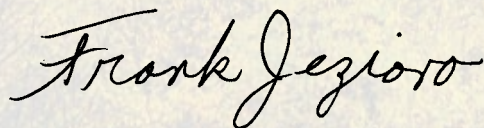


Weather Plays a Role in Wildlife Management Today

One hundred years ago, wildlife populations in West Virginia, as well as in the United States, had been depleted due to massive habitat destruction and unregulated hunting. State and federal laws were passed that set hunting seasons and bag limits. Game refuges were established and certain wildlife species, such as deer and beaver, were stocked to rebuild populations. The situation had improved by the mid-1900s, but populations of some species were still low. The last half of the 20th century saw passage of laws protecting the various components of habitat — land, air and water — and widespread use of wildlife and habitat management techniques based on science. These efforts were aided by an increase in public education about the environment and the need to wisely use our natural resources. As a result, populations of turkeys, bear and deer, among others, rose to levels unknown since pioneer times. Biologists in the first decade of the 21st century have worked to stabilize and, in some cases, decrease populations of some species.

Today, most wildlife populations are dependent on weather and how that affects their food supply, and in cases of game animals, how that affects hunter participation in the seasons used to control populations. Each year in late summer, DNR and Division of Forestry personnel along with other individuals comb the state's forests surveying the abundance of nuts and berries that wild animals eat. The results of the survey help biologists predict game harvests and help hunters plan their fall forays.

The mast crop from this year not only determines where wildlife species will be found this fall, but also determines the health of females going into the winter and ultimately the reproductive success for the following year. Last year witnessed one of the worst seasons for mast in 40 years, followed by one of the harshest weather conditions in recent history. This year produced a bumper crop from many mast-producing trees and shrubs. Wildlife should enter this winter in prime condition. Barring another harsh winter, or big spring floods, the woods should be filled next spring and summer with wildlife that our state's citizens can observe and hunt.



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