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Issue 329

January/February 2026



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Magazine

Volume 35 Issue 329

Publisher and Editor

Mark A. Goudy

Contributing Editors

West Virginia Division Of
Natural Resources

No Subscriptions Offered

Printed Every Six Weeks

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P.O. Box 5521

Vienna, WV 26105

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Cover Photo

B.T Roberts, from Danville, took his Elite bow to Boone County to hunt. He brought down this very impressive 14 point buck. It was a 6x6 main frame buck with 2 points over 1".

We are looking for big game pictures. Form is on page 38.

The buck harvest in gun season was way off. EHD disease in many counties contributed.

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2026 Antlered Deer Harvest Down

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) today announced that hunters harvested 33,775 antlered deer during the state's two-week buck firearm season, which ran from Nov. 24 to Dec. 7.

According to preliminary data collected through the WVDNR's electronic game check system, hunters in Greenbrier harvested the most bucks (1,730), followed by Preston (1,349), Randolph (1,198), Hardy (1,165), Pendleton (1,135), Pocahontas (1,089), Monroe (1,057), Grant (1,039),

Fayette (991) and Hampshire (923).

The 2025 harvest was 18.5 percent below the 2024 harvest of 41,435 bucks. All WVDNR districts registered a decrease in harvests, with the exception of District 4 which experienced a 7.5 percent increase compared to last year.

This year's decreased harvest was caused by an increase in hard mast production, which often results in decreased harvests due to the difficulty of tracking and targeting game species spread out over a landscape. Several counties also experienced an outbreak of hemorrhagic disease, which likely impacted hunter success, especially in the western part of

continue to page 6



Aaron Walker brought in a fine Nicholas County buck.



Juanna Bradberry harvested her 1st buck this year.

Bass Sportsman 2026



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the state.

Hunters who harvested a buck during a 2025 deer hunting season are also reminded to submit their photos for a chance to win prizes in the state's fifth annual Big Buck Photo Contest. To learn more about contest prizes, rules and how to enter, visit WVdnr.gov/photocontest.

Additional Deer Hunting Opportunities

Several deer hunting opportu-

nities remained for 2025. The state's archery and crossbow season ran through Dec. 31, the traditional Class N/NN antlerless deer season was open in select areas on public and private land Dec. 11-14 and Dec. 28-31, the muzzleloader deer season opened Dec. 15-21 and the youth, Class Q and Class XS season for antlerless deer was opened Dec. 26-27 in any county with a firearms deer season.

To learn more consult the Hunt-

ing Regulations Summary, available to download at WVdnr.gov/hunting-regulations.

Better luck in 2026 hopefully.



Jimmy George brought in a top quality Kanawha County buck during gun season. *Photo courtesy of Scent Assassin.*



Alexis Nelson has a nice buck. *Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.*



Cameron Irizarry was one of the winners of a DNR trout contest.

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DNR Monster Trout Contest Winners

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) today announced the winners of its fourth annual Monster Trout Contest. The five lucky anglers each caught a tagged monster trout, which were stocked during the

weeks of Oct. 20 and Oct. 27.

“Congratulations to our winners, and thank you to all the anglers who got out on the water to participate in our fall trout stockings this year,” said WVDNR Director Brett McMillion. “Your enthusiasm and support for West Virginia’s incredible trout fishing opportunities help make programs like this possible, and we look forward to seeing even more folks enjoying our waters in the year ahead.”

This year’s grand prize winner and recipient of a West Virginia State Park cabin stay is Michael Waugh of Clarksburg, W.Va. Other winners include Bonny Davis of Mount Jackson, Va., Cameron Irizarry of Parkersburg, W.Va., Cory Rexrode of Bartow, W.Va.,

and William Biyce of Fenwick, W.Va., all of whom will receive a Bass Pro Shops prize package.

This year’s fall trout stockings included 40,000 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 21 to submit a photo with the tag number to win.

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 2026 fishing adventures are encouraged to renew their license early online at WVfish.com.



Michael Waugh was the monster trout contest winner for 2025.



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New WV DNR Fishing Regulations Available

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) today announced the availability of the state's 2026 Fishing Regulations Summary, which can be downloaded for free at WVdnr.gov/fishing-regulations.

"Reviewing the Fishing Regulations Summary each year is an important step for anglers to stay informed about the rules that conserve the quality of our state's diverse 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 fishing regulations will go into effect on Jan. 1. Anglers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the current regulations. Physical copies will be available at WVDNR district offices and authorized license

agents around the state in January.

All anglers 15 years and older are required to have a West Virginia fishing license and a valid form of identification while fishing in the state of West Virginia. Trout stamps are required for those fishing for trout. Licenses and stamps may be purchased online at WVfish.com.



Juanita Cleavinger brought in a nice Lewis County archery buck.



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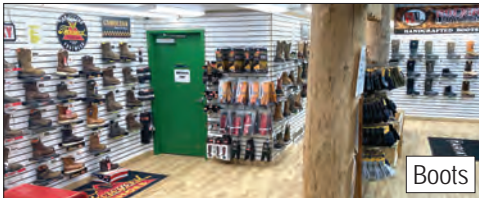
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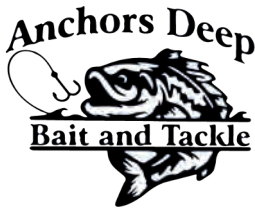
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Interesting Hunting Facts

Hunting was one of the main methods used to obtain food for thousands of years prior to the creation of agriculture. Hunters and gatherers roamed the earth for many centuries before people began to settle down in one place and grow their own food. Hunting is still a common method to obtain food in many parts of the world, and in other parts it is a sport. Hunting is used in some areas to control wildlife populations, but it has also led to the endangerment and extinction of species. Many groups protest hunting because of strong belief in animal advocacy, while others protest hunting because of religious beliefs.

Interesting Hunting Facts:

Animals that are hunted in the wild today tend to be better sources

of meat because they are able to eat a natural diet and roam free as they were intended to do.

In some cases where hunting is closely regulated, hunting actually helps animal populations to thrive and grow.

People that kill animals unlawfully are called poachers. In most cases in order to hunt a person requires a license and a tag to kill an animal. Poachers can serve jail time and pay expensive fines

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Jebidiah Short gun hunted in Lewis County for a great buck.



Torie Riffle, from Linn, bagged a nice 8 point buck with a rifle.



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Different types of hunting are popular in different parts of the world.

In North America, people hunt, with the intention to eat, birds and waterfowl, turkeys, deer, moose, bear, elk, caribou, bison, bighorn sheep, rabbit, squirrel, beaver, and other animals.

In North America hunters sometimes have to kill animals because they are threatening humans or livestock. Some of these animals that are hunted include coyote, wolves, cougars, mountain lions, and bear.

In the United States hunting is usually done with a gun, bow and arrow, or traps.

In the United Kingdom fox hunting has been a long standing tradition. It has been considered a sport

of the upper class for centuries.

Safaris are another popular form of hunting, in which a hunter goes on a journey that lasts sever-

al days to weeks, pursuing a big game specimen.

Many hunters save the heads
continue to the next page



Aiden Compton went to Ritchie Co. for a nice 10 point buck.

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Josh Compton used a gun for a 10 point Ritchie County buck.



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and/or other parts of the animal to have preserved so that they can mount it on the wall like a trophy. Different methods of hunting exist around the world. They can include shooting, bows and arrows, traps, using other animals to chase and catch prey, spears, and today some hunters use the internet to hunt remotely.

Some areas are banning the use of lead bullets because they have the potential to cause pollution when they miss their target and land on the ground.

Some animals throughout history have been hunted for only a small portion of their body, resulting in devastating losses to populations. Some of these animals have included elephants (for their ivory tusks), bears (for their gall-

bladders), white rhinos (for their horns), and American bison (for their hides).

Sport hunting has surpassed hunting for food in many parts of

the world, although many animals that are hunted for sport are also consumed after they have been killed, such as moose, deer, elk, and bison.



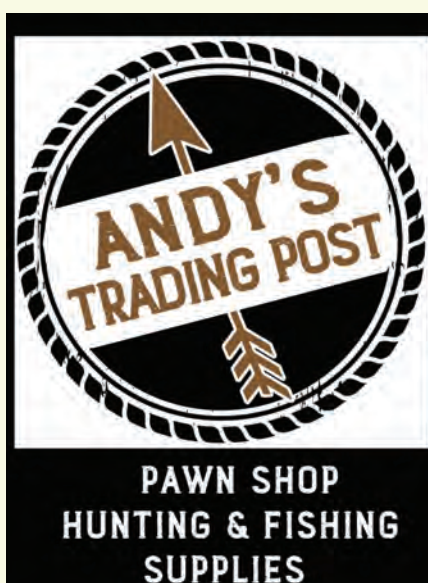
Jerry Evett used a rifle for his nice 8 point whitetail buck.



Jim Bernard went to Tyler County for a gun buck.



Eric Adkins went to Wayne County for his 11 point buck.



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Amy Lilly had success with an 8 point Raleigh County buck.



Cole Emerson used a rifle for a quality Lincoln County buck.

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Bass Fishing Hope For 2026

By Easton Fothergill

This is the time of year when a lot of people start talking about New Year's Resolutions. I do this too, but instead of focusing on big changes, I'm choosing to look at things that I resolve to continue doing in the new year.

To do this, I have to look back at my 2025 season and identify the things I was happy about. For one thing, I learned a lot about myself and what it takes to perform at the Bassmaster Elite Series level.

I also learned a lot about the mental part of competitive fishing. If you look at my results, you can see a mental shift that took place between my first two Elite events and the rest of the season.

It took me a couple of events to learn where my head needs to be at, but we got it figured out early enough to have a solid season.

So, as for my New Year's Resolutions, I'm going to continue my high-octane fishing style. When I'm moving fast and covering as much water as I can is when I'm performing my best.



Haden George used a recurve bow for his Ritchie Co. black bear.



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The fish are always changing when we show up to places, and if I can cover enough water, I feel like I can figure it out a little faster than guys who are moving slower.

With the new forward-facing sonar rules for 2026, I think it will

be even more important to put my bait in as many places as I can. That will allow me to generate a few bites early to give me a clue to run with the rest of the day.

That strategy served me well at
continue to page 18



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the Bassmaster Classic, but that's where I hindered myself in the two Florida events. I didn't cover enough water. I just stayed in a couple of areas I'd found in practice.

From the Classic on, I followed a more mobile game plan. This was especially important at the Pasquotank River. I covered a

bunch of water and adapted with the changing conditions. I got a clue the first day of the tournament and got a Top 10 finish.

It was a combination of the Classic and the Pasquotank that made the lightbulb turn on. I realized this is how I need to roll going forward.

A few more resolutions:

Don't get complacent. Every time I dump my boat into the water, my goal is to learn something new. On the Elite Series, we have to work hard to keep our place and, with the young talent coming in every year, you cannot afford to relax.

Stay positive. You have to go into every event confident you're gonna catch 'em. If you carry doubt into an event, it's not going to happen.

Even if you have a bad practice, you have to will it into happening. A lot can change throughout the course of a day, so you have to re-

continue to page 20

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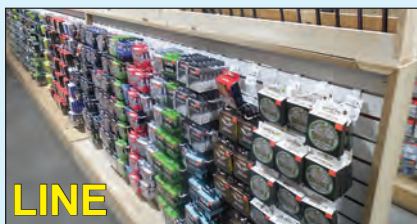
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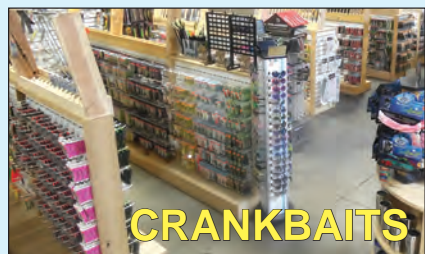
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your friends. Besides, how lucky are we to be able to compete and spend time in the outdoors.

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for granted — the sunrises, the sunsets, the wildlife. We have to embrace it because you never know when it might end.



Dave Farmer, from Princeton has an impressive whitetail buck.



Billy Wimmer, from Bluefield, bagged a huge black bear this season.



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WV's Hunter Ridge Bird Hunting Experience

"Get ready, Roxy is on a bird," said Shad Rice. I moved in while she was on full point and a rooster chukar flew up. Bang. "I guess I still have it", I said. "Bird down!"

I have not bird hunted for around 15 years. I had 3 English Setters over the years. The grouse population near the Wood County area has pretty much disappeared. As the forest canopy gets taller, some other food sources for grouse don't get enough sun and die off.

Other areas of the state that had strip mines, still have grouse I've been told.

I had the pleasure to visit Hunter Ridge Wing & Clay in Rock

Cave, WV. This wonderful bird preserve covers around 160 acres. Greg Moats and daughter Cassie, are the owners. Their property has a building for the hunters to get ready and they have an outdoor covered picnic shelter with tables.

They buy ring neck pheasants and Hungarian chukars and bring them to their hunting grounds. They offer guided hunts with a dog and handler. Other people bring their own dogs. Rates vary based on what you choose.

Game birds are taken out to trails and placed for the hunters. The trails are easy to walk on and a lot

of their property is open with few trees. Sometimes on a bird flush, they will fly into the wooded area. Makes it more fun taking your shot.

continue to page 34



Bird dog Roxy is on point waiting for the hunter to move in.



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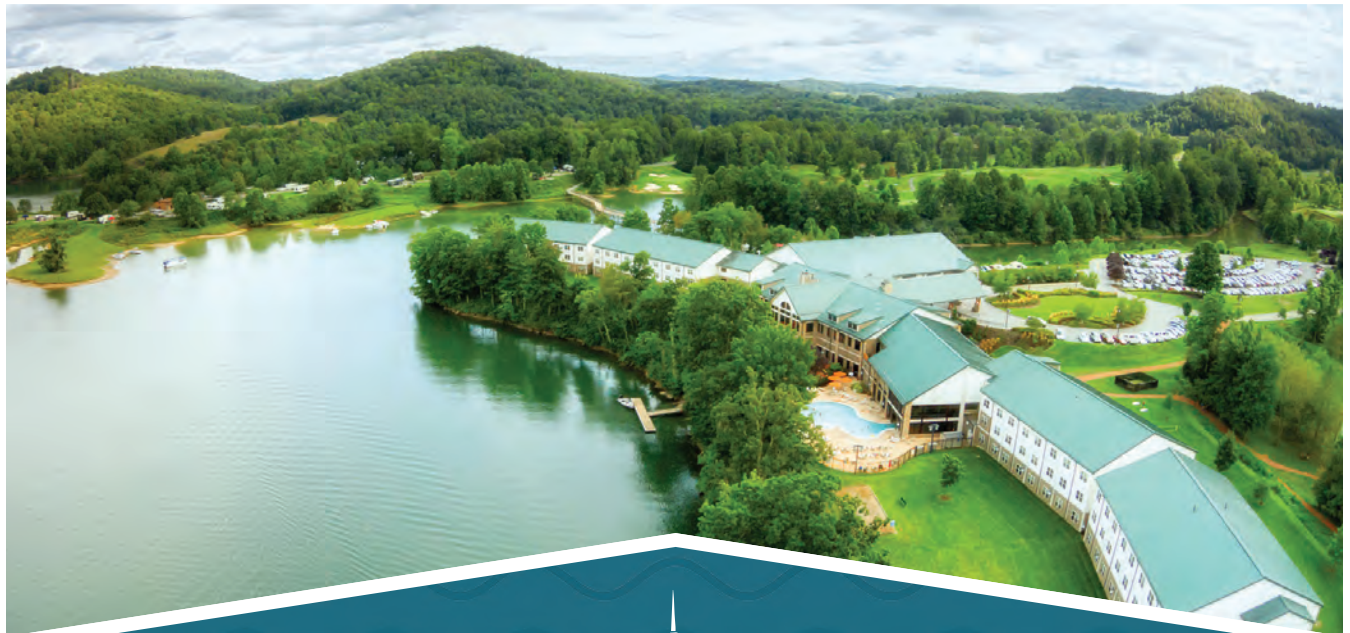
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Back to my hunt, Shad and his Brittany Spaniel, Roxy, guided me around the trail. If you haven't seen a bird dog at work, it's quite an experience. When a bird went up, I shouldered my 12 gauge and took a shot or 2 if needed. After downing a bird, Roxy would go retrieve the bird. What a deal... We hunted for around 3 hours and I ended up with a dozen pheasants and chukars. When a big rooster ring neck pheasant flies up, it's quite majestic to see. I did miss a few but in most cases you could see where they landed. Then Roxy would locate them and go on point. Some did get away.

We drove back to the club house on Shad's UTV. It was time to clean the birds. Greg Moats, co-owner, was there and showed the fastest way to clean a bird that I have seen. He had an apparatus that would clean the birds in just a few seconds. It would leave only

the breast meat.

There was a group of 3 hunters with their own dogs when I arrived. They had 30 chukars put-

out for them. They were having a ball.

Overall for me, it was an out-
continue to page 26



Gunner Ketterman harvested a fine buck. Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.

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Details On Page 3**

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Go to hunterridge.net to find out more about rates and other things. They do have 2 deluxe cabins with jacuzzis available. They also have a Facebook page.

They will be having a Europe-



Julie Teter got a 10 point gun buck. Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.



Hunting in Mason County, Pratt Dawkins brought in a gun buck.

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Look for the Hunter Ridge ad on the bottom of page 22 of this is-

sue. Contact info is in the ad.

Greg and Cassie Moats also offer Colorado elk, black bear and mule deer hunts. You can find out more about these exciting hunts by viewing their website. Look

up mountaineeroutfitters.info for details.



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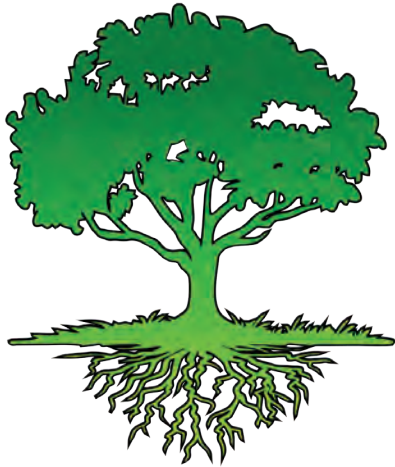
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A West Virginia hunting and fishing license is your ticket to unforgettable adventures in the Mountain State. Whether you're a seasoned hunter, an avid angler, starting your hunting and fishing journey or looking for the perfect gift for an outdoor enthusiast, this guide has you covered. Learn which license is right for

you, how to purchase it and how to upgrade your experience with collectible license cards.

WHICH LICENSE SHOULD I BUY?

With several hunting and fishing license options to choose from, West Virginia has something for

everyone. Not sure where to start? Here's a quick breakdown of our most popular licenses:

ANNUAL LICENSES

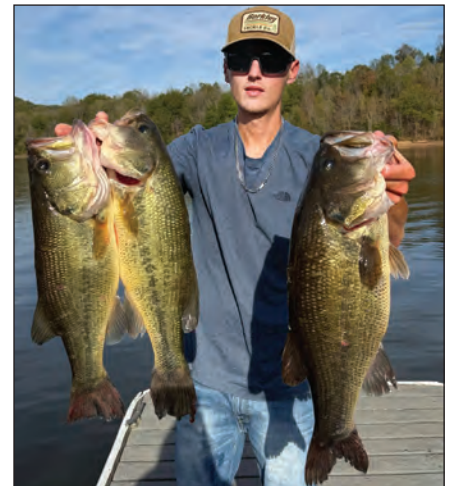
Whether you want to hunt, fish or both, annual licenses are perfect for those who love year-round
continue to the next page



Ayden Ashley used a bow for a great Marion County buck.



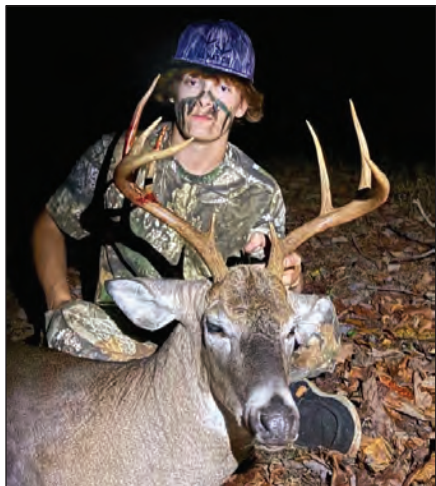
Using a recurve bow, Brian Mabe had archery success with a buck.



Jay Harman was the fall King Of Stonewall with these bass.

adventure. If you're new to hunting, note that you'll need to complete a hunter education course before purchasing an annual license. An annual license is your key to enjoying hunting and angling throughout the year in West Virginia.

Hunting and Trapping License – Join West Virginia's rich hunting heritage and enjoy access to various game seasons, including deer, turkey and small game. Whether you prefer hunting with a firearm or bow and arrow, this license allows you to explore it all. Don't forget—you can also



Hunting in Summers County, Tyler Stratton had a bow buck.



Chase Walls arrowed a Logan County giant buck.

trap fur-bearing animals with this license for an additional outdoor adventure.

Fishing License – Enjoy unlimited access to West Virginia's pristine streams, rivers and lakes, and reel in trout, bass, catfish and more. From fly fishing in quiet mountain streams to casting your line in wide-open lakes, this li-

cense lets you experience fishing at its finest. Add a trout stamp to unlock even more opportunities for fishing adventure.

Combination License – For those who want it all, this combination license is the best option for sportsmen and women who want to enjoy hunting, trapping

continue to the next page

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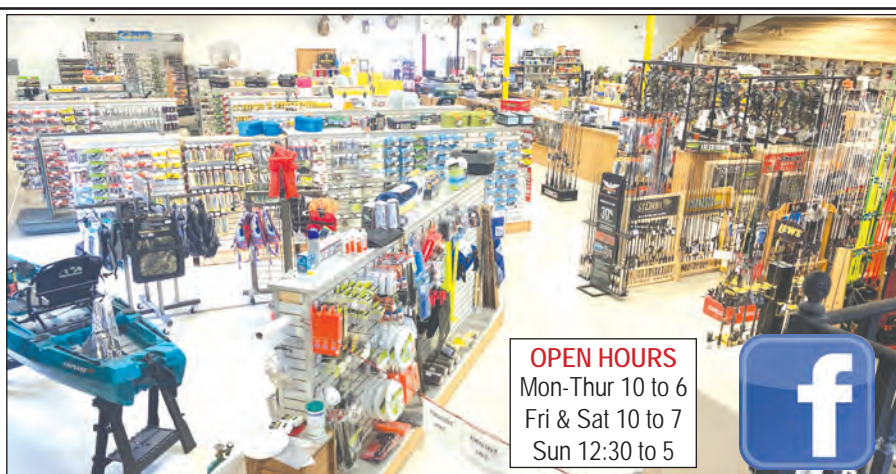
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Dakota Layton arrowed a fine whitetail buck.



Hunting in Cabell County, Justin Caldwell bagged an archery buck.

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HOW TO BUY A WEST VIRGINIA HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSE

Buying a license is quick and easy. Visit our Electronic License System and log in or click "Enroll Today" and set up your profile. Once logged in, click Purchase a License, Tag, or Permit, add your desired licenses and stamps to the cart and complete any necessary surveys and accept any terms, click Pay Now and enter payment details on the secure payment screen. That's all there is to it. Need help? Contact the WVDNR License Unit at 304-558-6200 for assistance.

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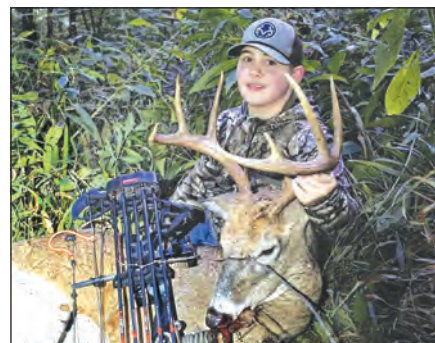
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Bev Toler used her bow for a dandy archery buck.



Young Logan Blake took down a quality whitetail buck.



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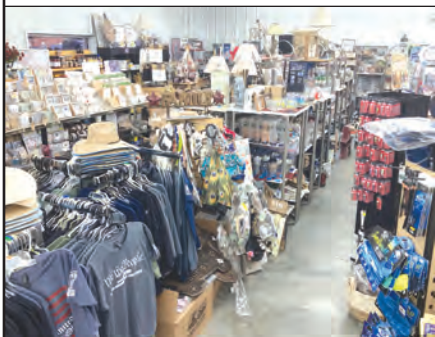
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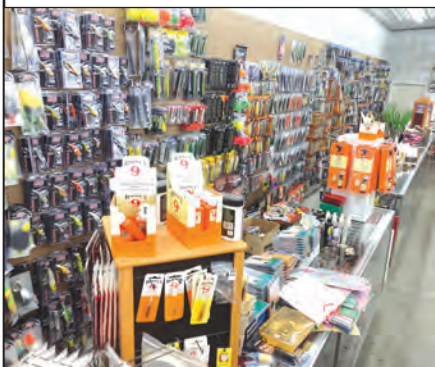


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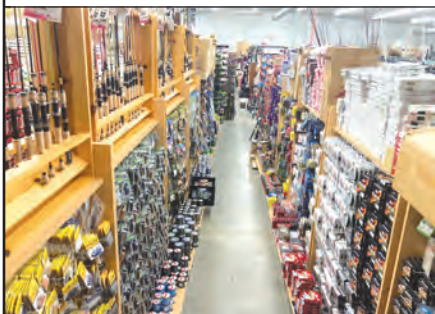
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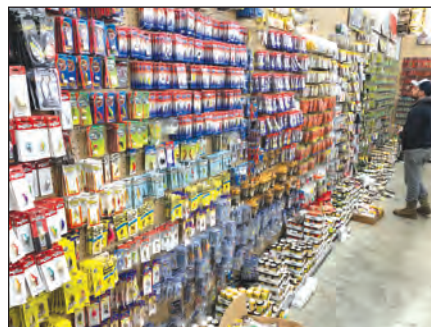


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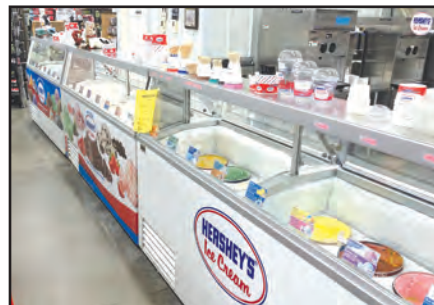
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Winter Rabbit Hunting

What can you hunt when it's not time to hunt deer? Every hunter has a personalized routine that they resort to once deer season comes to a close.

Some resort to coyote hunting to keep predators out of their whitetail territory, and others will hide out until the winter weather settles down and spring gets a little bit closer. Although these are both excellent ways to keep your shooting skills sharp for the next deer season, one type of hunting is often forgotten and should be considered during these hard winter months: rabbit hunting.

Hunting rabbits can be as equally productive as any other off-season hunting. Not only can it provide you with some tasty meat for the dinner table, but it is fast-paced, fun, and satisfies that itching trig-

ger finger.

However, these little guys can be tricky to locate, so you first must understand where they hide. Today, we will tell you where to find rabbits and give you four tips on hunting them successfully.

Where They Hide

Rabbits are mostly found where they locate food sources or cover for thermal and predator protection. This makes it crucial for hunters to locate areas with dense coverage, such as thick brush, oaks, or dense woods.

However, rabbits have been known to tolerate human activity, causing them to hang out in brush near dwellings, barns, and small wooded areas.

In the winter, rabbits tend to burrow into thick piles of leaves, brush, or shrubs for necessary cover. If trees have fallen or been destroyed, you can almost bet that rabbits will most likely hang out here. However, from time to time, on a warm, sunny winter day, you can catch rabbits out soaking in the sun near south-facing slopes.

All in all, the three areas to look for are:

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304-472-4279 LIVE BAIT

Areas with human activity

Sufficient coverage

Lack of predators

Now that you have a general idea
continue to the next page



Young Aiden Lilly took a buck with a muzzleloader.

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Eden Pullins hunted in Braxton Co. for his 10 point. *Photo courtesy of WV Wild Outdoors in Birch River.*

Jan/Feb 2026 ~ Page 32

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W. Va Sportsman

• Details On Page 3

• Reach Potential Customers

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of where they hide, here are four strategies to help you better hunt for rabbits.

A rabbit by a tree in the snow, how to hunt rabbit concept.

4 Strategies for Hunting Rabbit

Ready to test your skills and stay sharp during the off-season? Follow our four tips for hunting rabbits.

1. Target Sunny Slopes When the Weather Allows

Although rabbits are primarily active during the early morning and late night, they can't help but move on a sunny day following a cold front.

Therefore, watch the forecast and predictions on your HuntWise app

continue to the next page



Young Dylan Fox hunted in Kanawha County for his buck



Eli Ward had a fun day at Sutton Lake. Caught a 6 lb. smallmouth and later got a nice buck.

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MAR. 28-29, 2026 - HURRICANE, WV - PUTNAM CO. PARKS & RECS CONFERENCE CENTER

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MORE DATES/LOCATIONS TO COME



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to keep current on the weather that might be coming. On these sunny days, rabbits will often move at midday, especially on sun-drenched south and south-western slopes. This can be an ideal time to hunt rabbits.

2. Locate the Thick Covered Areas

One of the main reasons rabbits have become nocturnal is that they lack coverage to stay hidden during the day. Therefore, the best place to locate these furry

animals will be within the dense vegetation of your land.

Search for brush-filled hollows, overgrown shrubs, corners of fields, and areas with tall weeds and trees. Many of these spots offer crops, fruits, and other food sources as well, making it not only a place of coverage but also a food source.

3. Try Using the "Zig-Zag" Ap-

proach

When approaching rabbits, the best way to kick them out of hiding is to use the "zig-zag" approach.

This will alarm the animals and allow you to bag some rabbits. Then, as you get them moving, you'll need the last tip to end your hunt successfully.

4. Shoot Quickly

Out of all the game you can hunt, rabbits are not one to lol-
continue to page 36



Happy hunter Sawyer Sims, from Crosslanes has a nice buck.



Cole Wines, from Poca, reeled in a Kanwaha River flathead.



Hunting in Fayette Co., Chris Schrewsberry got a gun buck.

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gag around. You will not have the time you might have to line up your shot when hunting deer or turkey.

Make sure you have your shot-



Jerry Cutlip, from Crosslanes, harvested a quality 10 point buck.

gun at port arms when you are in ideal coverage and zig-zagging. You must be ready to shoot at any moment, as once you kick them up, they will zoom around quickly.

Use HuntWise for Successful Rabbit Hunting

As with tips for hunting any type of game, the list of different strategies to use when hunting rabbits could go on and on. However, we feel these four tips are a good start!

Understanding where they hide and the best ways to approach them will be crucial to your success. Attempting to stay alert, kick them up, and be quick on the trigger will keep your skills sharp and provide you with a nice tasty meal.

If you're already using HuntWise to improve your deer and turkey hunts, use it for your rabbit hunts, too! You can mark where you see rabbit activity or thick brush where they hide. You can also use the app to track the wind and plan an ideal day to get out and hunt



83 year old Kenny Ramsey has a 10 point buck from Tyler Co.



Wyatt Ware brought in a gun buck from Webster County.



Ashley Drake is pleased with her Wood County buck.



Dusty Marple has a nice Upshur County buck.



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Nathaniel Mayor got a buck with a gun that had an unusual rack.

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