arrow are fairly traditional

Blowpipes, or blow guns, are some of the most dangerous weapons a hunter can use.

The Australian boomerang, now

a popular toy and tourist gift, was originally a tool used for hunting.

When early humans hunted bigger game, like antelopes, they chose to eat only adults, leaving behind younger and older animals  
continue to the next page



Stacy Hart caught this 41 1/2" gar at the St. Marys boat launch.

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in the herd.

Hunting may have helped establish traditional gender roles, as males were forced to learn to hunt more efficiently in order to feed their female mates and offspring.

When agriculture was introduced about 11,000 years ago, hunting became less important as people dedicated more time to cultivating crops.

Hunting is still important for people who live in areas where farming is impossible or very difficult, such as rainforests in South America or jungles in Southeastern Asia.

Artemis, daughter of Zeus, was the virgin Greek goddess of the hunt.

Diana, the Roman equivalent of Artemis, guarded forests and the animals who lived there.

Mixcoatl was the Aztec god of hunting. To ensure a prosperous hunting season, the Aztecs performed human sacrifices. Aztec Hunting Sacrifice

Aztecs often made humans sacrifices to ensure the favor of the gods (we're curious about how they hunted those animals)

Dogs were most likely trained to hunt alongside humans in the ear-



Freddie Collins caught big bass at a night event at Burnsville Lake.



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ly Neolithic era, and some breeds were developed to hunt specific animals.

Horses were raised to hunt starting in 2nd millennium.

In ancient Egypt, hunters were a separate class, often hunting for

nobles and aristocrats as well as on their own.

The use of hunting dogs can be traced back to ancient Egypt, where greyhounds were used to track gazelles.

continue to the next page



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“Coursing” is the use of hounds in hunting.

“Gun dogs” are dogs that hunt by scent and sight, and both fetch birds after they have been killed as well as sighting them before. Setters, spaniels, and pointers are the most common "gun dog" breeds.

During the Middle Ages, hunting as a sport was reserved for the rich and done on private lands owned by aristocrats.

Some hunting techniques in the early modern era involved putting animals in an enclosed space and allowing them to be killed outright with little effort.

In many early Northern European tribes, slaves were forbidden from hunting since they were not allowed to own weapons or bear arms.

Hunting with firearms began in the 16th century.

The perils of duck hunting are great - especially for the duck.- Walter Cronkite

In 1515, the French government made hunting and poaching illegal for peasants.

Punishments for peasants who hunted on grounds owned by no-continue to the next page

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Drake Cole - 7 3/4 walleye. Photo courtesy of WaterDawg in Hinton.



Jacqueline Compton landed a channel catfish at North Bend.



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bles included being sewn into a deerskin and chased by hunting dogs, who would kill the prey upon capture.

Kings would often demonstrate their hunting ability for an audience of nobles. To do so, kings would have game brought to closed arena before shooting and killing it, rather than hunting it in the wild.

Nobility in medieval England hunted several animals, including

the stag, the boar, and even otters. Queen Elizabeth I enjoyed hawking (where prey is killed by trained hawks) as well as hunting.

Royal feasts in medieval and renaissance Europe often included wild boar and venison, sometimes killed by the king himself.

Red deer, fallow deer, and hares were hunted for their ability to lead a chase, an exciting change from waiting for prey to wander into range.

The French Revolution opened up lands for hunting, but the sudden free-reign of people on hunting grounds caused massive animal and ecosystem damage.

Foxes were initially hunted like vermin but were eventually hunted for sport.

Wolves were considered a type of vermin in early Europe. People were allowed to kill as many wolves as they could, whenever they could.

### Hunting Fact Wolves

Wolves were hunted to extinction in the UK, but species still remain in North America and in continental Europe

By 1770, wolves had become extinct in the British isles due to  
continue to page 20



Justin Pecsetto caught a PB 6 lb. 2 oz. largemouth at Stonewall.

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overhunting.[6]

In the 1800s, over-hunting had brought about the extinction of several species, prompting the introduction of the extensive game laws currently in place in Great Britain.

In the UK, nothing more deadly than a double-barreled shotgun is allowed as a hunting weapon, as the shooter can only unload two bullets before reloading, thus allowing prey the chance to escape.

It costs about \$20 and takes about 5 hours for the average deer hunter to secure one pound of venison.

The most common “trophy” animal (an animal meant to be killed and then displayed) in the United States is the snow goose.

American hunters track and kill most of their trophy animals in Canada.

In Africa, the most common trophy animal is the lion, followed by the elephant and the leopard.

Samuel Colt, the man who created an empire selling hunting weapons, was said to have coined the phrase “new and improved.”

Only five percent of Americans participated in hunting during the



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past five years, meaning the sport is on the decline.

Non-violent natural activities, such as nature photography and bird watching, are replacing hunting in popularity.

**Hunting Conservation Fact**

Somewhat ironically, money spent on hunting helps fund wildlife conservation efforts

Taxes on hunting licenses and equipment pay for 60% of wildlife agencies’ expenses. Less hunting

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Dustin Wilburn caught a 5 lb. largemouth at Stonewall.

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means less funding, which is a concern for many state-run wild-life and recreational departments

President Theodore Roosevelt, himself an avid hunter, helped create the “conservation through wise use” principle and encouraged other hunters to donate to causes that would preserve the land they hunted on.

New York sold its first deer hunting permit in 1864. President Roosevelt helped more states sell licenses, thus allowing for healthier revenue streams.

In 1937, Congress passed legislation that required money earned from hunting licenses and products to be used for conservation efforts.

Almost a third of hunters in the United States are baby boomers.

Most hunters retire from the sport by the age of 65.

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## Fall Bass Fishing

By Laura Ann Foshee

As the temperatures drop and the leaves begin to change, so do the habits of bass. Fall is a prime time to fish, but being successful during this season means preparing for those shifting patterns and conditions.

Understanding Fall Bass Behavior

In the fall, bass become more active, feeding heavily in prepara-

tion for the colder months. As the water cools, they move from their deep summer spots toward shallower areas, following schools of baitfish. This transition is key for anglers, and knowing where to find them is half the battle.

Target areas like main lake points, coves, and creeks—places where baitfish tend to gather. Bass will often be close by, ready to strike. Early fall can still see bass holding in deeper waters, but as the season progresses, they'll head to shallow waters, particularly during sunny afternoons

continue to page 24



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Maddy Richards hooked a huge bluegill in Ritchie County.

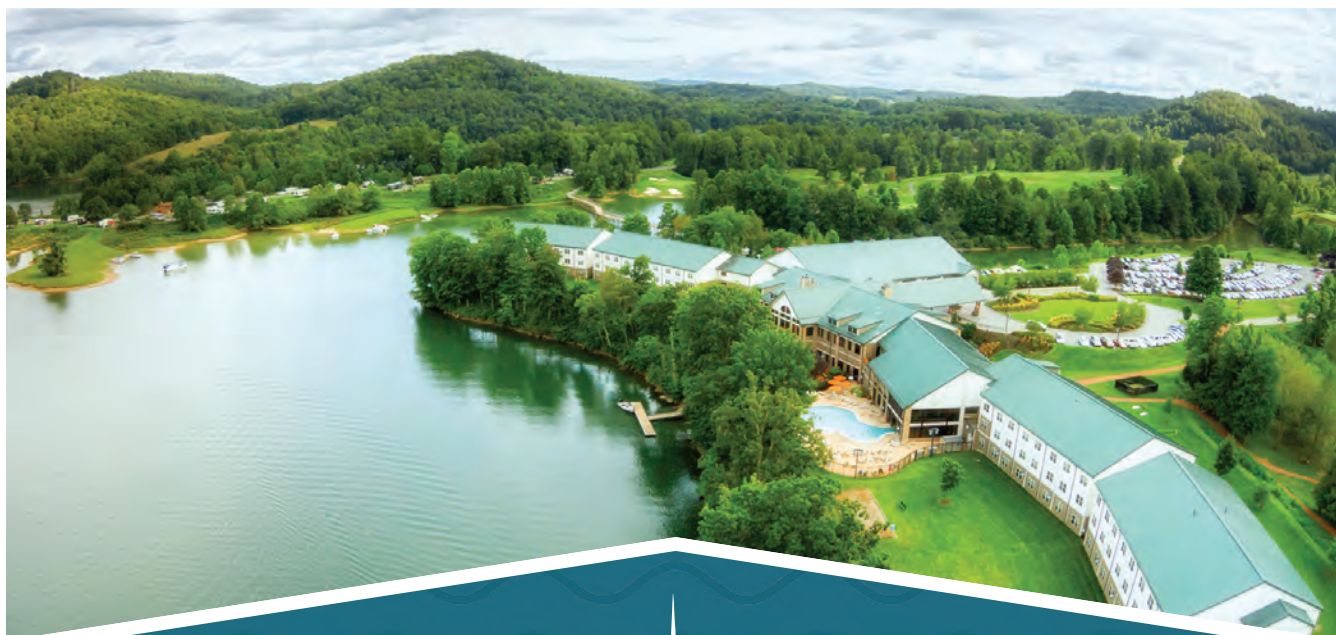


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when the water warms up just a bit more.

### Adjusting Your Tackle for Fall Fishing

Your tackle setup plays a huge role in your fall fishing success. Since bass are focused on feeding up for winter, they're chasing smaller baitfish, which means downsizing your lures can lead to more bites. Some of the best fall baits include:

**Crankbaits:** These are great for covering water and mimicking the baitfish bass are feeding on.

**Spinnerbaits:** These are perfect for targeting bass in shallow, grassy areas, especially as they chase schools of bait.

**Jigs:** A jig with a craw trailer can be deadly around rocks and wood, where bass often lurk during this time of year.

**Lipless Crankbaits:** These are excellent for working over grass beds and targeting fast-moving bass.

As for your line, fluorocarbon is a solid choice for its sensitivity and low visibility in clear fall waters. Stick with a medium to medium-heavy rod to give you the versatility needed to switch between techniques as the conditions demand.

### Best Fall Fishing Locations

Finding the right spot is always crucial, but during fall, it can make or break your day. The key is to find the bait, because where there's baitfish, there's bass. Some of the best areas to target in fall include:

**Creeks and Coves:** Bass will move into these areas as they follow schools of baitfish to shallower waters.

**Main Lake Points:** These points act as migration routes for bass

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moving from deep to shallow water.

**Vegetation and Structure:** Look for submerged vegetation and structures that offer both cover and ambush opportunities for bass.

Using your electronics, like depth finders and forward-facing sonar, can help locate schools of baitfish, which are critical to tracking down active bass.

**Time of Day:** When to Fish in the Fall

When it comes to fall fishing,

timing can be everything. Bass often become more active as the

continue to page 26



Aiden Tackett caught a 27" walleye at the Winfield Locks. *Photo courtesy of Get Hooked in Winfield.*



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warms the water, so focus your efforts on mid-day or early afternoon trips when temperatures have had a chance to rise slightly. This is especially true after a cool night, as the bass will be sluggish until the sun gets higher in the sky.

That said, stay flexible. Local weather conditions can play a huge role—an extended warm spell can keep bass feeding throughout the day, while a cold front might slow them down until things stabilize again.

### Prepping Your Boat for Fall

As you gear up for fall fishing, don't forget to give your boat a little TLC too. Make sure all your equipment is ready for the season:

**Check your batteries:** Cooler weather can affect battery life, so double-check everything to avoid any surprises on the water.

**Inspect your electronics:** Ensure your fish finders and other gear are functioning properly.

**Safety first:** Check life jackets, throw cushions, and any other safety gear to ensure it's in good condition.

**Dressing for Success: Fall Fishing Clothing and Safety Tips**

Fall mornings can be cold,

and even though the afternoons might warm up, it's crucial to dress in layers. Start with a moisture-wicking base layer to keep sweat off your skin, followed by a warm insulating layer, and finish with a waterproof jacket in case of rain or wind.

Also, don't forget that cooler water temperatures mean safety is even more important. Keep a life jacket handy, and be mindful of the shorter daylight hours. Always check the weather forecast before heading out—fall weather can turn on a dime, and a pleasant morning can quickly become a stormy afternoon.

### Key Tips for Fall Fishing:

Bass move shallow in the fall, but adjust your strategy based on their changing behavior.

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



Macy Bland got an 8 point buck. Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.



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Dress in layers and always be prepared for cooler weather and shorter days.

Look for bass near baitfish schools, submerged vegetation, and migration routes like main lake points.

### Planning for Success: Final Thoughts on Fall Fishing Prep

Preparation is key to making the most of the fall fishing season. Plan your trips with the changing conditions in mind, keep your gear in top shape, and be ready to adapt your strategy based on the weather. Whether you're targeting bass in shallow coves or following them on their migration routes, the fall season offers some of the best fishing opportunities of the year.

Remember to stay warm, stay safe, and most of all, enjoy the beauty of the outdoors as fall sets in. With the right preparation, you're in for a productive—and memorable—fall fishing season.

With the right gear, timing, and preparation, you can make the most of fall fishing. Enjoy

the cooler weather, the changing scenery, and—most importantly—the bass!



Justin Stanton caught the big bass, 5lbs, 6 oz., at the recent Stone-wall Jackson Bass Sportsman event. The lake is way down but the catch rate is much better. The bass are more concentrated now.

## EHD Outbreak In Three Counties

**SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va.** — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) today confirmed an outbreak of epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) affecting white-tailed deer in areas of three counties in north central West Virginia.

According to Paul Johansen, chief of the WVDNR's Wildlife Resources Section, samples collected from Monongalia, Marion and Barbour counties tested positive for the viruses that cause EHD. These viruses are not directly transmitted from deer to deer but typically by small biting flies, which are killed by hard frost. Additionally, EHD is not contagious to humans.

“While the effects of an outbreak may seem concerning, EHD is not a long-term threat to the overall health or sustain-

continue to the next page

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ability of the deer population in West Virginia,” Johansen said. “Deer populations in impacted areas will rebound with next year’s fawns and migration from adjacent areas.”

This wildlife disease should not be confused with chronic wasting disease (CWD), which has been detected in six counties in the state’s eastern panhandle and is a long-term threat to the health of West Virginia’s deer population. Those who have questions about EHD or wish to report deer mortalities should visit [WVDnr.gov/](http://WVDnr.gov/) contact to get contact information for their local WVDNR district office.



Gunner Ketterman brought in a great buck. *Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Good in Elkins.*

## Crossbow Basics

Modern crossbows are fast, accurate, and plenty powerful enough to cleanly take the largest big-game animals in North America. They are also a pleasure to shoot. To get the most out of your crossbow, you need to understand the basics of how to set one up for hunting and how to shoot it. Here are 12 tips to make you a crossbow-shooting machine, using a crossbow-and-arrow set-up designed specifically for hunting big game.

1. Buy the Best You Can Afford  
There’s a big difference between an el cheapo, bargain-basement crossbow and a top-of-the-line model. Sure, the bargain model costs a lot less, but it will not be built as well, be as accurate or reliable, and sooner or later it will fail you when the moment of truth arrives. You can buy crossbow packages that include everything you need to get out shooting and hunting—crossbow, a few arrows and arrow points, a scope sight, cocking device and quiver—from anywhere between about \$800 to \$2,000.



Allison Watts used a crossbow in Cabell County for a good buck.

Oct/Nov 2024 ~ Page28



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### 2. Use Enough Draw Weight

The principle specification that distinguishes a hunting crossbow from a target model is draw weight. Fortunately, most states have taken the guesswork out of determining what is sufficient by establishing a regulatory minimum. While those regulations vary considerably from state to state, the overall range runs from 75 to 125 pounds of draw weight.

With little exception, any crossbow in that range should be adequate to kill a whitetail deer at moderate ranges. That said, most of the better hunting crossbows are in the 150 to 175 pounds range, with a few topping out over 200 pounds. In general, bigger is better—or in this case, faster. Keep in mind that you can go too heavy, too, as at least one state—Ohio—has a maximum allowable draw weight of 200 pounds.

### 3. Shoot a Fast Enough Arrow

Both crossbow and compound bow makers continually strive to push the speed envelope. You make a crossbow faster by increasing the draw weight. That's



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why the above point is so important. How fast is fast enough? I like my crossbows to shoot a hunting-weight arrow with an initial velocity of at least 300 feet per second (fps.) That will both give your arrow enough kinetic energy (K.E.) to cleanly take any big-game animal, and reduce arrow trajectory at longer ranges, which makes accurate shooting easier. Some crossbows are beginning to push the 400 fps envelope, so look for improvements in this number across the board in coming years.

### 4. Use a Scope Sight

Though some crossbows still come with open sights, you will be much better served using some sort of scope sight. These optical sighting devices make accurate shooting much easier. For magnification, you can choose from just about anything between zero power and 5X. Inside the scope is the reticle, defined as some configuration of horizontal and verti-

cal crosshairs—though for crossbows, it also includes any object projected or suspended across the field of view. Choices begin with a simple, single red dot or crosshair. With them you sight in for a fixed distance, typically 20 yards, then have to compensate for longer shots by holding higher.

continue to the next page

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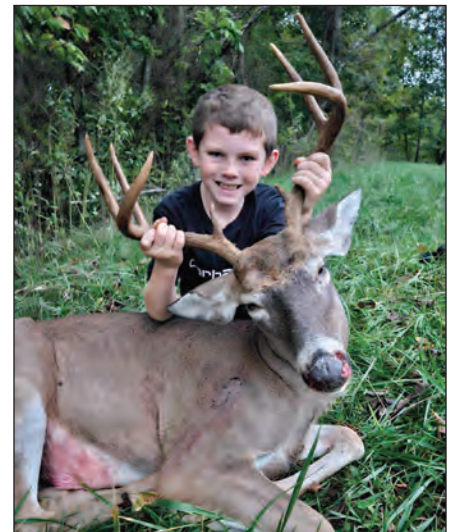




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Clayton Seckman got his 1st buck. Photo courtesy of Tyler Outdoor Supply in Middlebourne.

Multi-reticle scopes are the most popular, particularly those with three to four dots or horizontal crosshairs. The top one is sighted in for 20 yards and the next two are fixed at intervals that will be dead-on at 30, 40 and 50 yards, respectively, on most bows.

5. Use Quality Arrows

Unless your arrows (or bolts) fly like laser beams, you'll never be able to precisely hit your target. Cheap arrows manufactured to sloppy tolerances will fly like a knuckleball. That's why you should use only the very best arrows, designed specifically for crossbow shooting, you can afford. Many crossbow companies sell arrows, but they're made for them by arrow manufacturers like Gold Tip, Carbon Express and Easton. Make sure they have a nock designed for crossbows, not




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compound bows, are cut to the proper length and have the proper fletches. Both carbon and aluminum arrows work well, but by far the most rugged and high-tech are made from carbon.

6. Use Quality Broadheads

The business end of a hunting arrow is the broadhead. There are more makes, models and styles of hunting broadheads available than you can shake a stick at. Here again, the most expensive are generally those built to the tightest tolerances, with the sharpest blades, that fly straight and true, and have a long track record of success. Both replaceable-blade and mechanical broadhead designs will work well for crossbow shooters, with the mechanical design becoming more and more popular each year. The most common weight for a hunting broadhead is 100 grains, with 125 grains a distant second.

7. Take a Rest

A crossbow is somewhat heavy and clunky, making it almost impossible to accurately shoot without using some sort of rest. That can be everything from using standard rifle shooting positions like kneeling and sitting, to

using a set of shooting sticks or monopod, to using a shooting rail in a tree stand or shooting house. I never, ever turn an arrow loose from my crossbows without taking a rest of some kind.

When using a rest, try padding the crossbow's forearm with something soft—your hand, a rolled-up jacket, a day pack, something—which will help absorb recoil and make precise sighting easier than if you shoot off a hard surface.

8. Learn Arrow Trajectory

All arrows fired from a crossbow travel downrange in a large  
continue to the next page

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Elim Schneider has his crossbow buck. Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.





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### 9. Use a Rangefinder

With the click of a button, a modern laser rangefinder can instantaneously give you the exact

distance from you to the target—a critical bit of information in accurate shooting when you are lobbing an arrow at the target. The best laser rangefinders are as reliable as the sunrise. My Nikon

Archer's Choice model even tells me exactly where to aim when shooting at steep uphill and downhill angles. Costing somewhere between \$250 and \$500, they're

continue to the next page



Seth Pack, from Danese, has a huge archery buck.

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10. Get a 'Feel' For the Trigger  
Every crossbow has a trigger unique unto itself. You need to shoot your crossbow enough so that you know exactly when the trigger will send the arrow on its way. Shoot both with and without gloves so you know how both feel (it will be different).

11. Practice in the Field  
The old axiom, "practice makes perfect," certainly applies to shooting your crossbow. Once you get it set up and sighted in, spend some time shooting off a bench rest. Use these sessions to precisely set your sights and get a feel for the trigger. However, you then need to move away from the bench and practice taking shots that simulate actual hunting conditions. Shoot from the kneeling and sitting positions. Climb into

your tree stand or ground blind and take shots at the same angles and distances you anticipate you'll be taking during hunting season. Learn to use your shooting sticks or monopod quickly, quietly and efficiently.

12. Maintain String, Rail, Trigger  
A crossbow is a machine, which means it will need regular maintenance if it is to keep on ticking like a fine Swiss watch. That means you should always check the string and cables for wear. This is very important on a crossbow because you have direct string-to-rail contact, which creates friction and abrasion, with every shot. At the first sign of fraying or abnormal wear, replace them. You can reduce the need for replacement with regular maintenance. Keep the string, cables and center serving clean and well maintained after each practice session, and especially after each trip to the field. Make sure you lubricate the center serving, and the rails should also be regularly lubed per the manufacturer's instructions.

Don't Do This!  
There are some real mistakes that can cost you accuracy and/or

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lead to injury if you are not careful when shooting a crossbow. Here are the three most common:

1. Watch Fingers & Thumb

Many shooters used to shooting rifles have a tendency to stick the fingers of the hand that holds the rifle's forearm straight up in the air when they cradle the rifle. If you do this with a crossbow, you risk placing your digits in the path of a bowstring that is rocketing down the rail and will slice the fingers and/or thumb to the bone. Never, ever do this!

2. Don't Shoot Off-Hand



The construction of a crossbow puts a lot of weight in its front end, making it very difficult to balance when trying to shoot from the off-hand position. Even the very best rifle shooters only shoot off-hand as a last resort. You'll be much better off learning to shoot quickly from the kneeling and sitting positions, and when using shooting sticks for a solid rest.

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## Deer Scouting

By Mark Kenyon

“Scouting is the name of the game,” said experienced white-tail bowhunter Jesse Coots. “It’s kind of like training as a wrestler. If you skip your whole training season and go right to your first match, you’re going to get pummeled. Bowhunting is no different.”

Coots is not alone in this belief. Of the hundreds of expert deer hunters I’ve interviewed on the Wired to Hunt Podcast, their focus on scouting stands out above all else. Here’s a selection of insights from the nation’s top white-tail hunters on all things scouting. Scout More Than You Hunt One of the simplest ways to level up your scouting game is to simply do more of it. There is a clear difference between the amount of time spent scouting by highly effective hunters and their less successful peers. “I scout probably 80% of my time and hunt 20%,” Coots said.

Joe Elsinger, another renowned

public land deer hunter, views scouting as a never-ending endeavor. “Scouting season is 365 days a year—in season and out of season you can scout,” Elsinger said.

This year-round scouting allows Elsinger and similar hunters to be overprepared for the season. “It’s my rule of thumb to have scouted at least twice as many spots as I could hunt in a season. I’m focused on playing the long game and stacking the odds in my favor, so I’m constantly sorting what the best areas are,” he explained. “I’m only hunting the top half or third of those in any given year, but I’m still watching those other areas. I’ll get boots on the ground a couple times and run a trail cam or two to see what’s around. But that’s how I try to stack the odds in my favor.”

Consider Time of Year “Right when the season ends is a great time to start scouting,” said Andy

May, First Lite pro team member. “I’ll get right out there when there is still snow and walk all my hunting areas. I’m looking for winter continue to the next page



Justin Andrew Mounts landed a big walleye.

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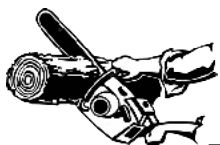
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bedding, food sources, trying to find bucks that survived, and all that's related to future late-season hunting."

Andy's scouting doesn't stop there. It continues throughout other parts of the year too, but with very different methods and goals. "When the snow melts, that's when all the sign is still visible. Every scrape, every rub, the beds are very visible. That's when I'm looking for individual buck beds, I'm looking for doe bedding, intersecting trails, all that stuff. I'm trying to put all those puzzle pieces together for more effective rut sits for the next fall," he said. "Then in August and September, that's when I'm trying to find early season patterns, so I'm running some trail cams, doing a lot of glassing, checking fields for large tracks, that sort of thing."

Quality over Quantity It's tempting to get excited by sheer quantity of deer sign when scouting a new area, but if you're targeting bigger or older deer, that's not necessarily the best focus.

"I personally think deer are

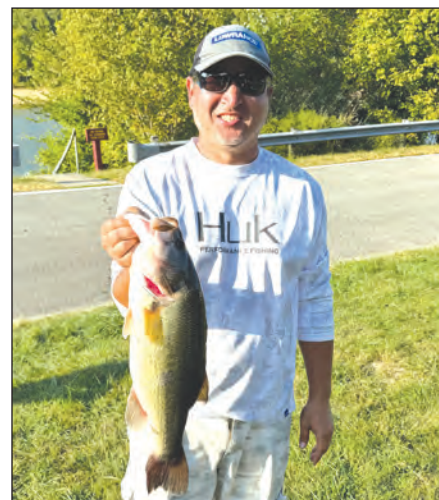
like men. When they're young, they're all over the place, they're goofing around, they're with the herd," said Jesse Coots. "But when they're getting older, which is what we're hunting, it's different. When I'm in my 40s, I'm not going to the bar anymore, I'm not out with the masses. Big bucks are the same way. So when I'm covering ground right now I'm not looking for tons of tracks. I'm looking for a giant. I'm looking for a big track."

Dan Infalt, founder of The Hunting Beast, puts a lot of stock in the bigger is better theory as well. "You know if I find a track that's bigger than four fingers laying down next to it, as a walking track, that's a big animal and something I'm interested in," Infalt said. "If you're not finding any big rubs or any big tracks, go find a different property, because there are no big bucks there."

Prioritize Bedding Areas Talk to any exceptionally good deer hunter about scouting, and almost without exception they'll mention the importance of locating bed-

ding areas. These zones are the hub of a buck's wheel, the center of his daily travel, and the location he'll spend more hours a day than almost any other. If you can locate the metaphorical sun that a buck's life revolves around, all the other pieces of the puzzle will make more sense.

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Daniel Pearl got second big bass with a 5 lb., 1 oz largemouth at the Stonewall Classic on day two.



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Whether looking at maps or scouting in person, bedding is where Dan Infalt always begins. “I’m looking for areas that I think look like deer bedding and I go straight to those areas and skip most the rest of the woods. My main interest in scouting at this time of year is where big bucks bed,” Infalt said. “I’m on mostly public land and hunting pressured whitetails, so I want to get close to those deer where they’re bedded because they don’t move far in daylight, at least not the mature ones.”

Always Ask “Why?” Getting into the woods to scout more often is obviously a good start, but actually translating the observa-

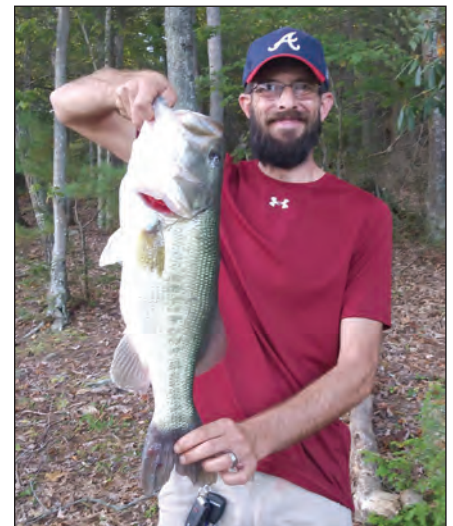
tions you make into actionable intelligence is another step altogether. The key to this is trying to understand exactly why deer sign is where you find it and what that indicates for future deer movement.

“Always ask ‘why,’” said white-tail writer and land consultant Steve Bartylla. “Don’t be content with just finding deer sign, ask why they made it there. What’s the motivation? What are the odds of it happening again? Where is he coming from? Where is he going to? The more of that stuff you generate over the year, you almost build up a database of experiences that can then start to apply to other locations.”

Take for example how Steve tries to learn from the buck beds he finds. “During the off season when I find that buck’s bed I go ahead and I hunker down in it,” he explained. “I look around and ask why is that buck bedding in this one location here? What makes this spot one of the spots where he feels safe enough to lay down? You do that enough and you start

getting the feel.”

Look for Annual Patterns The inherent disadvantage to scouting for sign like tracks, rubs, and scrapes is that the evidence you’re observing was made in the past, and in many cases, might not be replicated again that year. That’s why many hunters use sign and observations from previous years to predict behavior in the future. This is due to the fact that many bucks often develop rough “annual patterns.”



Jason Sturgill reeled in a huge largemouth bass.

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T	E	L	M	A	C	T	B	I	C	I	L	I	A	R	T	O	W	O	U
S	R	A	C	K	S	E	V	A	H	G	A	K	G	V	O	A	O	L	N
E	L	N	A	K	R	E	L	O	I	T	I	T	E	T	E	F	S	U	T
P	B	A	R	T	R	N	V	F	A	G	A	P	R	X	D	H	N	H	U
E	E	L	L	N	I	R	A	U	I	B	A	H	C	R	E	P	M	A	C
B	R	B	I	O	E	E	C	B	I	R	R	U	W	P	I	A	C	T	N
U	T	H	M	G	D	Q	B	L	C	T	B	E	I	U	E	D	E	Y	O
L	S	N	G	I	E	F	R	S	E	K	I	X	A	P	L	G	A	N	I
L	E	I	V	C	L	Z	E	L	B	T	C	M	L	A	R	U	E	I	T
E	R	R	C	L	E	O	T	I	T	R	A	O	E	A	T	U	S	G	I
T	U	I	E	R	R	E	N	N	T	X	A	W	T	C	E	S	T	N	N
O	R	H	N	E	G	I	U	G	W	E	P	O	C	S	R	E	O	I	U
H	S	W	B	B	D	R	H	M	O	R	A	E	B	M	C	S	D	V	M
N	A	M	O	N	A	K	B	U	C	K	I	L	L	A	N	O	L	R	M
F	I	E	L	D	G	C	R	P	G	R	A	L	S	I	E	P	U	E	A
T	T	N	I	W	N	O	S	I	N	E	V	O	P	D	R	L	V	T	C

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Aidan Crockett caught a 5 lb., 1 oz. largemouth bass at Stonewall.

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CLIP OUT TO MAIL

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Fish \_\_\_\_\_ Pound \_\_\_\_\_ Oz \_\_\_\_\_  
 Deer \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_ #Points \_\_\_\_\_

We are looking for **LARGE** fish & game pictures from 2024.



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