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Issue 297

January/February 2022

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RABBITS**

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Outdoor Photos



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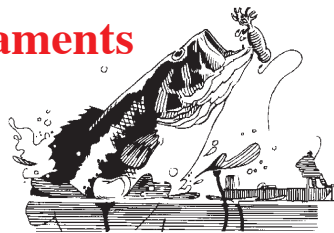
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Cover Photo

Shawn Belcher, from Oceanna, bow hunted in Wyoming County for this 17 point buck. It green scored at 198 non-typical.

The buck harvest was up around 10% this year.

The next magazine may look a little different. My printer closed their doors to specialty print products like my magazine. I will be using a new printing business.

Send in your hunting pics from the 2021 season. Information on how to send a pic is on page 38.

Buck Season Harvest For 2021

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.VA. — Preliminary data indicates West Virginia hunters harvested 42,674 antlered deer during the two-week firearm season from Nov. 22 to Dec. 5. The harvest is a 10 percent increase over the 2020 harvest of 38,785 bucks.

“The harvest during the 2021 traditional buck firearm season was expected to be similar to that of 2020,” said Paul Johansen, chief of the WV Division of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Section. “Below average oak mast indices may have allowed hunters to better pattern deer movement.”

Johansen explained that only the

north central portion of the state had a decline, while all other areas of the state registered increases. The southeastern and southwestern areas of the state had the largest increases from the 2020 harvest at 31 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

The top 10 counties for the 2021 buck harvest are Greenbrier (1,603), Hampshire (1,483), Randolph (1,356), Jackson (1,353), Hardy (1,264), Preston (1,261), Braxton (1,243), Monroe (1,225), Kanawha (1,222) and Roane (1,205). A breakdown of county harvests since 2017 is attached here.



Young Ayden Trunk brought in a nice 9 point whitetail.



4 year old Eli Pethel, from New Matamoros, Ohio got a buck.



Jennifer Riffle used a bow for a great 12 point Braxton Co. buck.

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2021 Fall Turkey Harvest

FARMINGTON, W.VA. — Hunters in West Virginia harvested 694 birds during the fall 2021 turkey season, according to preliminary results provided by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

Hunters harvested 33.1 percent

fewer birds during the fall 2021 turkey season compared to last year. The low harvest may be in part due to mast conditions. Statewide mast conditions are 61 percent above 2020 and 8 percent above the long-term average with soft mast species doing very well.

“We were expecting the fall harvest to be higher due to the good turkey production we had this year,” said Mike Peters, WVDNR wild turkey and migratory game bird biologist. “It appears good mast conditions may have spread

continue to the next page

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James Mullins hunted in Lincoln County for a huge 8 point buck.



Hunter Simmons had success with a quality whitetail buck.

the birds thin across the landscape, making them more difficult to hunt and less susceptible to harvest.”

As reported in the 2021 West Virginia Mast Survey and Hunter Outlook, this year’s wild turkey brood observations were above what was reported last year and were the highest in the past five years. The 2021 fall turkey harvest came in 30.7 percent below the five-year average and 39.5 percent below the 10-year average. This is the third year with a declining fall harvest and the lowest harvest since 1962, when 664 birds were taken.

District 2 is the only district that reported an increased harvest over last year’s numbers. District 2 also had the highest harvest with 168 birds. All other districts reported fewer birds harvested than in the 2020 season. District 4 reported 162 birds harvested, District 3 had 121 birds harvested, District 5 reported 109 birds harvested, District 1 had 72 birds harvested and District 6 reported 62 birds harvested.

Greenbrier County led the state with 41 harvested birds, followed by Hardy and Monroe counties at 36 birds each and Pocahontas at 34 and Mason at 33. All of these counties had a four-week season, except Mason County, which had a two-week season.

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Danny Harper used a bow for this nice Braxton County buck.



Brandon Cross put an arrow in this 9 point Gilmer County buck.

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Winter Rabbit Hunting


Why Rabbit Hunting?

As you first start hunting your own food, it's often easier to start with small game species (e.g., squirrels, birds, rabbits, etc.). They are usually very plentiful, have more liberal hunting seasons, and

can be found across the country pretty easily.

Rabbit hunting, specifically, is perfect for this time of year. You'd face a lot of challenges with early season rabbit hunting simply because the plants are so dense and you'd hardly ever see one. But there is almost no vegetation during the winter rabbit hunting season, and they stand out much better against the snow (in most cases).

It's also one of the few species you can hunt throughout the winter, while seasons for most upland bird and big game species are closed after the New Year. Because there are few hunters who capitalize on it, you can often have the woods to yourself instead of competing for a parking spot at the trail head. It's also really good exercise to combat the holiday eating you did, as you might have to walk a few miles to end up with a couple rabbits.



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And finally, it's usually easier emotionally for many people to start hunting small game animals. Shooting your first squirrel or rabbit might still produce some tears for you, which is good; that lets you know you truly do care about what's best for the animal. But right or wrong, it will usually feel easier than shooting a deer.

Rabbit Species and Habitats

Depending on where you live, you could be hunting one of several species. Hares (jack rabbits and snowshoe hares) and rabbits (cot-continue to page 10




Chase Lowe used a bow to take this Wirt County 10 point buck.



Bill Basil brought in an 8 point bow buck. Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.

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cottontails) have overlapping ranges in several states. In Minnesota, for example, you might chase a cottontail rabbit from a brush pile or jump a snowshoe hare from beneath a spruce tree. They are similar in some ways, but tend to prefer separate habitats.

Cottontails are typically found across the country in back yards, old fields, woodlots, and farmsteads. They like to stay concealed in brush piles or thick clumps of grass, especially in the cold winter months. Their fur stays dark gray and brown throughout the winter, which can make them stand out against the white snow, though their tails still look like giant white cotton balls. They range in size from 1 to 2 pounds. In winter, they will often travel along trails they have packed down.

Snowshoe hares are generally found in more northern settings with conifer trees and bogs. They hide out under low-hanging spruce branches and browse on twigs. While they sport brown fur throughout the summer, it turns to solid white as winter arrives to help them blend in. Snowshoe hares are usually larger than cottontails, and can weigh up to 3 pounds or more. True to name, they have exception-

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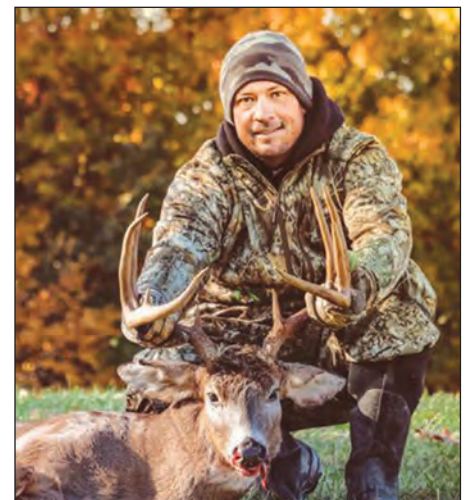
ally large hind feet that can spread out and keep them on top of the snow.

Rabbit Hunting Gear
Luckily, you don't need much
continue to the next page

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Using a bow, Matt Summers harvested a long tined buck.



Joey Stalnaker, from Sutton, put an arrow in this quality 10 point buck.

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hunting equipment for hunting rabbits. If you do any kind of outdoor activities during the winter, you likely have the gear you need.

Clothing

Rule number one on clothing: don't wear cotton! Performance clothing made out of polyester and wool is best to keep you from overheating and sweating. Make sure to comply with your state's blaze orange laws, as many agencies require you to wear a certain percentage of blaze orange clothing while small game hunting.

Boots

Good-quality hunting boots are also a necessity. As I said, you may have to walk a lot to put some rabbits in your hunting vest. That means you need boots that will keep your feet warm without overheating, and they need to be broken in so you don't get blisters. If snow conditions are deep, you may want snowshoes or at least some gaiters to keep the snow out of your boots.

Hunting Weapon

You'll also obviously need a good shotgun in the 12 to 20 gauge range to effectively kill a rabbit on the run. Most rabbits and hares will flush from cover, run a short ways to another hideout, and then

continue to the next page



Ray Clark went to Mingo County with a bow for this dandy buck.

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Stephanie Burns used an arrow to down this quality Wirt Co. buck.



Wannis Daniels, arrowed a huge southern WV whitetail buck.





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pause again to blend into their surroundings. Shooting a rabbit that is holding still will produce the most ethical shot, but don't be afraid to take a shot at a running rabbit. For most small game species, almost any small game ammunition (size 7 shot) should work out just fine. You could also use a .22 caliber rifle, but you'll have to limit yourself to motionless rabbits.

Where to Find Rabbits

Once you have everything you need for rabbit season, it's time to head to the field and start your first rabbit hunting trip. Here are a few winter rabbit hunting tips to help you out. Whether you have access to private land or public land, start your search by targeting the habitats above for each species. Focus on walking habitat edges (e.g., the intersection of a brushy swamp edge and an overgrown field) and

take extra time to investigate brush piles, downed tree tops, or other places where a rabbit could hide out. Rabbit hunting without dogs can be a little tricky simply because you have to flush them from this thick cover yourself, but it's definitely doable (that's all I do). If you stumble across a rabbit trail,



Mike Scott has a big Wirt County archery buck.

it always pays to follow it and see where it leads.

For example, on a recent snowshoe hare hunt, I walked a zig-zag pattern through an area that had been planted with spruce trees
continue to page 14



Justin Robertson had good luck this archery season.



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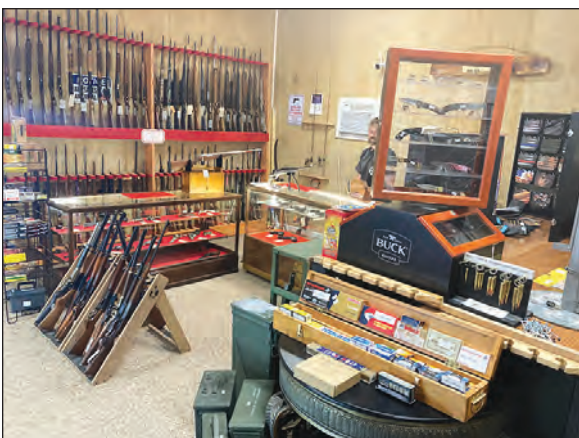
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10 years ago. As I passed clumps of trees, I would pause every few steps with my shotgun mounted to my shoulder. This sudden pause will often unnerve small game animals into flushing from their cover because they think you have spotted them. This particular technique has always worked great for my rabbit hunting trips.

Once they enter the open grass, however, they seem to either sprint to the next clump of trees to hide underneath them or they pause only 15 yards away and hold absolutely still to blend into the snow. I never try shooting rabbits if they are more than 25 to 30 yards away, as the shotgun pattern can get a little sparse beyond that to ethically put them down quickly.

Rabbit Anatomy

Speaking of which, do you know where to aim on a rabbit? Unlike big game animals, the most ethical shot for rabbits, squirrels, or even birds is a head shot. For shotguns, you should really just point at the head and the pattern of BB's will spread out in that area. For running rabbits, point the shotgun slightly ahead of the nose to lead the pellets out in front of them. If you're using a .22 caliber rifle on motionless rabbits, the best spot to aim is right below the ear and behind the eye. Their brain is about the size of a quarter, and a shot placed in this

continue to the next page

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area is all but guaranteed to hit it. Surprising Emotions of Rabbit Hunting

Fair warning: the first time you shoot a rabbit, you might be shocked at how much they might kick afterward. You might feel like you messed up the shot and nobody wants them to suffer. Similar to the chicken with its head cut off, even a perfect brain shot on a rabbit might still result in a kicking animal for 20 to 30 seconds afterward. This can be really hard to watch. But it's just nerves still firing, and the animal is dead in almost all cases.

If the rabbit keeps running after the shot (but you hit it the first time), you could take a follow-up shot at the head from closer up. But a closer shot will often ruin more meat and spread more pellets throughout the body that you'll have to pick out later. Since we're hunting for meat, this is just wasteful. If you can sneak up on them and grab them, you can also grasp the back legs with one hand and the head/neck in the other. Quickly pull up on the legs while pulling down and back on the head, which will sever the spine and kill them quickly. Again, this can really seem brutal and leave you a little sick to your stomach. But if you're going to eat meat, I think it's a privilege



Zach Cales went to McDowell County for a great buck



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to be involved in the process. Field Dressing a Rabbit

After dispatching the rabbit, you

can place them in your vest pocket or a backpack to carry them

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throughout the rest of your hunt. One of the best rabbit hunting tips and tricks I ever learned was to put them in a plastic grocery bag first, as the blood can make a mess out of your hunting vest quickly. At the end of your hunt, it's time to field dress them. I plan on doing some videos on how to do this soon, but here's a quick explanation for now. **Skinning a Rabbit**

Start by removing the hide from the body. Make a shallow cut around the hind leg at the first knee joint. Keeping your knife blade up and away from the body, only cut through the skin and make a cut from this knee joint up to the genital area. At this point, you will basically start peeling the skin away. Work your fingers under the hide around each leg and pull it down towards the front of the rabbit. Once you get to the tail area, you will likely need to use your knife to

cut through the tail bone. When this is separated, hold the rabbit's hind legs in one hand and peel the skin down with the other hand. A freshly-killed rabbit will slide out of the fur very easily. Once it gets to the front legs, you will need to push the legs through the hide. The paws will stay attached to the legs and the hide should break loose without having to cut it. Once the hide gets down around the neck, you can use your knife to cut through the neck and sever the head.

After the hide is removed, you should sever all the paws from the legs at the first joints. Pruning shears work great for that, but you can also use your knife to sever the tendons and work it between the joint. This takes a little practice, so don't get frustrated!

Remove the entrails and wash with fresh water.

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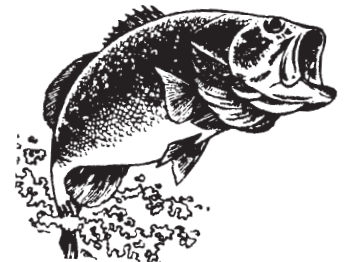
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Hunting Facts From Around The World

Is hunting a sport?

People often ask is hunting a sport? Maybe, in some way we can agree with this statement. On the other hand if we look at the official definition we'll see that hunting is people's activity, connected with wild animals searching, stalking, prosecution and transportation. So,

hunting can not be called a sport discipline.

Sometimes we can hear phrase such as sport hunting. It is a kind of hunting, if we can say that, that is mostly done for recreation. When people choose this type of hunting they do not care for meat, fur and other trophies.

Trophy hunting facts

Trophy hunting is a special kind of hunting when hunters try to get concrete wild animals with unique characteristics f.e. moose with beautiful paired horns. Trophies are often kept at homes or offices.

Facts about trophy hunting

Trophy hunting is forbidden in some countries all over the world. f.e. in Kenia from 1977.

Hunting for leopards is forbidden in South Africa.

In Botswana trophy hunting is not legal in government-controlled

continue to page 20

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Caden Krepps, from Elkins, bagged a nice buck.



Wes Findley bagged a nice bow buck. Photo courtesy of Hardcore Hunters in Grafton.



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hunting areas since 2014, but it means that it is open in other parts of the country.

Every trophy hunter dreams of the Big Five: lion, elephant, leopard, buffalo and rhinoceros. The term Big Five was created by hunters many years ago, they considered the animals the most difficult and dangerous to hunt on foot in Africa. A lot of great politicians were trophy hunters: former US President George H. W. Bush, former Vice President Dan Quayle and Retired Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf Jr., the former King of Spain, Juan Carlos I were members of Safari Club International.

Some well-known businessmen are also keen on trophy hunting: the CEO of Godaddy.com, Bob Parsons, Jimmy John's founder and CEO, Jimmy John Liautaud, and President Donald Trump's sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, among many others.

CITES does not prohibit trophy hunting!

The cost of hunting lion trip for 21-day could be \$100,000

Penalty cost for trophy hunting in Costa Rica is \$3000 or facing im-
continue to page 22

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Drew Johnson harvested a massive whitetail buck.



Matt Brown landed a couple of December smallmouth at Bluestone.



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prisonment.

South Africa and Namibia allow trophy hunting of the Big Five only. Trophy hunting is allowed in the next countries: Belarus, UK, Montenegro, Australia, Cambodia.

Trophy hunting of black bears is open in 32 US states, in New Jersey it has been forbidden from 2018.

Hunting statistics

The amount of hunters in the US

According to hunting statistics, in 2017 there were more than 15 million hunters. In the US hunting is regulated state-by-state, but has much in common in all the hunting rules. Of course all the hunters should be holders of hunting license. There were 15.49 million paid hunting license holders in the U.S. in 2017.

Fox hunting with dogs was forbidden in England and Wales in 2004.

The Mammal Society and the Animal and Plant Health Authority wrote that the stable British fox population is around 430,000 animals.

Why is hunting good

Hunting is one of the oldest human occupations.

Hunting is not as dangerous as others suppose. According to the National Shooting Sports Foundation (US), gun's hunting is the third-safest sport in comparison with 28 other popular sports and less injurious than golf, volleyball
 continue to the next page



Mason Stutler's buck, from Jackson County, had 18 points.



Tyler Hall's Calhoun County buck had a massive rack.

and football.

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Why is hunting important? - It regulates populations of wild and dangerous animals like wolves f.e. Deer hunting facts

Traditionally, male deer is called a buck (larger males are referred to as stags).

A female animal is called a doe or hind.

A small young deer is called a fawn.

Only bucks have antlers.

Fawns grow up very quickly: in 20 minutes after birth they can stand, walk in 60 minutes, run in 24 hours.

Adult deers have the same quantity of teeth as humans - 32.

Buck's antlers start to grow at the end of the March and grow at the rate of about ¼ of an inch/day.

Each year, antlers fall off and re-grow.

Deer can jump up to 10ft high.

All the deer have 310 degrees' vision due to eyes' settlement on the side of their head (the humans have only 180 degrees' vision).

Excavations tell us that people raised deer at least 4000 years ago.

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Deer mate in October - November, this period is called estrus.

Pregnancy usually lasts 7.5 months (could be more - up to 8 months).

How many people hunt?

What is hunting today? For the Eskimo and aboriginal tribes, living

continue to page 26



John Evans harvested a fine 11 point in Gilmer County.



Garrett Cutwright - 13 - used a bow in Upshur Co. for his buck.



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in the Amazon basin it is a lifestyle and meat. For the Europeans it is a passion and tradition. Nevertheless, if we try to count all the hunters in different countries we'll see that France is the country with the biggest amount of the last-named in Europe.

Fact: about 3 million people have hunting licenses in France.

In Germany there are more than 300,000 hunters.

In Russia 3,5 mln.

In Belarus 123,000 (but only 40,000 from all really hunt and pay an annual license for hunting).

Where is hunting most popular - we will give you the list of the most popular destinations for hunting:

- Tanzania
- Mozambique
- South Africa
- Namibia
- Montenegro
- Belarus
- Cambodia
- Canada
- Argentina
- Uruguay

Animal poaching facts

Try to start with the definition of animal poaching - is a process when animals are killed illegally (without licenses and permissions). A lot of animals are killed for specific trophies that could be used in medicine, f.e. rhino horns, elephant tusks and so on. Anyway it was proved that rhino horn has no medicinal effect.


1. However 946 rhinos were poached in South Africa in the period January 2012 - January 2013! List of TOP-countries with the black markets:

- Vietnam,
- China,
- Thailand,
- Korea.

continue to the next page


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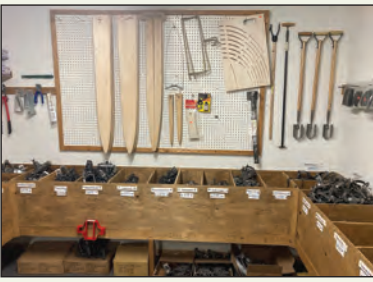
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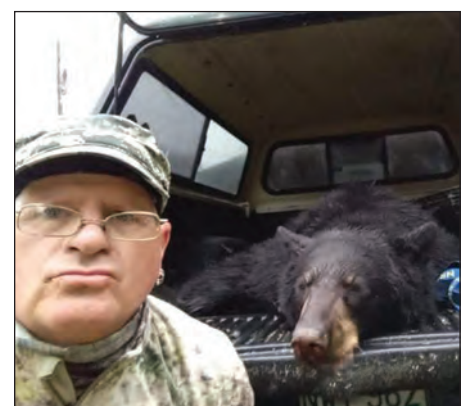



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Charles Smith from Ohio caught his 1st trout on the Elk River.



Wes Kimlin went bear hunting in Nicholas County.

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DNR Restoration Project

GLADY, W.VA. — More than 2,000 acres of wildlife habitat in the Monongahela National Forest is being restored thanks to a collaborative project between the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources and United States Forest Service.

The work is being done on the Beaverdam Wildlife Management Area in Randolph County as part of the Beulah Wildlife Enhancement Project, a major effort between the WVDNR and US Forest Service to better manage the area's upland game wildlife, streams and fisheries.

"We're grateful for the opportunity to work on this project with the Forest Service and with our game managers to improve the different types of habitat here," said David Thorne, state trout and stream habitat biologist for the WVDNR.

The Beulah Wildlife Enhancement Project area covers 2,287 acres of National Forest land in the West Fork Gladly Fork watershed.

Habitat improvements include vegetation diversity enhancement,

wildlife opening management, timber and wildlife stand improvement and vernal pool creation. Fish and wildlife species that will benefit from the work include brook trout, ruffed grouse and American woodcock.

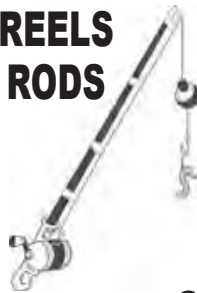
"Our work is going to benefit brook trout in the streams all the way up to the game and non-game species that call this area home," Thorne said.

continue to page 29



Ronnie Moyers landed some crappie last fall. *Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.*

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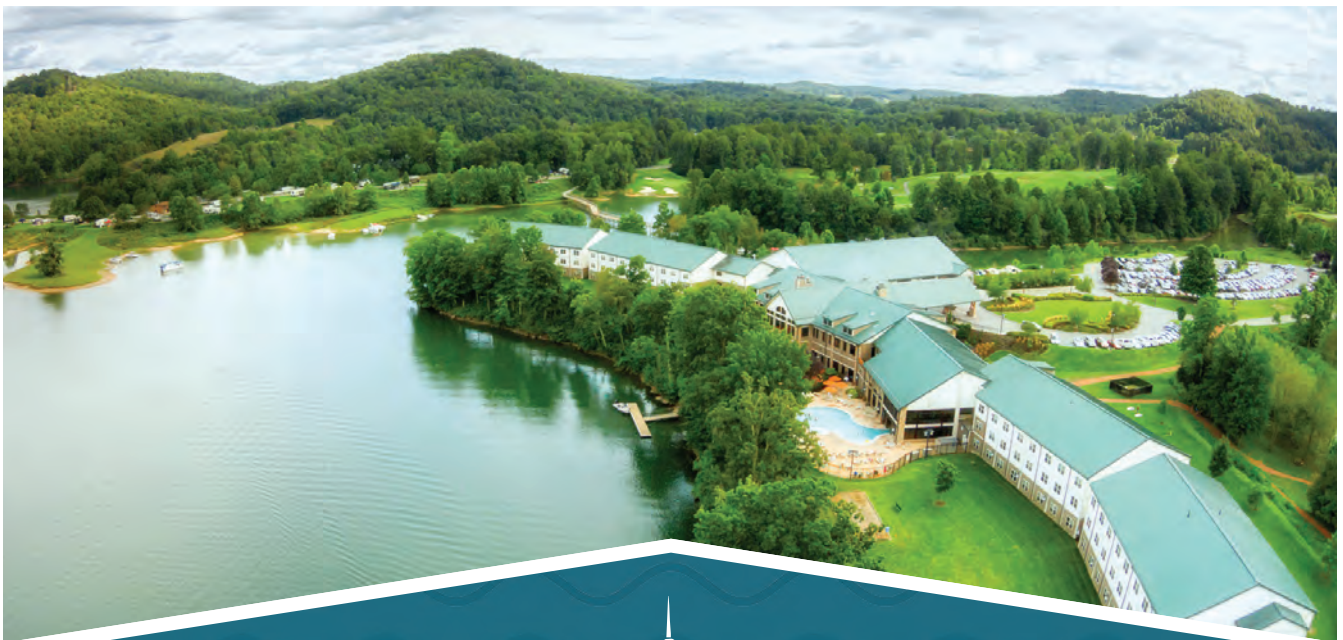
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The area was once timberland and habitat had degraded over the years



Mike Young Jr. blasted a nice Kanawha County buck.



Reuben Browning used an arrow in Logan Co. for a 9 point buck.



Samantha Heavner & Dusin Dennis won a Stonewall tournament.

due to logging, railroad operations and grazing.

“We are working along stream banks and above the stream to create early successional habitat and diversity on the landscape,” said Kaylee Pollander, a wildlife biologist for the WVDNR. “We’ve gone through cutting and uprooting trees to create wetlands and young forests that a lot of species need.”

Thorne said the area is in the initial stages of revegetation, but will provide much-needed habitat for upland game species in the years to come.

“One day, this area will reach a point where you won’t even know the land had been disturbed,” he said.

For more information about the WVDNR’s wildlife conservation efforts, WMAs and other programs, visit WVdnr.gov.

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Cooper McCoy bought in a nice 7 point gun buck. *Photo courtesy of Hardcore Hunters in Grafton.*



Beulah Bailey, from Cox Mills, had success with a wide 12 point.



Russ Dawkins, from Walker, bagged a 9 point buck.



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GAME PROCESSING

Kentucky B.A.S.S. Tournament

By Mark Menendez

I was scheduled to fish a tournament on Kentucky Lake with the Murray State Bass Anglers on the day of the tornadoes, Saturday. I was supposed to fish with Allen Everett, a Murray State student and friend of the family. We launched on Kentucky Lake Friday morning to do a little practice.

The fog was unbelievable. It was as thick as pea soup. I mean you could see it moving around with the wind, but unlike most of the times it didn't go away. I had my running lights on most of the morning. And, the fog was cold. I don't mean cool. I mean cold. At the same time though the air was warm. All that made for a strange combination, one that should have dissipated it fairly quickly. It didn't.

So anyway, we decided to run the canal and go over to Lake Barkley. There wasn't even a whiff of fog on her, not a thing. The best way I know to describe it is to say that it was a picture-perfect afternoon on the lake.

In all the years I've fished those two lakes I've never seen anything like it. The lakes couldn't have been more different. It was weird

continue to the next page

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and unsettling. Honestly, it gave me the creeps.

So anyway, the bite on Barkley was slow at first, just a few little ones. But then, about 1:30 the bass went crazy. In an hour we caught several good fish on a drop shot with a Strike King 3X ElazTech Z Too Soft Jerkbait. After that, we switched to a 300 Series Strike King KVD Jerkbait. It produced too. However, about 2:30 it just stopped as far as the bigger ones were concerned. We did keep on catching dinks though.

All in all it was one of the strangest days I can remember. It's proof that weather conditions have a



Seth Clark brought in a dandy in Pendelton County.



Matt Francis bagged an 11 point in Wirt County.

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huge impact on how fish behave. It's just that we don't know the why of it or how to deal with it.

That was the strange part of our

day. What wasn't strange — actually it was gratifying — was what we found out about the bass popu-

continue to page 34

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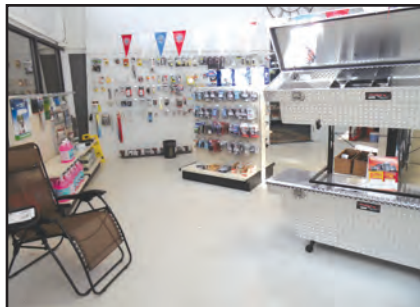
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lations in these two fisheries.

We caught at least a couple of fish from the last five to seven year classes of the spawn. That tells me that the bass are in good shape on both lakes. They're reproducing, and they're growing. That's all it takes to make a good bass fishery. Another thing we found out was that the smallmouth are just as plentiful as the largemouth, maybe even better.

What wasn't good was (is) damage the tornadoes did to the United States and especially to Western Kentucky that night and the next day. Melissa, the kids as well as me didn't have any issues, but we were just lucky. We only live 25 miles from Mayfield and the other towns that were hit hard. But for the grace of God that could have been us.

It looks like the country has come



Tim Evans bagged a 9 point in Gilmer County.



Brad Berga caught a couple of fall smallmouth on the Ohio River.

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together to help all of the victims though. Supplies of all kinds are coming in, and they're very much appreciated. Because of that response I decided to contribute my time to the environment and try to help clean up the waterways.

Lyon County Judge Executive, Wade White, gave me the parameters in which my crew could work in Eddy Creek on Lake Barkley. County public access that married

up to Corps of Engineers boundar-
continue to page 36



Denver Young bagged a 12 point in Jackson County.

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Details On Page 3

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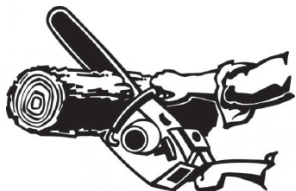
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ies was the only location we could use. We weren't allowed to infringe on private property.

My crew consisted of my fishing buddy Allen Everett along with Jack Hutcheson, Luke Wilson, Caroline Menendez and Max Menendez. They're college freshmen and high school students who worked very hard. I brought my aluminum boat — the one I used to win an Elite Event — to ferry the debris out of the creek and onto county property. We managed to get a sizable pile of 2x4s, trusses and floor joists plus every other

kind of debris you can imagine.

The magnitude of this disaster really comes home when you see debris that was previously someone's house floating in a creek. It was once where they lived, went to bed, ate supper and raised their kids and now it's reduced to a pile of rubble. It's sad, heartbreaking.

Before I go I want to say that Melissa, the kids and I want to wish everyone a wonderful holiday and to remind everyone to be kind during family get-togethers. You never know what tomorrow might bring.

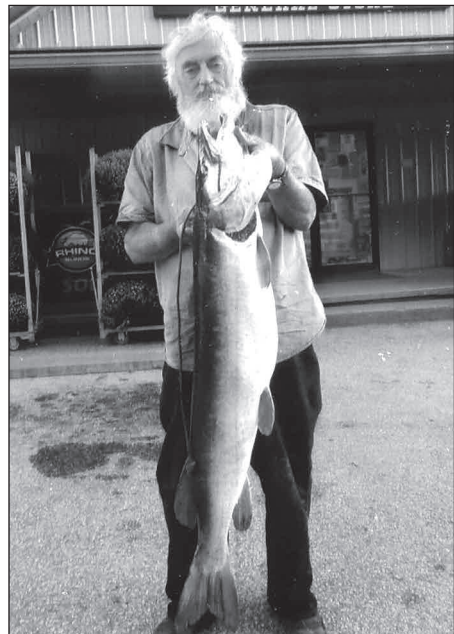
One other thing: If you're contributing supplies to the victims of this disaster please don't forget the other smaller communities around Mayfield. It received most of the publicity, but they got hit hard too.



Logan Weese harvested a 7 point in Fayette County.



Monty Roupe used a gun for his 8 point buck.



85 year old Harold Stutler landed a 47" Little Kanawha River musky.

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Chelsea Schoolcraft hunted in Roane County for a big buck. Photo courtesy of Trigger Time in Spencer.



Jeremy McCloy used a gun for a nice Ritchie County 9 point buck.



Becky Stalnaker brought in a Wirt County 8 point buck. Photo courtesy of Crossroads General Store in Walker.



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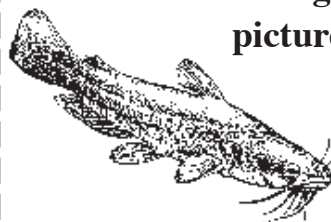
Keely Phares used her crossbow in Grant Co. for a wide raked buck.

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