



WESTERN STATES WILD TURKEY TECHNICAL
COMMITTEE AND

WESTERN STATES WILD TURKEY WORKSHOP

MAY 6-8, 2024

**HOSTED BY OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION**



**OKLAHOMA
DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION**

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ATTENDEES

Province	Alberta Conservation Association	Doug Manzer	In Person
State	Arizona	Rick Langley	In Person
State	Arizona	Rana Murphy	In Person
State	Idaho	Jeff Knetter	Virtual
State	Montana	Brian Wakeling	Virtual
State	Nevada	Justin Small	Virtual
State	New Mexico	Casey Cardinal	In Person
State	Oklahoma	Eric Suttles	In Person
State	Oklahoma	Marcus Thibodeau	In Person
State	Oregon	Mikal Cline	Virtual
State	South Dakota	Chad Lehmann	Virtual
State	Texas	Kyle Hand	In Person
State	Texas	Jason Hardin	In Person
State	Utah	Heather Talley	Virtual
State	Washington	Sarah Garrison	Virtual
State	Wyoming	Joe Sandrini	In Person
NWTF		Chuck Carpenter	In Person
NWTF		Patt Dorsey	In Person
NWTF		Annie Farrell	In Person
NWTF		Clayton Lenk	Virtual
NWTF		Jared McJunkin	In Person
NWTF		Krista Modlin	In Person
NWTF		David Nikonow	In Person

WAFWA Western States
Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting

Hosted By

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Dates: May 6th-8th 2024

Agenda

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Croton Creek Ranch

9516 N 1802 Rd.

Cheyenne, Oklahoma

May 6th -8th All Times Are Central Standard

Monday May 6th

- Optional Field Trip to Packsaddle WMA (time TBD)

Tuesday May 7th

- **8am – Breakfast/Registration**
- **10:30am** – Introductions, Agenda Review, Housekeeping (Thibodeau)
- **10:45am-** Oklahoma Welcome (ODWC)
- **11am** – National Wild Turkey Federation Update (NWTF)
- **11:30am** – Turkeys For Tomorrow Update (TFT)
- **Noon – Lunch**
- **1:30** – Oklahoma Wild Turkey Research Overview & Updates (Cody Griffin OSU)
- **2:15** – “A Distribution Level Health Assessment of Rio Grande Wild Turkeys (Blake Grisham TTU)
- **3:00 break**
- **3:30** – Turkey Trapping Training and Demonstrations (Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma)
- **6:30 – Dinner & Social**

Wednesday May 8th

- **8am – Breakfast**
- **9am – State Reports**
 - Arizona
 - California
 - Colorado
 - Idaho
 - Kansas
 - Montana
 - Nebraska
- **10:15 Break**
- **10:30 – State Reports Continued**
 - Nevada
 - New Mexico
 - Oklahoma
 - Oregon
 - South Dakota
 - Texas
 - Utah
 - Washington
 - Wyoming
 - Alberta
- **Noon – Lunch**
- **1:30 – Finish State Reports if needed / New Business**
 - Western States Research Needs/Priorities
 - Meeting Planning
 - Turkey conflict progress report
 - Other Topics
- **5:30 – Dinner**



State and Provincial Reports (alphabetical order)

Alberta Conservation Association

2023/24 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Turkey Surveys and Population Augmentation

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Mike Verhage

Primary ACA Staff on Project: Robert Anderson, Trinie Chisholm, Trevor Council, Brad Downey, Jeff Forsyth, Easton Fritz, John Hallett, Jalen Hult, Tyler Johns, Michael Jokinen, Paul Jones, Kris Kendell, Julie Landry-Deboer, Amanda MacDonald, Kade McCormick, Doug Manzer, Susan Peters, Corey Rasmussen, Amanda Rezansoff, Dayce Rhodes, Kelly Riehl, Layne Seward, Michael Uchikura, Jaclyn Vanderfluit, and Mike Verhage

Partnerships

Calgary Fish & Game Association

City of Kimberley

Government of Alberta

Government of British Columbia

Landholders in southwestern Alberta

Lethbridge Fish & Game Association

Okotoks & District Fish & Game Association
Onoway & District Fish & Game Association
Safari Club International – Calgary Chapter
Sarcee Fish & Game Association
Tony and Karen Legault (Paradise Hill Farm)
Wildwood and District Rod & Gun Club
Windermere Village
Zone 1 – Southern Alberta Fish & Game Society
Zone 5 – Northeastern Alberta Fish & Game Association

Key Findings

- We contacted landowners across known wild turkey range to gather winter counts. The numbers have been tracking down with an aggregate count of 840 in 2021, 792 in 2022, and then down to 637 birds in 2023.
- We translocated 177 wild turkeys from southeastern British Columbia into southwestern Alberta in early 2023. They were considered problem birds in British Columbia and captured around towns and communities. The birds were released in eight locations to jump-start sub-populations.
- We conducted an annual volunteer summer brood survey that, in 2023, had 30 respondents return a count of 175 hens with 243 poults for a ratio of 1.39 poults per hen. A ratio above 2:1 is considered a threshold for a stable wild turkey population.
- We translocated birds from British Columbia again in early 2024, and in total, we released 183 into southwestern Alberta.
- We tested all captured wild turkeys that are destined for release in Alberta for disease. To date, all have come back negative.

Details

Wild turkeys were first translocated into Alberta in 1962 with 21 birds from South Dakota released in the Cypress Hills in the southeast corner of Alberta (GOA 2022). Since then, several introductions and relocations have occurred through southern Alberta with a hunting season initiated in the spring of 1991. The current population appears to be

struggling, and this has led to the initiation of a wild bird translocation program beginning in early 2023.

We reached out to landowners in 2021 to monitor wild turkeys across their range in southwest Alberta. We divided the anticipated range into five zones and contacted ten or more landholders from each zone, primarily with ranching operations. We spoke with 118 landowners in winter 2021, and of these 44 reported an aggregate count of 840 turkeys. Many suggested that turkeys were more common in previous years, while in 2021 they were no longer present or occurred at sparse numbers. This count was 792 in 2022, and then down to 637 birds in 2023. We do not know if this count is accurate, though we suspect it is a reasonable index and that a negative trend has been occurring across much of southwestern Alberta.

To gain more resolution with population trend we also initiated a poult survey in summer 2021. We requested the public to report counts of poults and hens in summer and early fall. Our sample sizes are low and therefore to be interpreted cautiously. Even so, the ratio of poults per hen over the three years suggesting recruitment has been low during this period (poults:hen – 1.55:1 in 2021, $n=17$; 0.97:1 in 2022, $n=23$; and 1.39:1 in 2023, $n=30$). A ratio above two poults per hen (i.e., 2:1) is considered the threshold for a stable population for wild turkeys.

We began translocating wild turkeys from British Columbia into southwestern Alberta to counteract the apparent population decline. In early 2023, we translocated 177 birds and released them at eight sites, and in early 2024, we translocated 183 birds and released them at 11 sites. We foresee the need to continue annual translocations for 9–10 more years and, as local population growth occurs, to also relocate surplus birds within Alberta to establish additional sub-populations. This strategy of using translocations along with relocations over extended periods (10 plus years) has proven to be a successful approach for building sustainable wild turkey populations in other jurisdictions.

ARIZONA WILD TURKEY STATUS REPORT – 2024

Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting – May 6-8, 2024
Hosted by Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Cheyenne, OK

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POPULATION STATUS

Merriam's turkey populations in Arizona seem to be stabilizing in most locations while some populations appear to be increasing. Although we do not have a good way to estimate turkey numbers, Merriam's turkeys are estimated between 25,000 and 30,000 in number, and Gould's turkeys number around 1,500. Gould's turkey numbers continue to increase within the available habitat in their range and are expanding into lower desert riparian areas outside of their typical mountainous riparian habitat.

Spring “gobbler” surveys for Gould’s turkey are conducted in southern Arizona’s “Sky Islands” each year. The number of mountain ranges surveyed, and the number of routes in each range, varies slightly from year to year, but the number of Gould’s observed from year to year remains fairly consistent.

In 2023, six mountain ranges were surveyed (of 8 known occupied). A total of 59 routes were run, for a total of 538 Gould’s observed. The year prior one less mountain range was surveyed but more routes were run resulting in more turkey observed (n=655). While overall numbers were lower this year, totals can vary significantly each year depending on location of flocks at time of survey and number of routes run, therefore managers are not concerned with the lower numbers.

REPRODUCTION

Merriam’s turkey brood count data was collected in 9 game management units (GMU) across the state in 2023. A total of 888 turkeys were classified (up from 724 in 2023): classified as 88 males, 230 females, and 527 poults, for a poult to hen ratio of 2.55. This is similar to the long term average which usually runs around 2.5. Of the observations recorded in those 9 GMU’s, only 3 units recorded more than 5 groups. The average poult:hen ratio was only calculated on the data from 2 units that recorded observations greater than 100. These data are not statistically significant but they can be an indicator of the reproduction trend for this year. Reproduction/recruitment rates are improved after 2 years of extreme drought in 2020 and 2021. We are working to improve this data collection as it is the only technique we currently have to evaluate recruitment.

HARVEST

Harvest data used to be collected through a voluntary hunter questionnaire mailed to a subset of permit holders, but it mainly focuses on hunt success. Some age and sex data is collected through field-check data, but is very limited. The hunt questionnaire was modified for the Fall 2012 and the question was added to determine if the harvested bird was bearded or not and how long that beard was. This will give additional age and sex data that may be used in future hunt guidelines and decision making. For Fall 2018, the Department moved to including a QR code on the back of all tags, of which a hunter could scan and submit their hunt results. This resulted in dismal results with only a 3.7% return rate from hunters. The Department has gone back to mailing cards to hunters and sending emails to tag holders, which has resulted in increased return rates (>50%) and improved quality of data.

Spring Turkey Season

For Gould’s turkeys, a total of 76 permits across 8 management units were issued via a lottery draw system for the 2023 spring hunt. Most units have an extremely high hunt success rate ranging from 82-100%. Average days/kill range from 1-3, with the average being 3.

There are limited hunts for Rio Grande turkeys in Arizona. Four permits were issued for 2023 spring hunts. One bird was reported as harvested.

In 2011, Arizona had its highest spring permitted hunt to date with 7,698 permits authorized. Spring 2023 permits for Merriam's included 4,859 permits in stratified hunts and 340 youth permits. In 2024, we offered 4,692 permits in stratified hunts and 340 youth permits. There are 10 units that are open to youth non-permit tags (available over-the-counter).

Spring 2023 hunt success averaged 24% for the stratified hunts and youth hunts averaged 21%. Hunter days were 13,816 and the average days per kill is 16.2. We saw a decline in hunter days, an increase in average hunt success and a decrease in days per kill from 2022.

Fall Turkey Season

There are no fall hunts for Gould's turkeys.

There were 3,855 permits issued for Merriam's turkeys in the Fall 2023 season, down from 4,620 permits in 2022. Further reductions were recommended for Fall 2024, down to 3,550 any turkey permits. Average hunt success in 2024 ranged from 11 to 62% but the mean was 34%. Hunter days were 8,076 and average days per kill was 11. We saw an increase in hunt success and a decrease in days/kill.

HUNTING INCIDENTS

There have been no reported hunting incidents in Arizona in recent years.

RESEARCH

There are no ongoing research projects in Arizona, and we are no longer actively monitoring translocated turkeys with GPS transmitters. A state-wide large-scale monitoring project for turkey is being developed.

Telemetry work completed in 2017-18 resulted in 4 new publications on Gould's turkey.

The first focuses on roosting habitat. The citation is:

Bakner, N. W., Fyffe, N., Oleson, B., Smallwood, A., Heffelfinger, J. R., Chamberlain, M. J., and Collier, B. A.. 2022. Roosting ecology of Gould's wild turkeys in southeastern Arizona. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 86:e22277.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.22277>

The second focuses on habitat selection and movement ecology of translocated Gould's. The citation for this article is:

Cohen, B. S., Oleson, B., Fyffe, N., Smallwood, A., Bakner, N., Nelson, S., Chamberlain, M. J., and Collier, B. A.. 2022. Movement, spatial ecology, and habitat selection of

translocated Gould's wild turkeys. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 46:e1270.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/wsb.1270>

The third was on roost site selection. The citation is:

Bakner, N. W., N. Fyffe, B. Oleson, A. Smallwood, J. R. Heffelfinger, M. J. Chamberlain, and B. A. Collier. 2022. Roosting ecology of Gould's wild turkeys in southeastern Arizona. *Journal of Wildlife Management* e22277. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.22277>

The fourth and most recent publication describes habitat selected by Gould's turkey as influenced by landcover type and topographical features. The citations for this article is: Ulrey, E.E., Wightman, P.H., Bakner, N.W. *et al.* Habitat selection of Gould's wild turkeys in southeastern Arizona. *Sci Rep* 13, 18639 (2023).
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-45684-1>

REGULATION/LEGISLATION CHANGES

There are no legislative changes related to turkey hunting, but a change was approved in the most recent hunt guidelines package to allow an alternative set of fall hunt dates. The alternative dates would be in November around the Thanksgiving holiday. Arizona is also in the process of implementing an E-tagging program. This will allow hunters the ability to electronic report a harvested turkey and "tag" it electronically. This could increase harvest reporting and the quality of data in the future.

A rule change has also been approved to allow atlatls as a legal method for taking turkeys. The Department has not yet finalized that rule-making so it is unknown how this change would be implemented.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

HPAI is of concern but we have seen no indication that it has affected turkeys in Arizona. Blood was collected from a number of turkeys from recent captures and translocations. Results were negative.

Samples from Gould's turkeys are submitted each year to be tested for lymphoproliferative disease. None of the samples have tested positive as of yet. LPDV has been detected in Merriam's turkeys for several years.

Access to occupied turkey habitat continues to be a challenge in southern Arizona in Gould's turkey habitat. Many roads to public lands cross through private property and are blocked at those access points. While some progress opening gates onto land held in trust by the State of Arizona has occurred, lands owned and managed by the US Forest Service

continue to be difficult to access. In some cases, legal access has been designated, but roads have yet to be built, rendering the huntable areas still inaccessible by vehicle.

RELEVANT LINKS

Relevant information such as regulations booklets, hunter questionnaire reports, and survey summaries can be found on the AZGFD website www.azgfd.com.

MISCELLANEOUS

Translocations

Arizona remains active in the translocation program. In 2024, Region 1 captured and translocated a total of 40 turkeys to Region 6. 15 turkeys were fitted with GPS transmitters and released in GMU 22 North, as part of those translocations to look at mortality and dispersal/movement.

While Merriam's populations are relatively stable, the established Gould's populations in southeastern Arizona have shown strong recruitment and continue to grow. This has been a great conservation success story for the Department, NWTF and wild turkey management.

Colorado Wild Turkey Status Report 2024

Edward T. Gorman

Small Game Manager

Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Colorado is home to Merriam's and Rio Grande wild turkeys. Merriam's are considered native to Colorado, and occupy the mountainous regions of Colorado west of Interstate 25 and the pinyon-juniper canyon country of southeastern Colorado. Merriam's wild turkey range extends north along the front-range of the Rocky Mountains, west along the I-70 corridor, into northwest Colorado along the White River and are common in southwest Colorado. Rio Grande wild turkeys were introduced into Colorado, and primarily occupy the cottonwood riparian systems of the eastern plains region, in addition to the Rio Grande River in the San Luis Valley. Distribution is segregated in most cases (Figure 1), although in a few areas, Rio Grande and Merriam's occupy adjacent habitats.

Large portions of the state do not provide suitable habitat for wild turkeys, and while the locations of small, pioneering populations are frequently reported in previously un-

inhabited areas. Some of these disappear in a few years, but it is not at all uncommon to find viable turkey populations in non-traditional areas. For over a decade, populations of Merriam's have been stable or increasing, with the last major winter mortality factor occurring in 2006-07. CPW believes that the statewide population continues at or near a historical high. Rio Grande populations were also reduced by drought impacts as recently as 2012-13, and again in 2020-2022. In northern Colorado, some areas experienced winter for the first time in 20 years in 2022-23. Turkeys were subjected to frozen snow cover for approximately 90 days and then flooding conditions while hens were nesting. Correspondingly, populations in northern Colorado declined by ~ 25%.

Hunting Opportunity and Harvest

Colorado offers both fall and spring turkey seasons, with both limited drawing only and unlimited, over-the-counter (OTC) permits. Average license sales for fall seasons total approximately 5,000 with an average success rate of 20%. Spring turkey hunting is much more popular than fall turkey seasons, with total license sales reaching just over 20,000 in 2023, hunting just over 91,000 days collectively. Note, these numbers show a 230% increase in turkey hunting participation from the 1999 season.

OTC permits are responsible for roughly 85% of Colorado's spring harvest, while limited permits are generally restricted to areas where unlimited hunting pressure is unwanted, and in areas in which the turkey population has recently been established. In effect, limited permit areas provide "quality" hunting areas, with high success rates, as opposed to maximized opportunity. Annual harvest estimates are summarized in Figure 2 & 3.

Spring turkey hunters are annually surveyed via live operator and email. Harvest estimates are provided on a statewide level, at the county level for OTC permits and at the game management unit (GMU) level for Limited permits. Each harvest estimate includes an estimate of standard area and the 95% confidence interval. Data is collected for hunt participation, harvest, days and location of hunt effort and harvest. Data fields are similar for fall turkey hunting surveys, although fall turkey hunters are surveyed much less frequently. Harvest reports are available to hunters at the agency website.

Trap and Transplant

Colorado has an active turkey trap and transplant program, although this program has continually evolved over the last two decades. Approximately 150 turkeys are transplanted annually, with high prioritization given to release sites that offer public hunting opportunity. Nearly all trap and transplant operations are related to agricultural damage, nuisance, or urban conflict issues. Colorado's current trap and transplant policy

calls for disease testing 25% of any flock trapped for transplant, for four pathogens, including *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (MG), *Mycoplasma synoviae* (MS), *Mycoplasma meleagridis* (MM), and *Salmonella pullorum* (SP). Flocks that test positive for any of these at any level are not used for transplant.

State law requires that all birds coming from out of state are also tested for these diseases. Considering that in-state sources of birds often outnumber suitable release sites, Colorado generally discourages out of state sources for wild turkeys. State law also prohibits the release of pen-raised turkeys into the wild, although such releases are believed to occur, often in areas that does not or will not support turkeys regardless of origin.

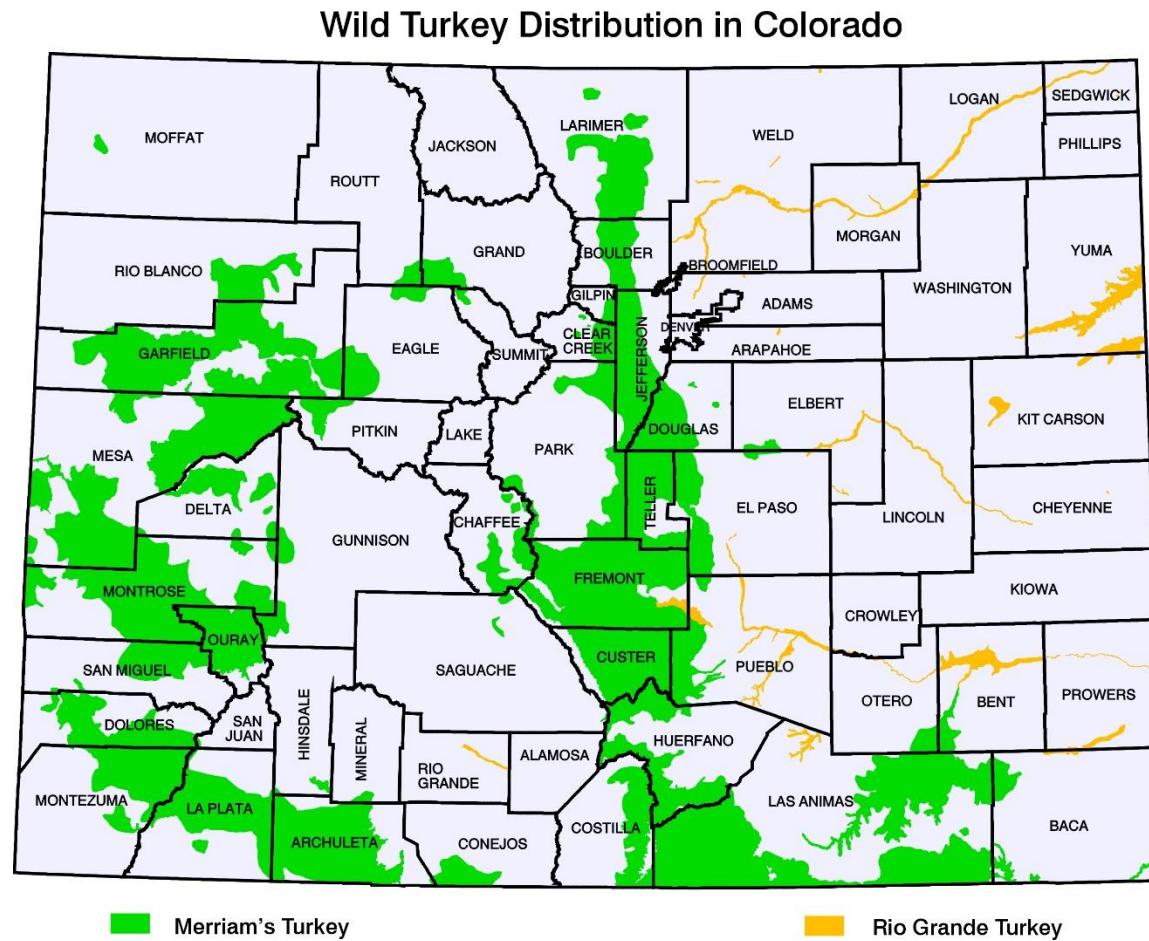
Hunter Programs

- 1) Licenses
 - a. Multiple Youth directed opportunities to hunt in spring and fall
 - b. Over-the counter licenses are valid in many game management units across the eastern plains and western Colorado.

Research

Currently CPW does not have a researcher dedicated to wild turkeys.

Figure 1. Colorado Turkey Distribution



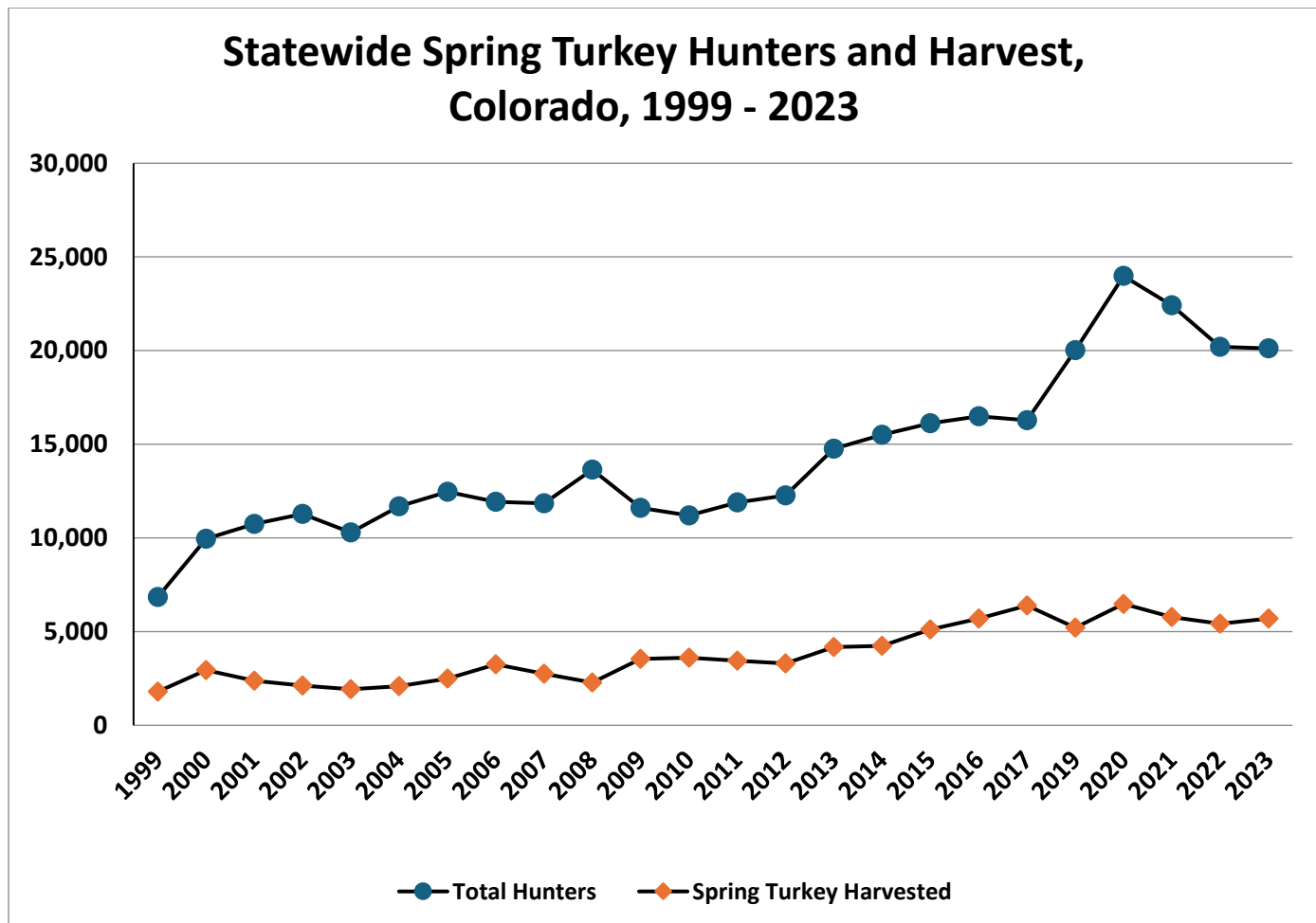
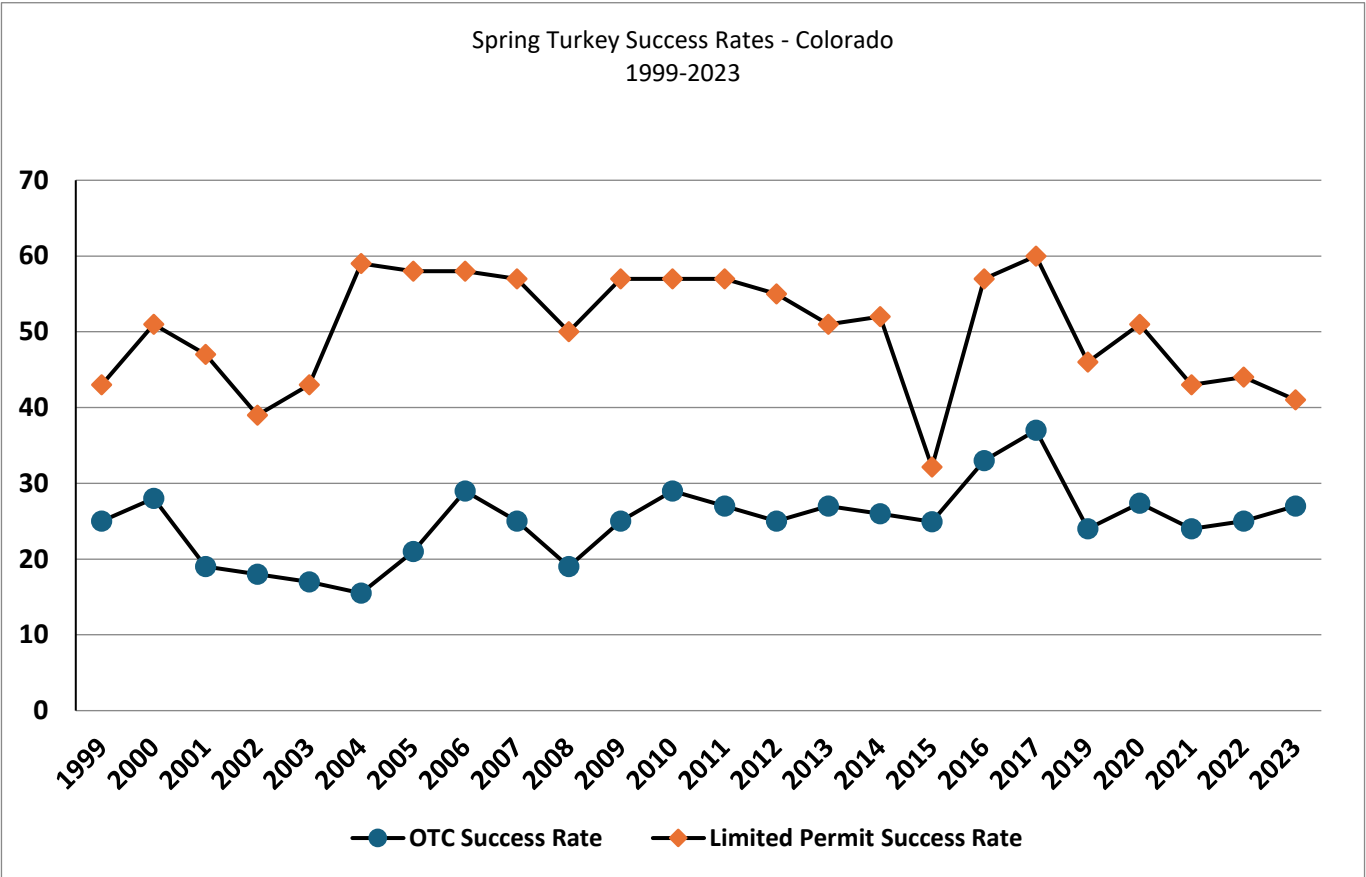


Figure 2. Harvest and Hunter estimates.

Figure 3. Turkey hunting success rate



Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting – May 7–8, 2024

Cheyenne, Oklahoma

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POPULATION STATUS

Wild turkeys are not native to Idaho but were first introduced in 1961. Since then, over 6,000 Merriam's, Eastern, Rio Grande, and hybrid wild turkeys were trapped from ten states (including Idaho) and released in Idaho; over 4,000 of these turkeys were of the Merriam's subspecies. These three subspecies have been translocated across the state and have readily intergraded; consequently, whether pure genetic strains of any of these subspecies persist in Idaho is unclear.

Idaho has not established a method to monitor population size or trends. However, Eriksen et al. (2015) estimated population size from spring harvest estimates and a population estimate constant (0.131); harvest was divided by the constant. If applied to Idaho, the spring population size fluctuated between 40,200 and 55,100 birds from 2019-2023; the average population size was 49,900 birds and the trend has increased since 2017.

In general, wild turkeys occupy available suitable habitat within Idaho (Figure 1). However, turkeys are still trapped and translocated, primarily to relieve depredation or nuisance issues. During winter 2024, turkeys were trapped and translocated only within the Southeast Region to alleviate conflict issues.

HARVEST

2023 Spring Turkey Season

In Idaho, the general spring season occurs April 15 – May 25; a youth-only season occurs April 8-14. In spring 2023, an estimated 18,100 hunters harvested approximately 6,200 wild turkeys during general season hunts, and an estimated 520 hunters harvested approximately 200 wild turkeys during controlled hunts. Success rates (harvest/hunters) were 36% and 38% for general and controlled hunt seasons, respectively. Over the last 10 years an average of 15,200 hunters harvested an estimated 5,400 wild turkeys during spring seasons (Figure 2). The bag limit is 2 bearded or male turkeys during spring seasons.

2023 Fall Turkey Season

In fall 2022, an estimated 7,700 hunters harvested approximately 3,700 wild turkeys during general season hunts, and an estimated 210 hunters harvested approximately 95 wild turkeys during controlled hunts. Success rates (harvest/hunters) were 48% for general seasons and 45% for controlled hunts. From 2013 to 2022, an average of 5,500 hunters harvested an estimated 2,800 wild turkeys during fall seasons (Figure 3). Bag limits during fall general seasons vary by region of the state, but the bag limit is 1 bird for controlled hunt seasons. Hunters may use unfilled spring tags during fall general seasons.

RESEARCH

In recent years, many states across historic wild turkey range have documented significant population declines after periods of apparent population growth. In the Panhandle Region of Idaho, wild turkey populations appear to have steadily increased over the past ten years. It is necessary to gather baseline information on wild turkey populations in north Idaho. We are currently investigating wild turkey reproduction ecology and cause-specific mortality to better inform wild turkey harvest and population management. We have deployed satellite transmitters on 30 female wild turkeys to determine nest initiation and peak incubation dates, and annual survival.

REGULATION/LEGISLATION CHANGES

Turkey seasons are set biennially in Idaho. They were last set in January 2024 and no substantial changes were made to seasons.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

Idaho has one of the fastest growing human populations in the country. With this population growth and associated development, it is likely wild turkey nuisance and depredation issues will continue to increase. The Idaho Wild Turkey Management Plan (Idaho Department of Fish and Game 2022) identifies strategies to respond effectively to these issues.

RELEVANT LINKS

Idaho Wild Turkey Management Plan: https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/idaho-wild-turkey-plan-2022_0.pdf

Wild Turkey Hunting Regulations: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/seasons-rules-upland-turkey-2022-2023.pdf>

Wild Turkey Hunting in Idaho: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/hunt/turkey>

LITERATURE CITED

Eriksen, R. E., T. W. Hughes, T. A. Brown, M. D. Akridge, K. B. Scott, and C. S. Penner. 2015. Status and distribution of wild turkeys in the United States: 2014 Status. Proceedings of the National Wild Turkey Symposium 11:7-18.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game. 2022. Idaho Wild Turkey Management Plan, 2022–2027. Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Boise, USA.

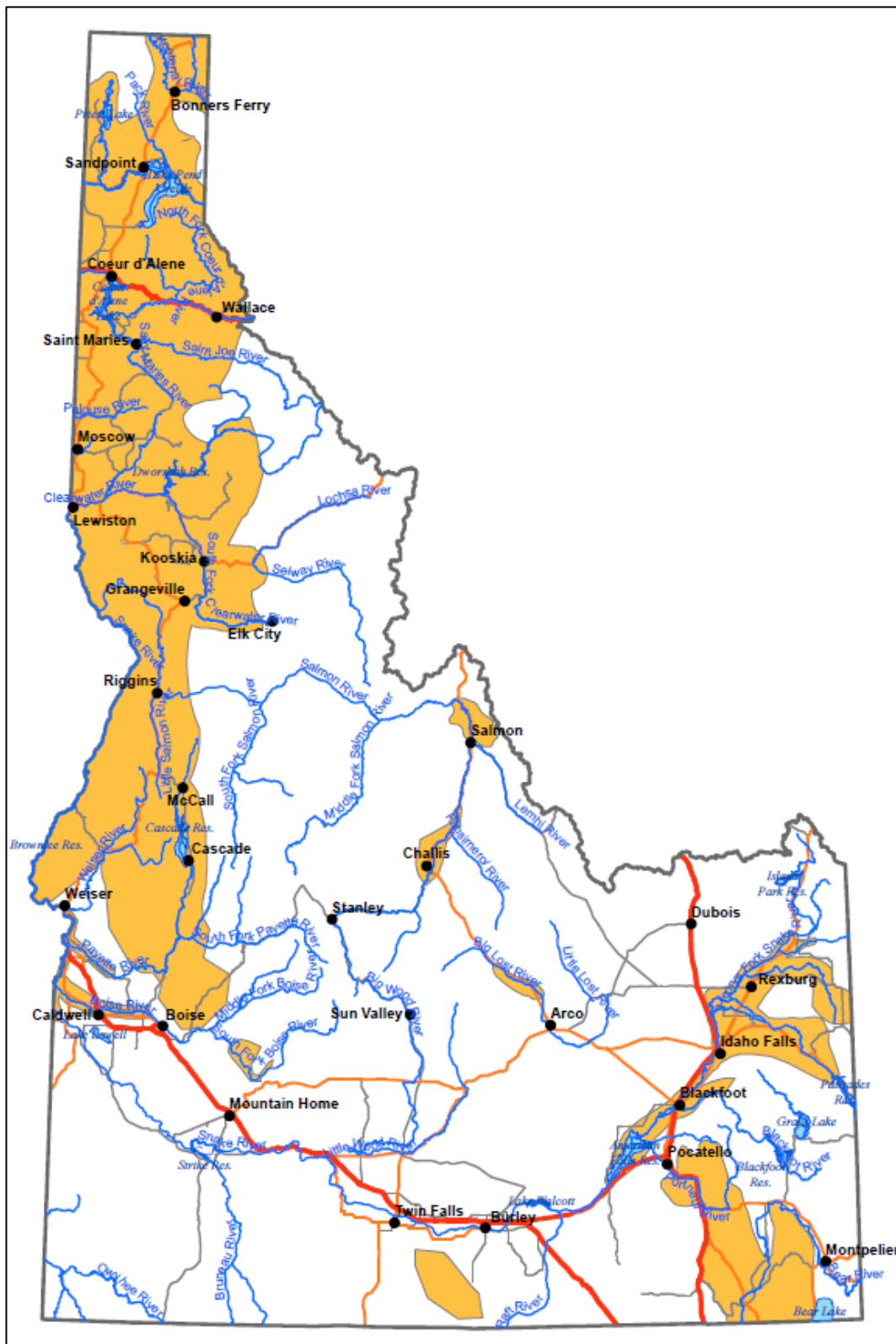


Figure 1. Wild turkey distribution in Idaho.

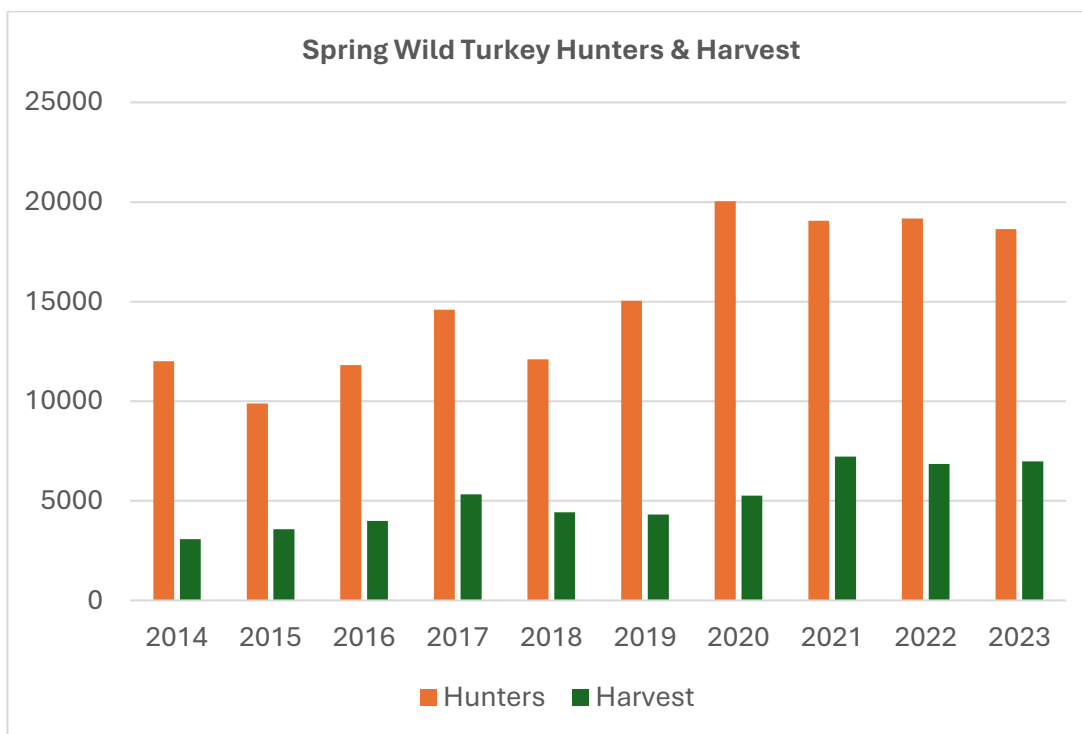


Figure 2. Estimated number of hunters and wild turkeys harvested during spring seasons in Idaho, 2014–2023.

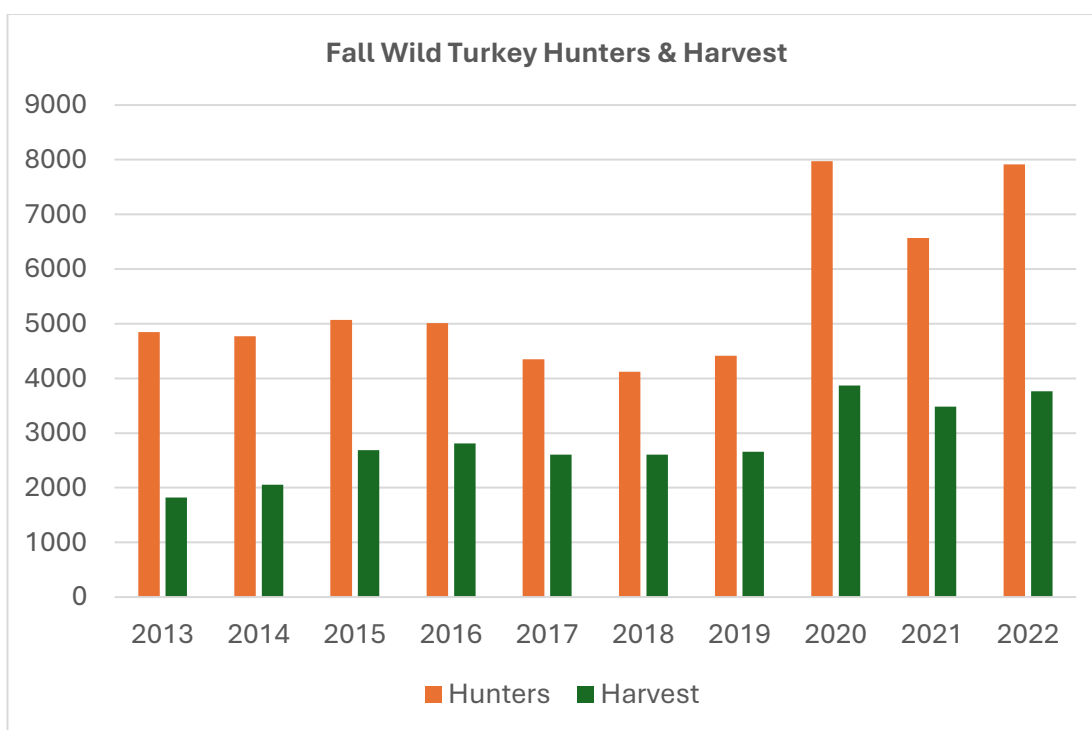


Figure 3. Estimated number of hunters and wild turkeys harvested during fall seasons in Idaho, 2012–2021.

MONTANA WILD TURKEY POPULATION STATUS REPORT – 2024

Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting – May 6–8, 2024

Cheyenne, Oklahoma

Brian Wakeling – Game Management Bureau Chief

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

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POPULATION STATUS

Populations remains relatively stable. Harvest monitoring is primary population monitoring undertaken by the state.

REPRODUCTION

No focused surveys to monitor reproduction, although anecdotal observations indicate that recruitment was about average last year. Long and cold winter may have influence on overwinter survival, although that is likely to vary by region of the state.

HARVEST

2023 Spring Turkey Season

In the 2023 license year, 42,014 turkey licenses were issued, which is similar to recent years. The individual bag limit remained 11 per year for 2023.

During spring 2023, 5,635 turkeys were harvested, and 9,135 (1,995 nonresident and 7,140 resident) hunters spent 42,731 days hunting, or 4.2 days per bird. Harvest and hunter numbers increased for spring 2023 over spring 2022, although days per bird remained stable.

2023 Fall Turkey Season

In fall 2023, 2,841 (1,452 males) were harvested, and 5,124 (500 nonresident and 4,624 resident) hunters spent 23,583 days hunting, or 4.4 days per bird. Harvest and hunters increased for fall 2023 remained stable as did days per bird.

HUNTING INCIDENTS

None reported.

REGULATION-LEGISLATION CHANGES

Spring season is now April 15 to May 31. Fall is September 1 to January 1. No draw hunts for turkeys, bag limit is 14. Airguns are now lawful method of take in fall, with .177 caliber performance ballistic alloy (pba) pellet travelling at 1,250 feet per second or a .22 caliber pba pellet travelling at 950 feet per second.

RESEARCH

No ongoing turkey investigations.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

Turkey translocations continue from areas of winter concentration in agricultural areas in central Montana and released in suitable habitat along river drainages distant from capture locations. Numbers of turkeys being relocated remain limited and do not exceed 30.

There are some localized issues with urban turkeys creating conflicts among individuals. To address urban turkeys, some local hunts are being encouraged, and the use of air guns may facilitate that activity. Merriam's

turkeys are primary subspecies in the state, although some Eastern wild turkeys were unlawfully released historically in the Flathead Valley. To reduce the likelihood for increasing hybridization among subspecies of turkeys, the use of translocations to address conflicts that arise from turkeys in the northwest part of the state is avoided.

RELEVANT LINKS

<https://fwp.mt.gov/>

<https://fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/hunt/regulations/2024/2024-upgbrd-final-for-print.pdf>

MISCELLANEOUS

The National Wild Turkey Federation is being innovative and progressive in supporting agency actions.

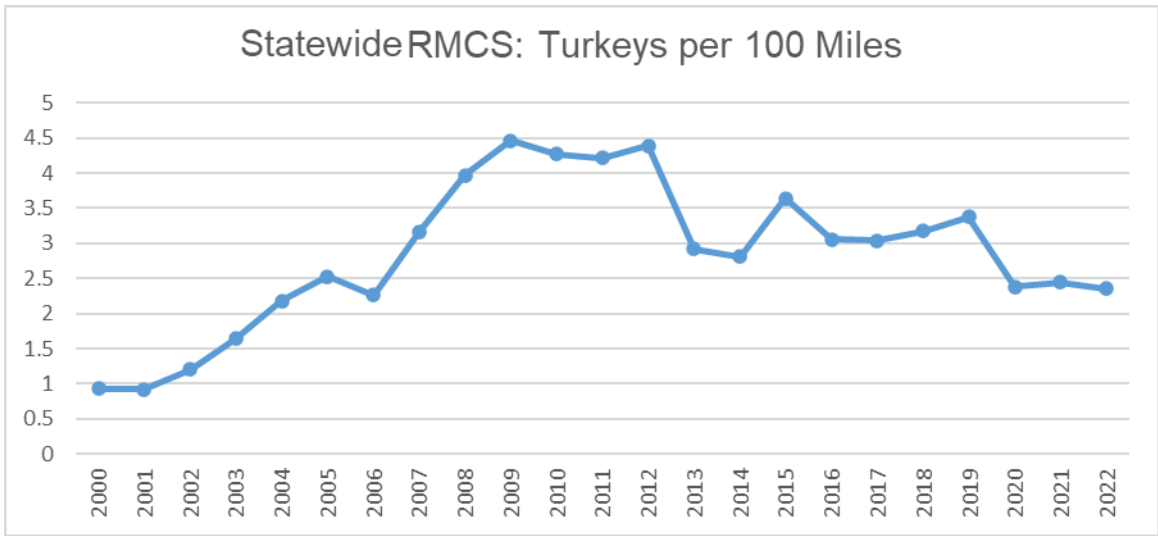
Nebraska Turkey Program Report

By: Luke Meduna

Population

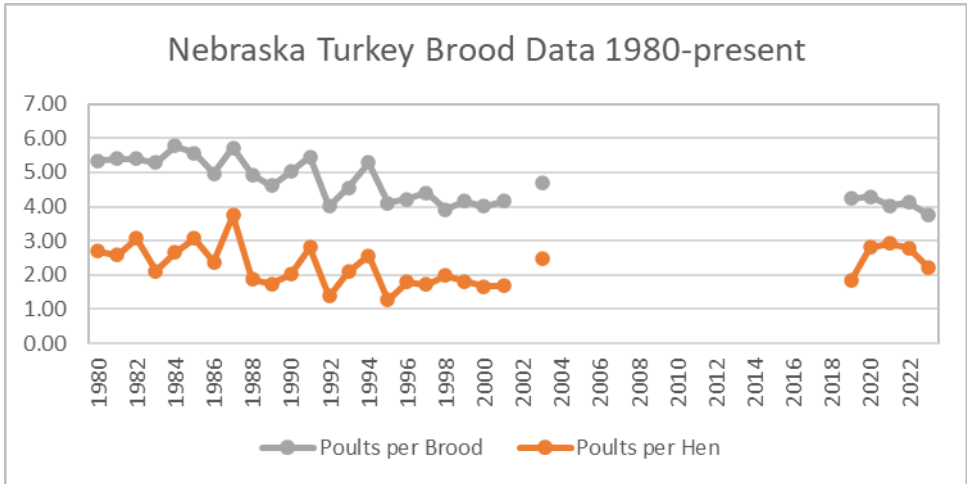
Rural mail carriers are asked to keep track of several species during April, July and October each year. The following graph is an average of those 3 surveys across the state of Nebraska. Turkey populations have declined about 50% since 2012, but are still above any time prior to 2006.

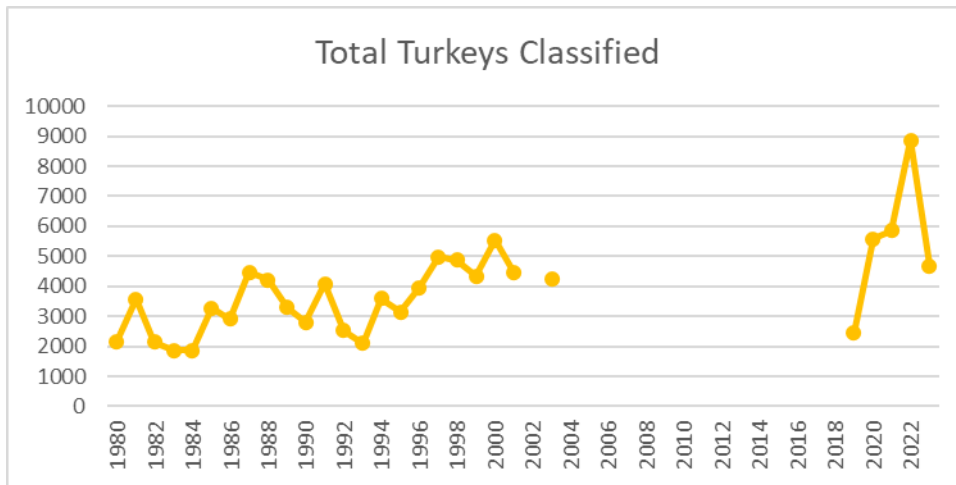
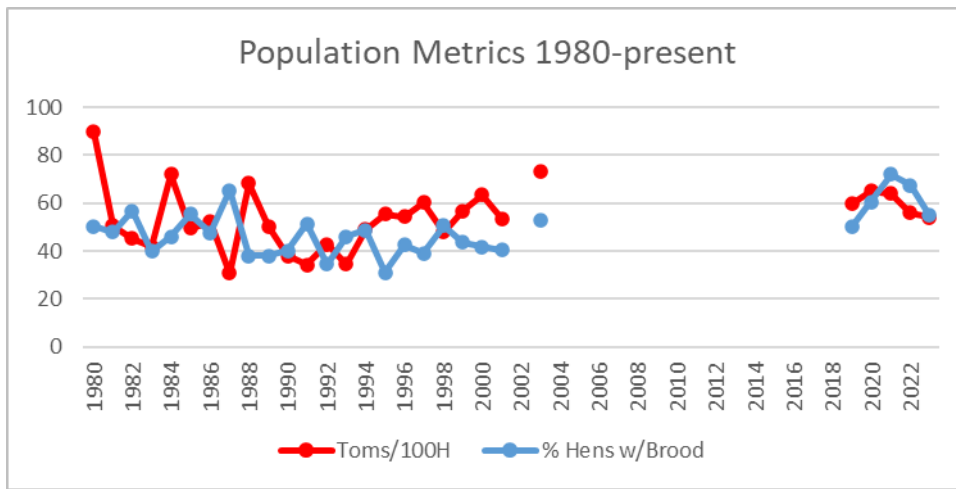
RMCS SURVEY



Reproduction

Turkey brood surveys provide useful estimates about annual production by wild turkey hens and the survival of poults, or young turkeys, through the summer brood-rearing period. Nest success and summer brood survival is generally the primary factor influencing wild turkey population trends. Information on summer brood information is essential for sound turkey management. Brood surveys were completed throughout many of the early years of turkey management in Nebraska but were discontinued in 2004. We restarted the survey in 2019. Results of the last 5 years show that brood production is similar to that of the 1990's and above the threshold of 2 poults per hen, which is generally held as the rate of replacement. This information would indicate that our production is high enough to maintain our populations and that issues other than nest success and production are contributing to our population declines.



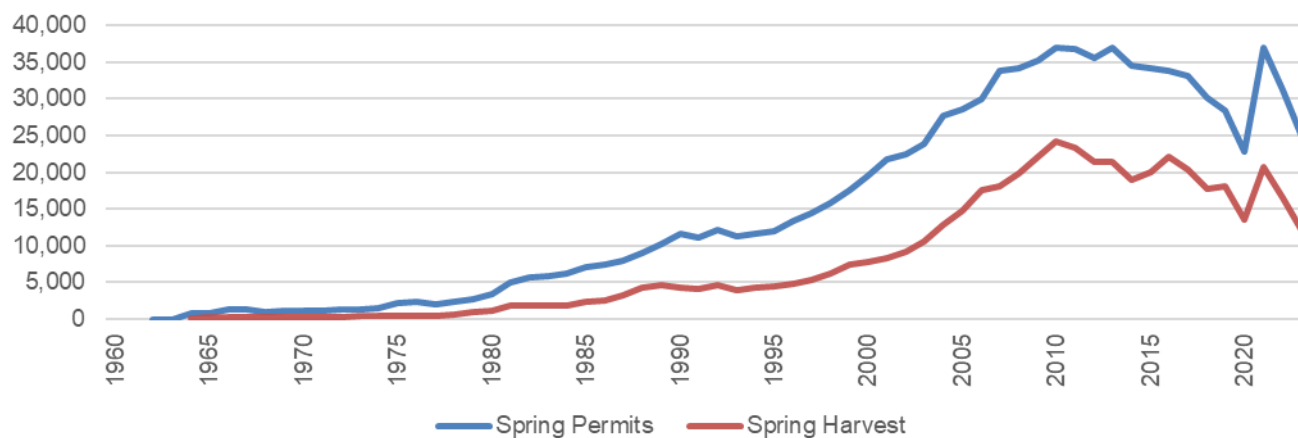


Harvest

2023 Spring

Residency	Permit Type	Permits Sold	Survey Permits	Reported Harvest	Success Rate	Estimated Harvest
Resident	Youth	2,388	332	90	27.1%	647
	Regular	11,841	2,437	1,028	42.2%	4,997
	Sub-Total	14,299	2,769	1,118	40.4%	5,644
Non-resident	Youth	871	284	93	32.7%	871
	Regular	10,100	3,152	1,807	57.3%	5,787
	Sub-Total	10,971	3,436	1,900	55.3%	6,658
Total		25,200	6,205	3,018	48.8%	12,302

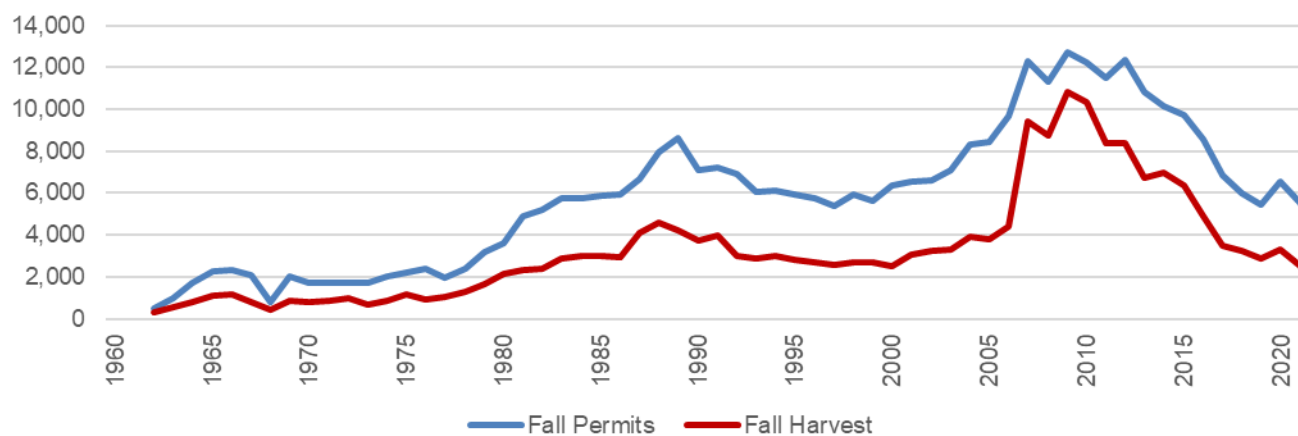
Spring Turkey Permits and Estimated Harvest



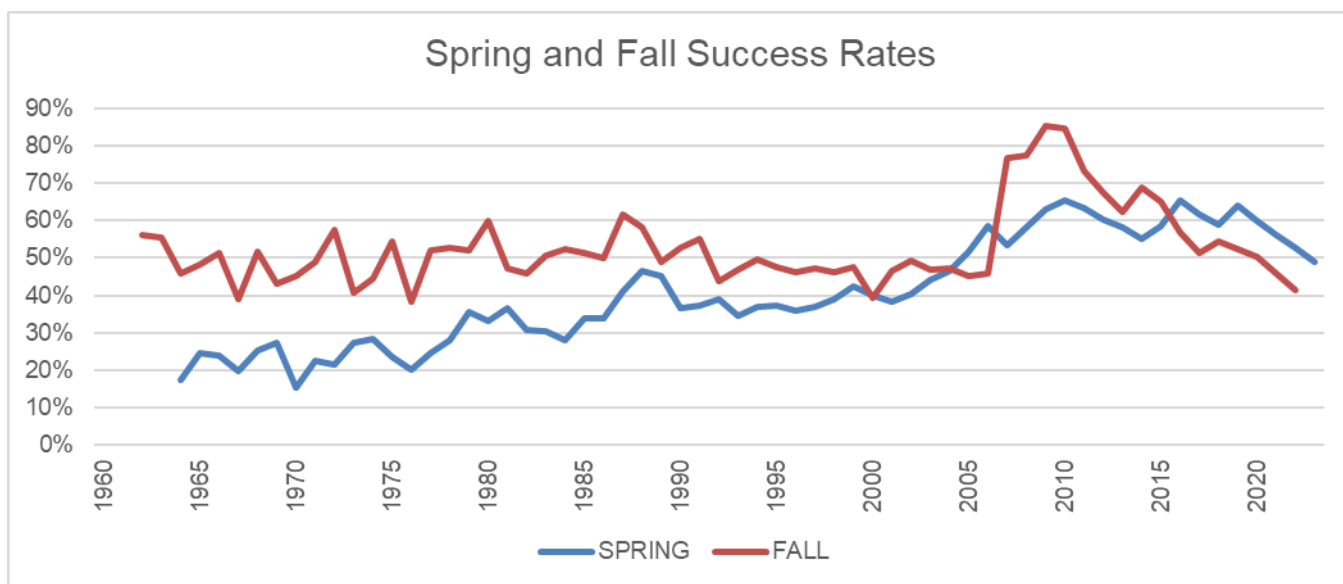
2023 Fall

Residency	Permit Type	Permits Sold	Surveyed Permits	Reported Harvest	Reported Success Rate	Estimated Harvest
Resident	Youth	463	60	12	20%	93
	Regular	2,324	397	102	26%	604
	Sub-total	2,787	457	114	24%	697
Non-Resident	Youth	68	5	2	40%	27
	Regular	269	75	27	36%	97
	Sub-total	337	80	29	36%	124
Total		3,127	533	143	27%	821

Fall Turkey Permits and Estimated Harvest



* Bonus tag added to Fall permit in 2007



* Bonus tag added to Fall permit in 2007 which inflates success

License and Season Information

SPRING 2023: Personal limit of 2 permits valid for one bearded turkey, NR capped at 10,000 total permits, permits valid for both archery and shotgun seasons.

- Youth Archery March 25 – May 31
- Archery March 25 – May 31
- Youth Shotgun April 8 – May 31
- Shotgun April 15 – May 31

FALL 2023: Limit of one permit per person, bag limit one turkey.

- Archery and Shotgun Oct 1 – Nov 30

PERMIT LIMITS, TYPES AND PRICES

- Spring turkey – Valid statewide during the spring turkey season for one male or bearded female turkey per permit. For age 16 years and older. Resident \$30 Nonresident \$128
- Spring youth turkey – Valid statewide during the spring turkey season for one male or bearded female turkey per permit. For age 15 years and younger. No minimum age. Resident \$8 Nonresident \$8
- Spring landowner turkey – Valid during the spring turkey season for one male or bearded female turkey per permit. For age 16 years and older. Limit one. Resident \$16.50 Nonresident \$65.50
- Fall turkey – Valid statewide during the fall turkey season for two turkeys of either sex per permit. For age 16 years and older. Resident \$30 Nonresident \$128
- Fall youth turkey – Valid statewide during the fall turkey season for two turkeys of either sex per permit. For age 15 years and younger. No minimum age. Resident \$8 Nonresident \$8
- Fall landowner turkey – Valid during the fall turkey season for two turkeys of either sex per permit. For age 16 years and older. Limit one. Resident \$16.50 Nonresident \$65.50

Regulation/legislation Changes

Regulations changed to require mandatory harvest reporting via Telecheck for the 2023 season. In August 2022, we changed the bag limits, season dates and permit maximums for 2023 spring and fall seasons. Spring was reduced from 3 permits per person to 2 and hunters are limited to harvesting one bird per day. The fall season was reduced from 2 permits per person to 1, the bag limit reduced to one turkey per permit (from 2) and the season dates were reduced from 9/15-1/31 to 10/1-11/30.

Research

In January 2023, we launched a research project with the University of Nebraska and University of Georgia to study turkeys in SW and NW Nebraska. We are looking at survival, habitat use, movements, nest success, gobbling chronology and genetics, among other things. The second year of captures are planned for January 2024.

Hot Topics

Turkey decline, predators and South Dakota's bounty program...

Relevant Links

Turkey page: <https://outdoornebraska.gov/hunt/game/turkey/>

Hunting Guidebooks: <https://outdoornebraska.gov/guides-maps/hunting-guides/>

Survey results and other info can be found at: <https://outdoornebraska.gov/conservation/wildlife-management/wildlife-surveys/>

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish 2024 Wild Turkey Status Report

New Mexico is home to three subspecies of wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*): Merriam's (*M. g. merriami*), Rio Grande (*M. g. intermedia*), and Gould's (*M. g. mexicana*; Figure 1). Merriam's turkeys are typically associated with ponderosa pine and occupy most of the mountain ranges in the state. Rio Grande turkeys are found in many of the lower elevation riparian areas in the northeast, central, and southeast portions of the state. Gould's turkeys are confined to riparian areas and woodland-savannas in the Peloncillo and Animas Mountains in southwest NM.

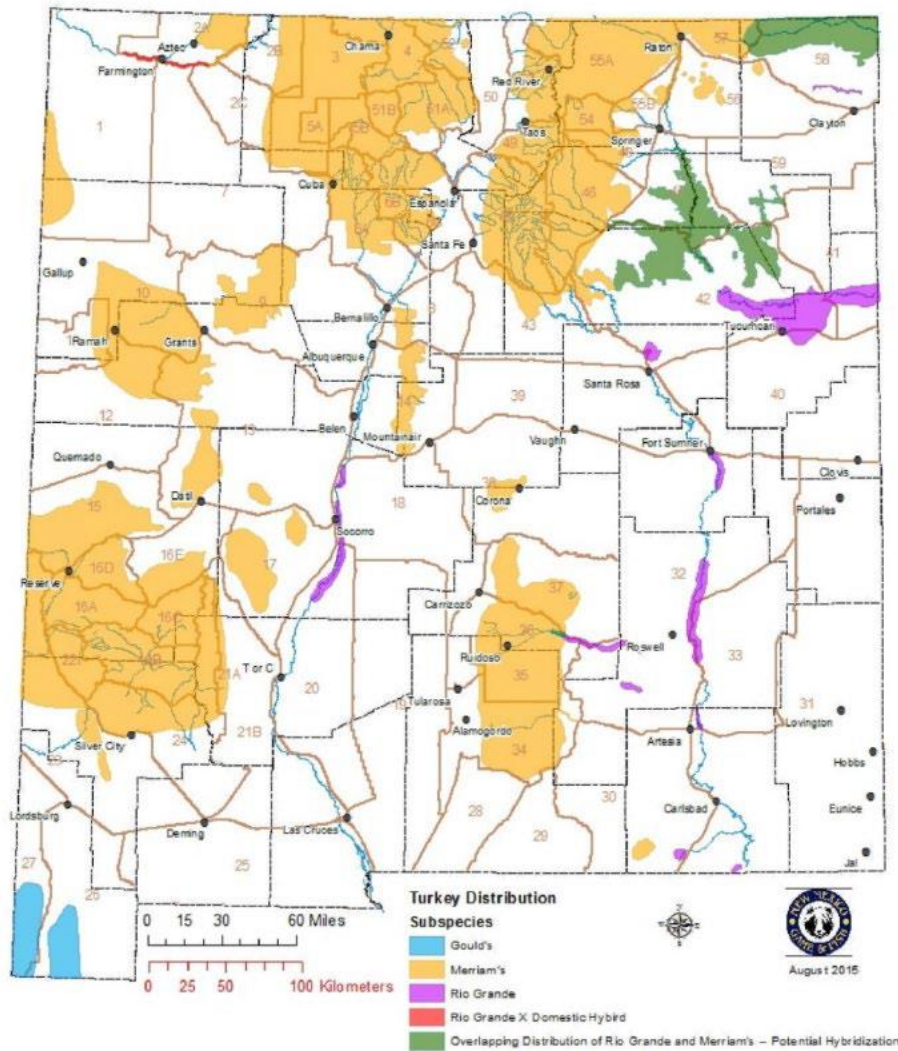


Figure 1. Wild turkey subspecies distribution in New Mexico.

Population Status

The current statewide wild turkey population is unknown. New Mexico has not established a method to monitor population size or trend for Merriam's or Rio Grande turkeys. Based on calculations from Eriksen et al. (2015), the current New Mexico statewide population is estimated to be 18,679 birds. Population trends seem to be stable the last few years, based on anecdotal observations from field staff and hunters. Breeding bird survey (BBS) data show positive trends for New Mexico's turkey populations (Figure 2), but BBS noted this data may have deficiencies in New Mexico, so caution should be taken when assessing population change with this data source. The Department has been monitoring Gould's turkey populations through spring surveys since 2006. Historically, survey sites were concentrated in areas of known roost sites or near water sources. Recent surveys have been targeted on GPS transmitter locations. Counts have ranged from a low of 18 in 2006 to a high of 295 in 2024.

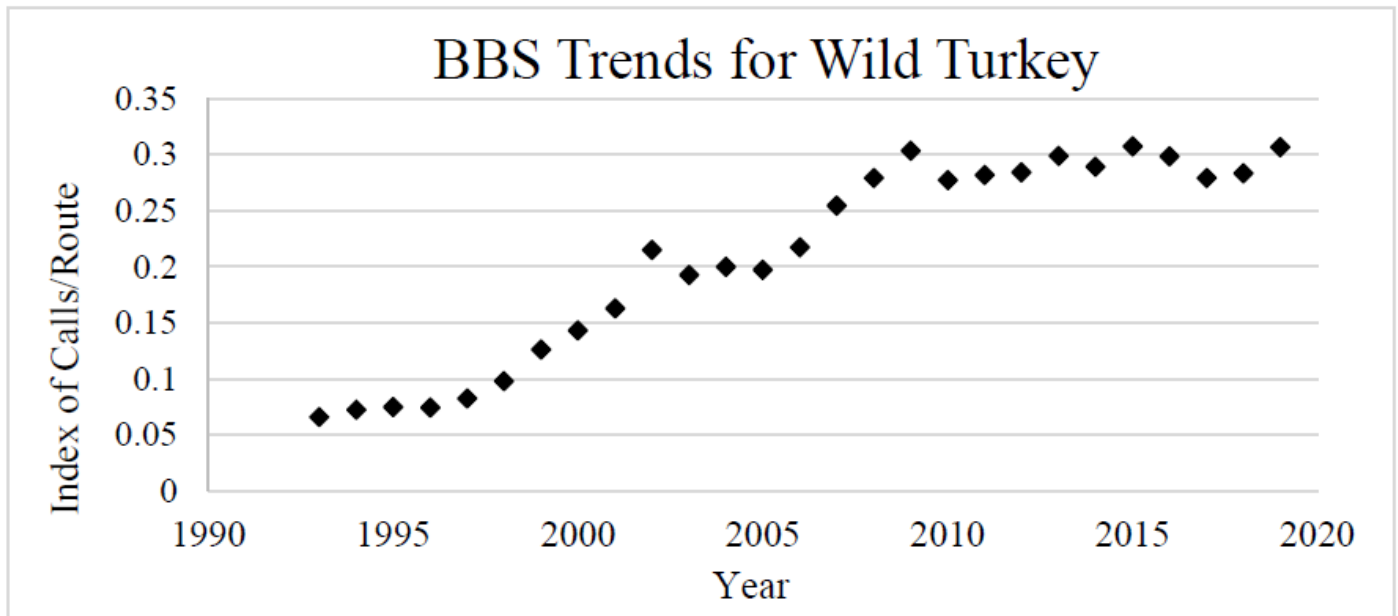


Figure 2. Breeding bird survey trends (1968–2019) for wild turkey in New Mexico.

Harvest Regulations

Current Regulations

Legal shooting time is ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset. Legal sporting arms include: any shot gun including muzzle loading shotguns using shot only, and bow and arrow. General turkey licenses are available over the counter, though there is a draw for hunts on special areas. The spring season runs from April 15–May 15, with a bag limit of 2 bearded turkeys. Fall seasons run from September 1–30 for archery, and November 1–30 for any legal sporting arm. The fall bag limit is 1 turkey.

Harvest Reporting

From 1961 to 2006 the Department collected turkey harvest information through mail surveys. No post-season turkey harvest survey 2006–2010. Beginning in 2011, turkey harvest reporting was conducted online. From 2011–2013, turkey harvest reporting was voluntary, and then turned mandatory in 2013–2014. Current reporting rates average approximately 80%.

Hunter and Harvest Estimates

The number of spring hunters and harvest have generally been on the rise. An estimated 8,742 individuals hunted in spring 2023, harvesting an estimated 2,447 birds.

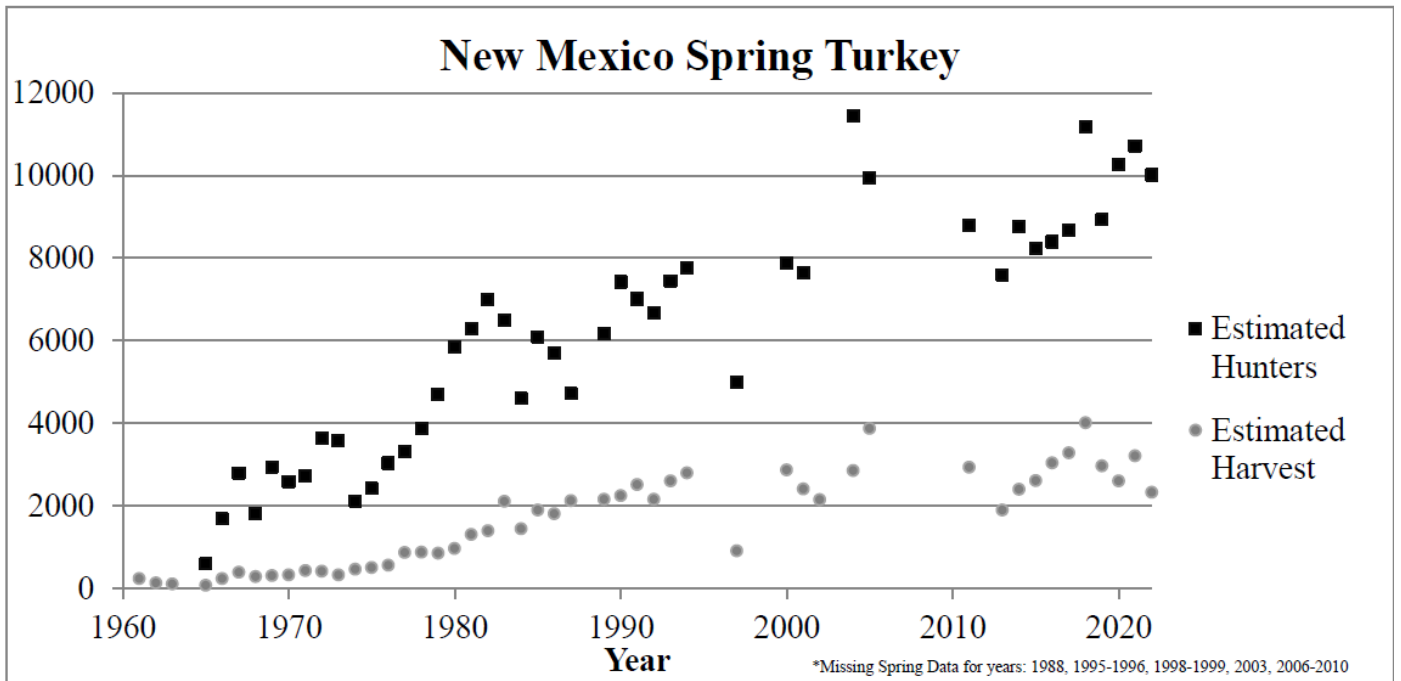


Figure 3. New Mexico wild turkey spring harvest

The number of fall turkey hunters dropped from 20,000 hunters to 3,000 hunters with end of the concurrent deer and turkey fall season. A turkey specific license was not required until 1983, so early estimates of fall turkey hunters were likely not accurate. The separated fall turkey license has allowed the Department to better approximate fall turkey hunters and harvest (Figure 4). Harvest estimates have varied from a high of 1,393 (1983) to a low of 108 (1997). Fall hunting was lower in the 1990s and early 2000s, with a slight resurgence of fall hunters in the last 10 years. An estimated 3,601 individuals hunted in fall 2023, harvesting an estimated 983 birds.

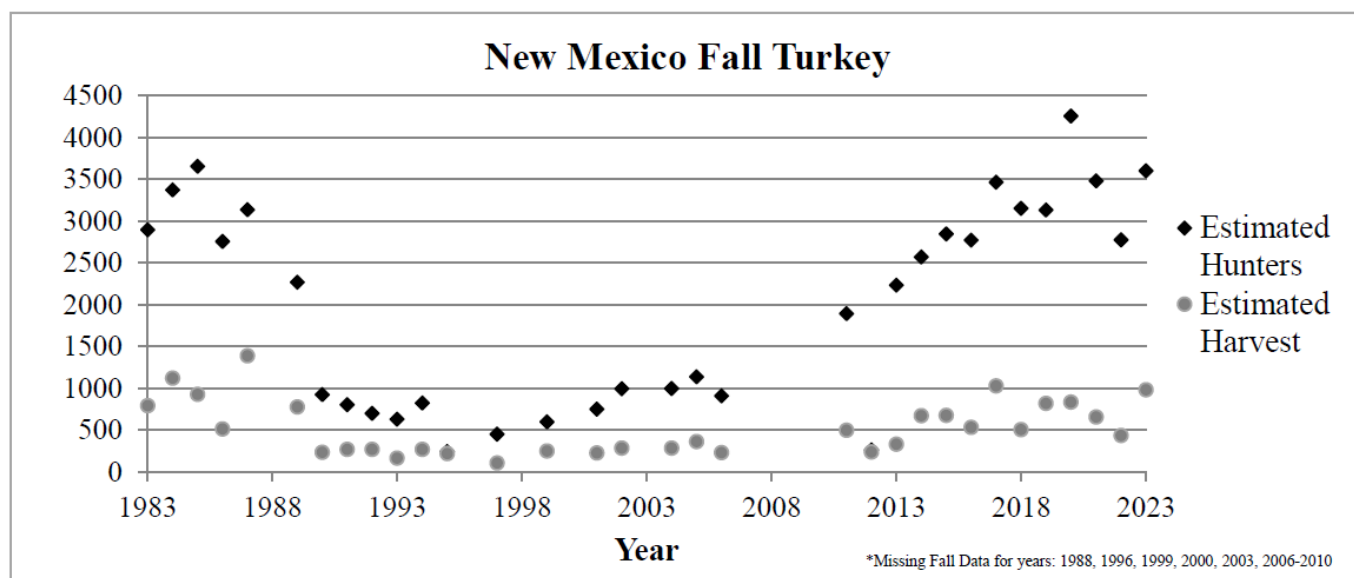


Figure 4. New Mexico wild turkey fall harvest

Research Efforts

Gould's Turkeys

From 2018 to the present, 58 hens and 43 males have been captured and fitted with GPS backpacks. Some transmitters collect three locations every other day, and all transmitters capture a nightly roost location. Information on reproduction, survival, and habitat use has been obtained from the transmitted birds. Some interesting observations include a male moving over 25 miles from capture location, and several hens going to Mexico and returning to New Mexico. The GPS data has also helped target survey areas for the annual spring survey, improving minimum population counts.

Merriam's Turkeys

In 2024, the Department commenced an investigation on female Merriam's turkey survival, breeding season habitat use, and reproduction in New Mexico. During the spring, 17 hens and 2 males were captured and fitted with GPS backpacks. Turkeys were captured in 3 out of 4 regions of the state. This study will be expanded in future years to have up to 140 marked hens across the state.

Disease

Since 2020, Avian Pox has been documented in several locations in New Mexico. In the last several years, turkeys with lesions have been reported near Las Vegas, NM and Bosque del Apache NWR near San Antonio, NM.

During Merriam's turkey captures in March-April 2024, oropharyngeal swaps were taken to test for HPAI and Mycoplasmas. HPAI was not detected in any samples. At one ranch in the Northeast region, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (Mg) and *Mycoplasma synoviae* (Ms) were detected in trapped birds.

Nuisance/Damage Complaints

The Department has received several nuisance and damage complaints regarding wild turkeys in the last year. Primary complaints involve turkeys congregating on agricultural lands or in urban areas. As these lands are under private ownership, hunting pressure is much lighter, leading turkeys to linger in these areas. Several options the state is pursuing to alleviate these issues is encouraging landowners to sign up for Open Gate, the New Mexico private land access hunting program, and translocating turkeys to augment populations in non-problem areas.

Trapping and Translocation Efforts

The Department's long-range management plan includes trapping wild turkeys from areas with large, healthy populations and relocating them to areas with smaller populations or areas where turkeys were previous

extirpated. Turkeys have been moved within the state since 1939. A summary of translocations since 2000 can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. New Mexico wild Turkey translocations from 2000-present.

Year	Month	Capture Location	Release Location	Male		Female		Total Birds	Subspecies
				Adult	Juv	Adult	Juv		
2000	Mar	Vermejo Park	Pelona Mt.		17	5	6	28	Merriam's
2002	Mar	Texas	Near Roswell					102	Rio Grande
2004	Feb	Chama	Luera Mts.					20	Merriam's
2004	Feb	Chama	Datil					19	Merriam's
2004	Feb	Chama	Sandia Mts.					22	Merriam's
05/06	Winter	Sacramento Mts.	Monticello Canyon, Horse Mt., and NE of Farmington					45	Merriam's
06/07	Winter	Sacramento Mts.	Guadalupe Mts.					18	Merriam's
06/07	Winter	Chama	Magdalena Mts.					17	Merriam's
07/08	Winter	Mayhill	Guadalupe Mts.					10	Merriam's
2008	Summer	Huey WMA	Delaware River	33	5	9		47	Rio Grande
08/09	Winter	Mayhill	Guadalupe Mts.					15	Merriam's
2014	Feb	Cimarron	Guadalupe Mts.					47	Merriam's
2014	Feb	AZ	Peloncillos Mts.	11	1	6	2	20	Gould's
2015	Feb	AZ	Peloncillos Mts.		9	6	3	25	Gould's
2016	Feb	AZ	Peloncillos Mts.		5		10	15	Gould's
2017	Feb	Raton	Guadalupe Mts.	4			1	5	Merriam's
2017	Feb	Raton	Guadalupe Mts.	4	12	16	18	52	Merriam's
2018	Feb	Santa Rosa	NE Roswell, NM	12	4	10	10	36	Rio Grande
2018	Mar	Raton	Guadalupe Mts.	15	16	17	24	72	Merriam's
2019	Feb	Raton	Cebolla Mesa		11	22	19	52	Merriam's

NORTH DAKOTA WILD TURKEY POPULATION STATUS REPORT

RJ Gross – Upland Game Biologist North Dakota Game and Fish Department

100 N Bismarck Expressway Bismarck, ND, 58504 701-391-2543 / ragross@nd.gov

POPULATION STATUS The Department uses several population techniques to obtain trends on our wild turkey population. We have a landowner survey that is sent to most landowners who have turkeys wintering on their land. Our district biologists and game wardens annually record observations of wild turkey hens, broods and poults on standardized pheasant brood routes during July and August. We also have our field staff collect incidental turkey brood data from June 1 to September 1.

REPRODUCTION The 2023 brood survey showed an increase in the total number of adult turkeys observed (5.9 vs. 1.9, 210%) and in average brood size (4.92 vs. 7.46, 51%) from 2022. The number of poults per adult hen was up 226% (.49 vs. 1.60) and number of broods was up 184% (13 vs. 37) from 2022.

HARVEST 2023 Spring Turkey Season The state uses twenty-two hunting units during the spring season. These units include all of North Dakota's 53 counties. During the spring of 2023, the entire state was open for wild turkey hunting except for unit 21 in the southwestern part of the state. This area has been closed for the past ten spring hunting seasons because of low turkey numbers in this unit. Licenses are issued by weighted lottery after the number of gratis licenses is deducted from the total available. Only residents are eligible to apply for spring licenses, although three spring licenses are provided to the NWTF for auction. The 2023 Spring Wild Turkey Proclamation provided the Outdoor Adventure Foundation with three turkey licenses, valid in any open unit, for the 2021 spring season. In accordance with N.D.C.C. 20.1-04-07(1) (c)), these two licenses shall be issued to a qualifying youth who has cancer or a life-threatening illness. First time spring turkey hunters age 15 or younger can receive one spring license valid for the regular hunting season for any open unit. As in the fall season, we provide only one time period for hunting wild turkeys in the spring. You choose your weapon from shotguns, muzzle loading shotguns, handguns and bow/arrows.

During the 2023 spring gobbler hunting season, a total of 7,887 regular season licenses were available. Gratis and youth licenses were not included in the regular season license allocation. 5,932 hunters harvested 2,358 turkeys with a success rate of 40% in 2023. Additionally, feather samples from the 2023 season resulted in 398 adults compared to 164 juveniles.

2022 Fall Turkey Season The state is divided into twenty-two hunting units and these areas include all 53 counties of North Dakota's. During the fall of 2021, twenty-one of 22 counties were open for wild turkey hunting. Unit 21 in the southwest was closed. Licenses are issued by weighted lottery after gratis licenses are deducted from the total available. Only North Dakota residents are eligible to apply in the first lottery. If licenses remain after the first lottery, then nonresidents can apply. North Dakota has no specific youth hunting season for wild turkeys in the fall. We also do not have a specific bow season for turkeys. We provide one time period for hunting wild turkeys in the fall, and you can choose your weapon from shotguns, muzzle loading shotguns, handguns and bow/arrows. During the fall of 2022, there were 3,975 permits available and 4,031 were issued (285 gratis and 3,746 general permits). From the wild turkey questionnaire, it was determined that 2,512 license holders hunted during the fall. Hunters harvested 1,240 wild turkeys for a success of 50 percent.

RESEARCH EVALUATING SURVIVAL AND MOVEMENTS OF TRANSLOCATED WILD TURKEYS IN NORTH DAKOTA (RESEARCH) A. NEED The restoration of the wild turkey in North America

represents one of the greatest success stories in the history of wildlife management. They are found in the wooded areas of southeastern United States and throughout much of the Great Plains and westward. The wild turkey has a current range that exceeds its original native range. Wild turkeys are not indigenous to North Dakota (Johnson and Knue 1989). Early attempts (1930's and 1940's) at stocking turkeys in the state were not successful. But in the early 1950's, three wild turkey subspecies were successfully introduced into North Dakota: Eastern wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo sylvestris*) released along the Heart River and Missouri River; Merriam's (*M. g. merriami*) released in the Pine Forest Region of Slope County; and the Rio Grande (*M. g. intermedia*) released along the Little Missouri River and the Missouri River (Johnson and Knue 1989). As these birds flourished in release areas, trapping and transplanting programs were initiated to move birds into other available habitat. Now wild turkeys occupy most available cover in the state. In fact, turkeys have been so successful in many parts of North Dakota that winter depredation problems can occur fairly frequently in both private farmsteads and adjacent to municipalities. Turkey complaints often require trapping nuisance birds and transplanting them to "hunt-able areas" which is time consuming and costly. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF) has been conducting a trap and transport program since 1996. On average, NDGF relocates approximately 200 turkeys from 5 sites in a year. Turkeys were initially marked with an aluminum leg band that had no information on how to report it. Therefore, in 2020, NDGF started banding birds with a standard aluminum band that now includes contact info to report the band. However, there have been few returns so there is little information on what happens to the released turkeys. Understanding survival and movements of transplanted turkeys would help the department to evaluate the effectiveness of transporting turkeys and to determine if they move to new areas that could create future depredation issues or if it is providing hunters with additional opportunities.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on the wild turkey in North America, little work has been conducted in the Northern Great Plains region, and only one study have been done on this introduced species in North Dakota (Courlas 2014). Most recent studies on wild turkeys in the Northern Great Plains have occurred in South Dakota (Flake et al. 2006). Most of this work has involved movement of birds, feeding habits and general ecology of Eastern and Merriam turkeys in northeastern and the Black Hills of South Dakota (Day 1988, Knupp 1990, Lehman 2005, Thompson 2003, Rumble and Anderson 1996, Shields and Flake 2004, Wertz and Flake 1988). In North Dakota, minimal information is available on spring/fall populations, peak nesting season, seasonal movements and home range, annual productivity and survival by habitat types and value of supplemental transplants to overall population welfare. Acquiring this data in North Dakota would help the department better understand wild turkey behaviors in North Dakota and aid in determining the best possible management practices and hunting regulations for turkey populations in North Dakota.

At present, minimal population data is obtained on wild turkeys in North Dakota. Harvest decisions are primarily driven by harvest success rates. Most population information is collected by North Dakota Game and Fish personnel through roadside counts of pheasants during mid-July through August. Many of these pheasant routes do not occur in ideal turkey habitat in the state, raising concerns that turkey estimates from pheasant brood routes might be underestimating relative densities. Therefore, it is difficult to link these routes to information regarding the extend of perceived turkey problem by landowners and evaluate if populations may be changing in areas where released birds may be leading to changes in population numbers. As a result, there is a need for understanding impacts of the trap and transport program in North Dakota, the fate of the birds transported, and the perceptions of landowners with complaints and in areas where releases are occurring.

B.OBJECTIVES

1.Evaluate movements of transported turkeys

Specific questions:

- ☐ Do home ranges differ between trapped/translocated birds compared to those just trapped and released at the depredation complaint site?
- ☐ How far do trap/translocated birds move from the release site, do they stay on the WMA where they were released, or do they return to original areas?

2.Evaluate survival and reproduction of turkeys transported

Specific questions:

- ☐ What are the average days survived after being transported?
- ☐ What is the cause of most mortalities?
- ☐ How do survival rates compare between transported birds and non-transported (control) birds?
- ☐ Do hens nest after being transported?
- ☐ What is the nesting phenology of transported females compared to non-transported (control) females?

3.Evaluate the wild turkey trap and transport program from a human dimensions perspective.

Specific questions:

- ☐ Are landowners satisfied with translocation results?
- ☐ How long does the depredation trapping results satisfy the landowner?
- ☐ Are additional depredation problems occurring near release sites?
- ☐ Are hunters using WMAs at release sites perceiving benefits?
- ☐ Is this the best management practice?

C.EXPECTED RESULTS OR BENEFITS

Findings of the study will result in recommendations that benefit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department with management of the wild turkey in North Dakota. This research will provide an in depth look at wild turkey movements, survival, and reproduction after transportation aimed at alleviating depredation concerns while provide additional hunting opportunities for sportsmen and women in North Dakota. With this data, state biologists will be better able to manage the wild turkey population across the state with regulated spring and fall hunting, harvest, and sustainable population management.

Findings will also provide insights into landowner and hunter perceived benefits, concerns, and questions regarding the trap and transport program. Information from evaluation of the current complaint database will help create maps of depredation concern areas and opportunities for where future turkey enhancement projects might be most successful. Combined with the demographic data, North Dakota Game and Fish will have information to assess the effectiveness of the program

D. APPROACH

Objective 1 and 2: Evaluate Demographics of Transported Turkeys

During winters of 2022 and 2023, ND Game and Fish personnel will capture turkeys using rocket/drop nets and fit 50 turkeys each year with backpack style GPS transmitters with VHS. Half of the turkeys will remain at trap sites while the other half will be transported to various 3 WMAs in North Dakota where enhancement efforts for turkey are occurring. We will put 26 transmitters on females split between transported and control birds, and 24 transmitters on males also split between transported and control birds (see sample sizes of Cohen et al. 2018). All birds captured will receive aluminum leg bands with NDGF reporting information on them. In addition to marking, birds will be aged, sexed, and blood samples taken for disease sampling (conducted in collaboration with Dr. Charlie Bahnson, NDGF Wildlife Veterinarian).

Movements and survival will be tracked by department personnel and hired technician in collaboration with a graduate student at UND. Due to reliability, the GPS transmitters selected will require personnel to get within 200 m of birds in order to download the data on a weekly basis. Duty cycles will be set to record every 2 hours during daylight hours and at midnight each night following Parker et al. (2021). Relocation of birds will require the use of 3-element yagi antennas (already owned by NDGF), R-1000 Communication specialist receivers (already owned by NDGF), and remote downloads using a high-range yagi antenna for downloads. All downloaded data will be stored using OneDrive and Microsoft Teams so that sharing can occur between NDGF and UND.

Data from relocated birds will be used to conduct basic movement information related to distance from release site with a particular interest in locations during the spring and fall hunting seasons. In addition, we will calculate home ranges per recommendations of Cohen et al. (2018) that assess differences between dynamic Brownian bridge movement and kernel density estimators based upon available data collected.

Survival calculations will be based upon the “capture history” created from the locations. The transmitters are fitted with mortality signals. Given we are conducted weekly relocations, we will attempt to collect all dead birds for necropsy to determine cause of mortality, but understand the frequency of relocation may limit assessments as predators, scavengers, and decay may reduce ability for collection of whole carcasses. Assistance with necropsies will be provided by the ND Wildlife Health Lab.

GPS transmitters have enabled more precise timing of nest initiation dates for turkeys (See Byrne et al. 2014, Yeldell et al. 2017). We can use GPS locations to determine when incubation begins, nest initiation by backdating from start of incubation, number of nesting attempts, and success of the nest. To do this, we will place effort on confirming the presence of nests and review contents of nests for the presence of eggshells, membranes and/or feathers in nest bowls.

While this study could provide substantial information on turkey demographics of both transported and non-transported birds, there is a risk that all birds transported do not survive long enough for detailed movement, survival, or reproductive data. While that will limit the data analysis for the study, it does provide information

about what happens to the birds once transported and is an important consideration to costs of the program and potential needs for incorporating other management techniques into handling turkey depredation cases.

Objective 3: Evaluation of Effectiveness of the Trap and Transport Program from a Human Dimensions Perspective

To evaluate the effectiveness of the program we will take a two-pronged approach. First, we will review the complaint history from landowners of nuisance turkeys and requests for depredation assistance that is available in the North Dakota Game and Fish Department system. We will mine the records to explore geographic areas of complaints to determine if complaints are associated with areas where trap and transported birds have been released, are in areas of active management by the ND Game and Fish Department, or in areas that have surrounding complaints. Using location information from this effort, we should be able to construct heat maps of areas where targeted efforts to relocate birds may be necessary or if relocation efforts are causing complaints in new areas. Further, we will use this information to document if trapping occurred in a year and birds were trapped and transported, did this result in any subsequent complaints that year or in the following 3 years.

We will use interviews of landowners and hunters to understand the perceived benefits, drawbacks, and landowner questions of the trap and transport program. This will include landowners that have filed complaints in the past, landowners adjacent to those filing complaints, landowners in neighboring private lands next to where release sites are, and hunters using WMAs. This approach will allow researchers to ask questions to landowners in a conversational manner where we can qualitatively assess a thematic understanding of landowner perceptions. This may include concerns with disease transmission, crop, or property damage, explore tolerance levels, and definitions of successful management of turkey numbers in their area. Semi-structured interviews allow a deeper understanding of specific reasons for complaints, tolerance levels of turkeys, and definitions of success of a trap and transport method that require larger sample sizes. All interviews will be conducted by UND researchers

Oklahoma Wild Turkey Population Status Report – 2024

Western State Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting May 6-8
Croton Creek Ranch, Cheyenne, OK

50th Southeast Wild Turkey Working Group Meeting – June 18-19, 2024
Skelton Conference Center, Blacksburg, VA

Eric Suttles & Marcus Thibodeau – Co Wild Turkey Program Coordinators
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POPULATION STATUS

Winter surveys were changed a little to represent a standard protocol statewide. We put renewed emphasis on finding flocks and counting the number of birds within each flock. Due mostly to standardization of protocol, decreases in populations were seen in the central and northeast regions of the state. Both the central and northeast region saw the largest population change in the state with an estimated decrease of 57%. The northwest and southwest regions saw little change of 1.7%. The protocol used did not change in these regions and thus no adjustment to population estimates was made like we had in the central and northeast. The southeast region noted an increase of 25%. Much of this increase is contributed to the renewed emphasis on winter flock survey data and may not reflect a population increase of 25%. Moving forward we hope that our standards and protocols allows all the regions to capture trends in turkey populations better than the older methods used in some of the various regions.

Throughout the state of Oklahoma, online check-in showed the spring harvest in 2024 increased 11.5 percent. Declines in 2021 to 2022 harvest data was a result of rule changes that went into effect. For the 2022 spring season ODWC reduced the bag limit statewide from 3 birds to 1 bird. ODWC expected the bag limit change to reduce our harvest and we did, by 37%. The increase shown in the online check-in data for 2024 had the same regulations as the 2022 and 2023 seasons and thus the harvest can be compared, and the increase is a welcome sight. Harvest in 2023 was the first year since 2016 that we have had an increase in harvest. We followed up the 2023 season with another increase in harvest in 2024. The regulation changes set in 2021 seem to be having a positive influence on our turkey populations.

Overall population estimates for the Rio Grande Turkey throughout the state indicate a stable to slightly increasing population. The Eastern Turkey population is stable, but they remain at low numbers. Weather has been a noted issue across this state Oklahoma. From severe drought and devastating wildfires to flooding, tornadoes and large hail events. In 2022 & 2023 a department wide emphasis was put in place on turkey surveys for better and more accurate data. Brood surveys were assigned department wide and winter flock survey protocols were made an emphasis. This resulted in some major county level fluctuations, but that was anticipated. The statewide genetic sampling of harvested birds is ongoing and research projects in the southeast and southwest portions of the state to document vital rates are also ongoing.

REPRODUCTION

Eastern Wild Turkey

Winter Flock Survey

Figure 1 summarizes the winter flock survey data for the Southeast Region from 1978 through 2024 based on incidental sightings. The 2024 survey showed a 25.3% increase from 2023 with the 5-year mean decreasing by 3.25%. Some variation in data between years can be explained by difficulties inherent to the survey technique. Personnel and cooperator changes cause bias in data collection. Incidental sighting data are not precise but indicate population status and distribution. The increase in 2021 (+52.26%) is a result of 2020 being low on winter flock survey totals. This was due to very low participation as COVID-19 was affecting work and observations. Note: renewed emphasis on winter flock data may be responsible for some percentage increase. However, biologist opinion is that the Eastern population has seen a bump in population, at least in pockets.

Summer Brood Survey

The average number of poults per hen (2.73) percent of hens observed with poults (46%) and the total number of broods sighted (44) observed in the summer of 2023 indicated an average reproduction in the Southeast region (figure 9). The last documented year of 3 poults per hen or better was in 2013.

History

Long-term data from the winter flock surveys show that Eastern turkey populations were very healthy in the early 2000's up until 2009. The drought year of 2010 is often blamed for the start of the turkey decline that in some ways continues to exist. The past 5 years has shown a stabilization within the population but at a very low level. Current winter flock survey numbers are low only around one thousand birds being sighted during the sample period. It is important to note that survey effort will and or could bias the survey data. Oklahoma as used staff, county workers, mail carriers, and partners in the past but more recently, ODWC staff and partners (ngo and government) provide much of the data.

Summer Brood data collection in the southeast region of Oklahoma started in 1980. The standards have changed a little over time as we adopted the NWTF standard. The long-term data indicates that turkeys in the 1980s and 1990s were much more productive than they currently are. During the 1987 survey they documented a 6.4 poult per hen ratio which is the highest documented to date in Oklahoma. The lowest on record was in 2009 with only a .67 poult per hen ratio. More recently we are observing around 2 poults per hen which indicates a stable population. Dating back to the early 2000s we used to document around 200 sighting. Starting in 2021 to present we are documenting around 55 sightings annually.

Rio Grande Turkey

Winter Flock Survey

The 2024 range-wide Rio Grande Turkey minimum population estimate (41,717) showed a 37% decrease from 2023 (Figure 2). The highest population estimate recorded was in 2006 (118,891). Note that most of this decline was due to protocol changes in the central and northeastern regions. Both regions seen a decrease by 57%. Where we used to estimate a population, we are now counting birds that make up the winter flocks to provide the state with a "minimum" population estimate. This is to guard against over estimating populations. We can also monitor individually known flocks and provide a percentage of increase or decrease over time.

The western portion of the state did show a stabilization the past 3 years (2022 to 2024). The southwest region experienced a -4.14% decrease and the northwest region a -2.54% decrease for the 3-year average. The western portion of the state experienced catastrophic wildfires and drought during all of 2022. Those conditions continued into yearly 2023 with wildfires like the smoke house fire that started on February 26 and claimed 1,058,482 acres the Texas panhandle and western Oklahoma.

Summer Brood Survey

Emphasis was put on expanding the NWTf standard protocol for summer brood surveillance statewide starting in the summer of 2022. Currently all 5 management regions conduct the survey. Figure 10 shows long-term trends. Poult production within the Rio Grande range indicates average reproductive. The NW and SW regions did indicate slightly better than average during the 2022 season with 3.5 poult/hen.

History

The Rio Grande turkey population estimate for 2006 (118,891) was recorded during the peak years for the sub-species. Population estimates had increased in most years prior to 2006, but then followed with nearly annual decreases until 2014. For several years prior to 2007, spring and early summer weather conditions were nearly ideal for nesting and brood rearing. In those years population increases were noted in all parts of the bird's range. The seven successive population decreases noted in 2007 through 2013 were atypical of previous trends. During the five-year period starting in 2007, central and northeastern wild turkey populations decreased each year. Western populations increased in 2008 but then decreased each year prior to 2014. Dry conditions in 2010 and severe to exceptional drought in most of the state in 2011-2012, resulted in lowered recruitment in those years. With continued depressed populations in the west through 2018, compared to recent increases in central and northeast Oklahoma, it was apparent that the severe drought may have affected wild turkey habitat to an extent that populations soon may not recover above those observed pre-drought. Field observers report extensive mortality to cottonwood stands and other roost habitat in some areas.

Decreases in Rio Grande turkey population numbers prior to 2014 should have been anticipated. During restoration, turkeys expanded their range into unoccupied areas and population numbers increased as expected. Rio Grande turkey numbers increased substantially throughout all parts of the bird's range. The recent lower population estimates should be characterized as a normal function of population biology. The exceptionally high population levels observed in 2006 were not sustainable given the dynamic nature of weather and habitat conditions during reproductive season.

HARVEST

2024 Spring Turkey Season

Statewide spring harvest data for all regions is presented in Figure 3. Regional spring harvest data is presented in Figures 4 through 8.

Eastern Wild Turkey

Harvest Analysis

The southeast region is the only region that we claim to have a population of the Eastern sub-species of wild turkey. Figure 4 illustrates the long-term trends for the region. During the 2024 spring season the region seen a decrease of -2.68% in harvest. The five-year average is an increase of .84%. In summery the harvest has been very stable dating back to 2012.

Results of the turkey Hunter Pressure Survey (Figure 11) revealed an decrease of -4.09% in hunter activity (hunter-days) for the Pushmataha, James Collins, and McGee Creek Wildlife Management Areas (Table 1). A total of 436 hunter-days were recorded for Pushmataha WMA, 503 for James Collins WMA, and 207 for McGee Creek WMA during the 33-day season. The ten-year average of all three management areas is 386 hunter-days. It is important to note the number of hunting days prior to 2022 season ranged from 16-22 in the

Southeast Region depending on the calendar year. 2022 and beyond the number of days in the season is set at 33. Covid-19 created a big jump in hunter use on our wildlife management areas. The decrease seen in 2021 is not less hunters on the average but a lot less than the previous year due to the Covid spike.

2024 hunting pressure in review; it seems that Pushmataha and James Collins the past two years (2023 & 2024) have seen a slight increase in wma use compared to the 2 years prior (2021 & 2022). McGee Creek has noted a strong decrease in hunting pressure when comparing the same years. McGee Creek used to be a destination location to hunt turkeys, however anecdotal and gobbler surveys seem to suggest the population has declined and struggling to rebound. James Collins has become a destination location not only for turkey but also deer and it is noted in this years survey with an increase of nearly 100 hunters. Hunter success indicates that James Collin's is the better of the 3 years to currently hunt. James Collins reported 1 in 18 hunters were successful while Pushmataha reported 1 per 29 and McGee Creek reporting 1 in 25,

History

In 1989, 1,836 birds were recorded at check stations in the southeast. The harvest declined to only 683 birds checked in 1994. The changes were attributed to population declines and more restrictive hunting seasons and bag limits. However, from 1994 through 2001, the harvest increased each year without modifications. In 2002, spring turkey season was moved back to April 6. The season length was 23 days (8 days less than the statewide season). The bag limit of one tom was raised to a limit of two for the combined 8 southeast counties. The spring of 2002 harvest resulted in an 84% increase over 2001 with 3,244 birds checked in southeastern counties. From 2004 – 2006, the season length for the spring turkey season was increased an additional seven days to the same as statewide 31-day season (April 6 through May 6). Bag Limit remained unchanged. In 2007 an additional two days were added to the season for the Youth Spring Turkey Season to promote recruitment of young turkey hunters under the age of 18. From 2007 through 2011 the population of Eastern turkey declined to point the regulations were changed in 2012. From 2012 – 2021, the spring turkey season for the southeast region opened on the third Monday of April and closed on May 6, with a 2-day youth season the weekend before the 3rd Monday start date. The bag limit was reduced to a one tom limit. The 2012 spring harvest resulted in a 53.9% decrease from 2011 figures (due to a later start date, shortened season length and reduced bag limit) with 688 birds checked in the southeastern counties. 2022 seen a big regulation change as the population of Rio Grande turkeys declined in the Western half of the state. The historic April 6th opening date for Rio Grande was needing to be changed. In doing so the agency moved to an opening date of April 16 statewide. This moved the SE opening date up a few days to have a single opening date that was statewide. Moving the SE opening date up was an attempt to prevent additional hunting pressure with 2 separate opening dates. The bag limit for Eastern birds changed from 1 tom for the 8 counties combined to 1 tom per hunter statewide (Figure 4).

For the 2022 spring turkey season to present, the harvest was basically unchanged compared to the other 4 regions. This is because the SE region basically had the season days, length, and bag limits in place. The 2022 season did lengthen from an average of 20 days to a fixed 33 days. The additional days were a few days on the front but mostly the 10 days on the end (May 6 ending date changed to May 16).

Rio Grande Turkey

Harvest Analysis

All 4 regions of the Rio Grande range (Southwest, Northwest, Central, and Northeast) reported increased harvest numbers for the second straight year.

Regional summaries showing Rio Grande populations year harvest totals can be found in Figures 5 through 8. The 2024 harvest exceeded the harvest of 2021 when we had an early season start date of April 6th and a 3-bird limit. This is an indication that we had more birds on the landscape and that hunter success rate was higher in 2024 than in 2021.

To illustrate the decline in Western Oklahoma, statewide in 2019 we had five counties (Beckham, Ellis, Major, Roger Mills, and Woodward) checked in over 200 birds. 2021 we had only 3 counties check in over 200 birds (Ellis, Roger Mills and Woodward). During the 2022 spring season one county (Roger Mills County) harvested over 200 birds.

To illustrate a slight rebound during the 2024 spring season we had 4 counties harvest over 200 birds. (Ellis, Major, Roger Mills, Woodward) Roger Mills County checked in 386 birds, the best since year 2019 when it checked in 406 birds. Major County checked in 244 birds, the best-known harvest post 2015.

Ellis County is a good example of our turkey decline and ODWC's approach for regulation changes for the 2022 spring season. In 2017 Ellis County harvested 302 birds. Then, due to population decline, harvest went to 212 birds by year 2021. For the 2022 season, due in large to the reduced bag limit Ellis County harvested 76 birds. So, the statewide big limit reduced to one bird might have saved as many as 136 birds in Ellis County alone. During the 2024 harvest season Ellis County harvest 206 birds, a nice rebound from the 2022 harvest numbers.

History

The turkey restoration project is one of the most successful wildlife projects in Oklahoma's history. Rio Grande populations quickly became established in western Oklahoma following early restoration efforts. Later, Rio Grande releases in central and some eastern counties also proved successful. In only 16 years, 1949 – 1965, ODWC went from the beginning of restoration to opening the state's first spring turkey hunting season.

Historically, there was no mandatory checking of harvested wild turkeys west of I35 (western half of the state). Statewide online turkey harvest data become mandatory in 2014. Because there was no check in process little to no historic data of harvest is known. We do know anecdotally, from stories and a liberal bag limit, that harvest was high and the turkey hunting was very good in the early 2000's.

2023 Fall Turkey Season

Rio Grande & Eastern Turkey Combined

Harvest Analysis

The fall harvest remains to be a low participated hunting season with most activity coming from incidental opportunities while deer hunting. 2023 Fall season had 256 birds reported statewide. Figure 12 will show you the region break down and season total. Central region has historically seen higher harvest than the other regions. Hen harvest in the fall as dramatically decreased after the 2021 regulation changes making it Tom only and removing the either sex regulation. Hen harvest in fall of 2023 was 7%.

HUNTING INCIDENTS

One hunting incidents occurred in Oklahoma during the 2024 season. A group of non-resident hunts was guided by a group of residents. The hunters set up on a corn feeder, illegal in Oklahoma within 100 yards of bait, and the residents went on the other side of the feeder about 50 yards away to watch. As the hunters took aim and shot at a bird the pellets traveled pass the target and hit one of the bystanders on the other side. The injuries were non-lethal but professional medical attention was needed.

REGULATIONS/LEGISLATION CHANGES

No changes

RESEARCH

Turkey research in Oklahoma has not lost its momentum from its start in 2022. Currently researchers from Oklahoma State University are conducting field work and tissue samples are being collected statewide by ODWC staff. See appendix 2 for research details.

Research Update

In the southeast portion of the state (McCurtain and Pushmataha counties) winter trapping was continued for a third field season. This winter 31 hens are equipped with tracking devices of various types. 19 of the hens have been identified that have initiated incubation. Preliminary data suggest that nest success is very low. Researchers collected and shipped 29 eggs (clutches of 12, 9, and 8) to the university of Tennessee for viability testing. These eggs were obtained after the known hen was predated or abandoned. Researchers have also conducted 39 vegetation surveys for the year's failed nest locations (one survey taken at the nest and two random locations within the same stand). Game cameras are also going to be deployed for the predator density estimate of the project. At the time of this report second and third nest attempts for 2024 breeding season is ongoing.

In the southwest portion of the study (Harmon and Greer Counties) we have entered into the second season for winter trapping. Transmitters were deployed on hens captured via walk in traps. Game cameras will also be deployed this spring for the predator density estimate of the project this spring.

For the genetic portion of this study, tissue samples are currently being collected statewide for analysis. Preliminary data is indicating that genetic flow and hybridization is accruing along the Red River. Early results are also indicating that the northeast turkey population is very hybridized.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

SW counties Harmon, Jackson, Tillman, and Greer within the SW Region are showing the worst population decline among Oklahoma. Decline is being reported among Winter Flock Surveys, Hunter Harvest Reporting, and public comments of concern.

As populations decline, thoughts of how to manage harvest and hunter pressure on Wildlife Management Areas is being discussed and growing in concern.

Live feed or cellular trail cameras and thermal imaging devices are gaining notice as being used in the pursuit of turkeys.

Fanning and repping hunting strategies are a topic that has been discussed with the SEWTWG, currently no issue or discussion is being discussed within Oklahoma.

A "No-Jake" rule was reviewed by the turkey project leaders. We noted that in 2022, jake harvest made up 24.5% of the total harvest. Project leaders do not believe this is significant to warrant a No-Jake Rule.

Aflatoxins and baiting/feeding in the state are evolving to possible research for future regulation implications.

Public releasing turkeys to “help” with population declines. Need to strengthen regulations to make it illegal for release of pen raised turkeys.

Out of state hunting guides are noted as the source of a lot of harvest and regulation violations in the western portion of the state. As states around the country limit opportunities those hunters are looking for over the counter tags like Oklahoma and thus could put additional hunting pressure on the research from nonresident hunters.

RELEVANT LINKS

www.wildlifedepartment.com

MISCELLANEOUS

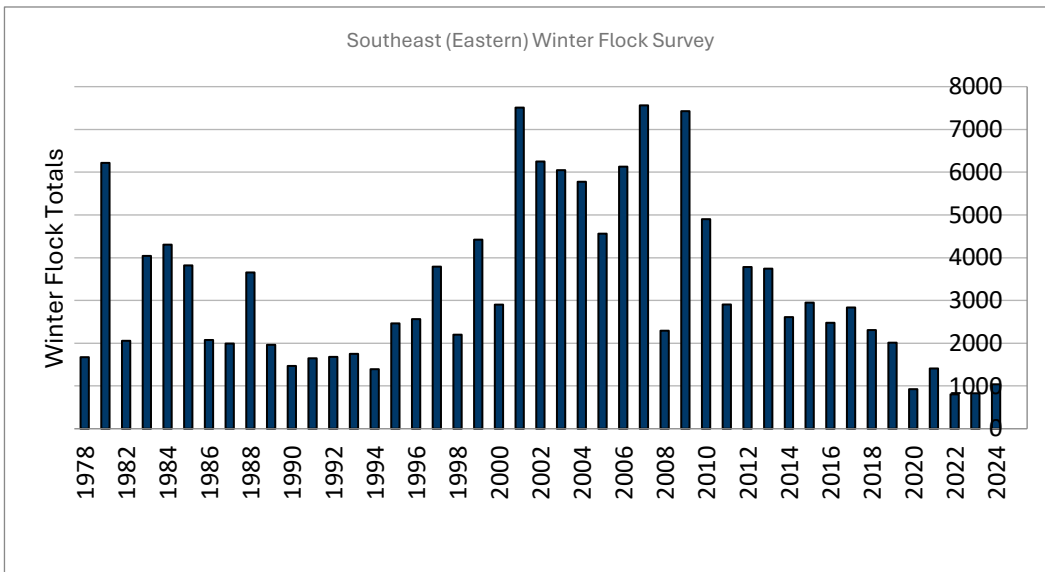


Figure 1 SE Winter Flock Survey 1975-2023

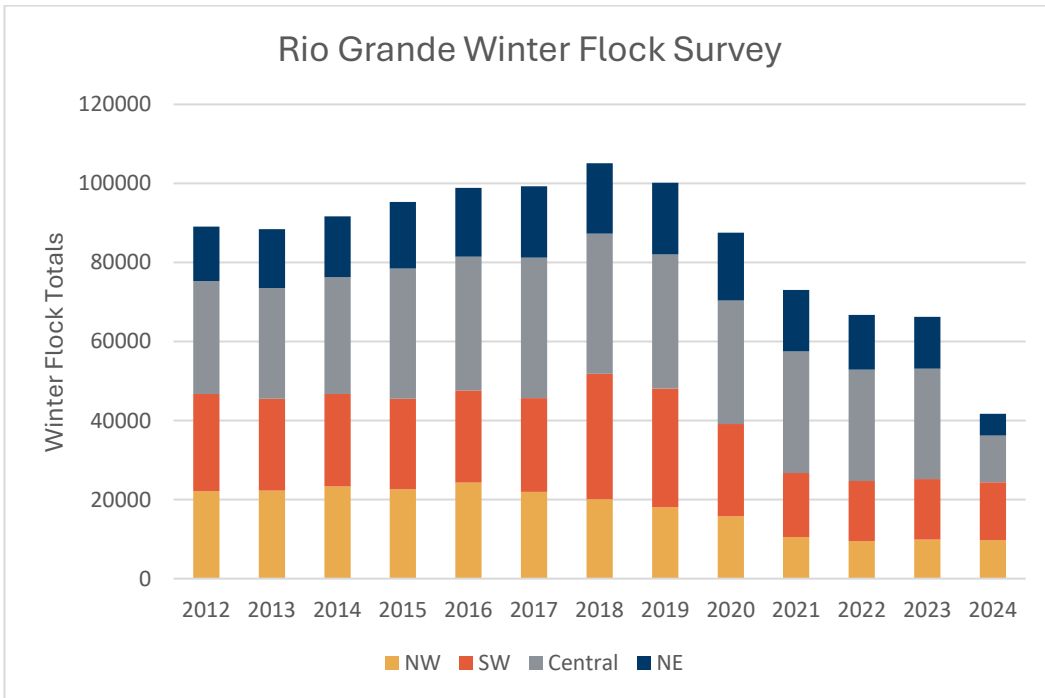


Figure 2 Rio Grande population estimates by region 2012-2023

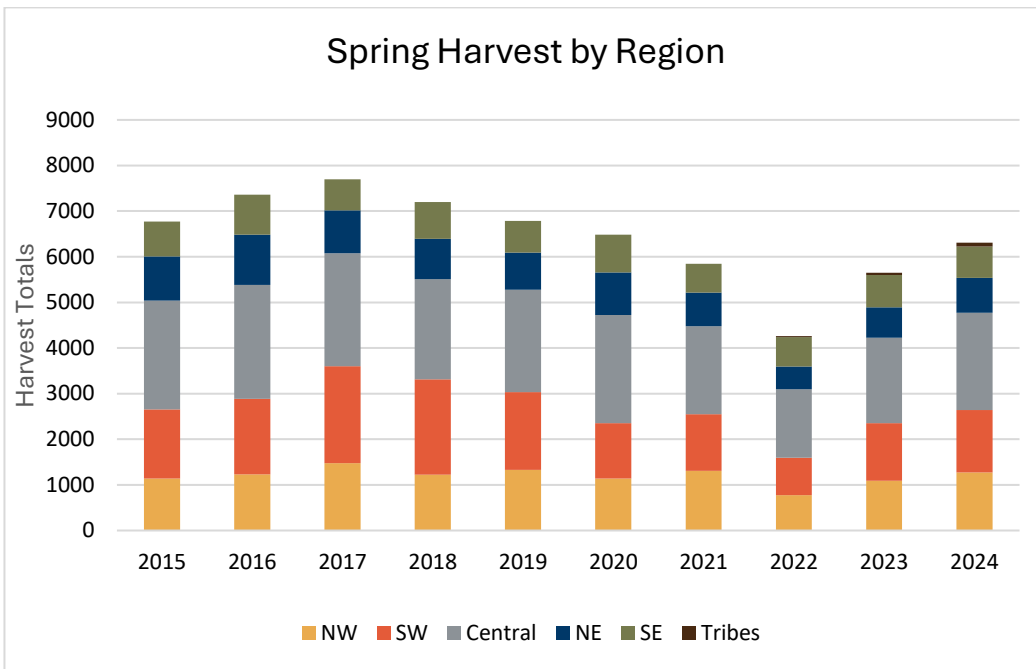


Figure 3 All regions plus tribal spring turkey harvest

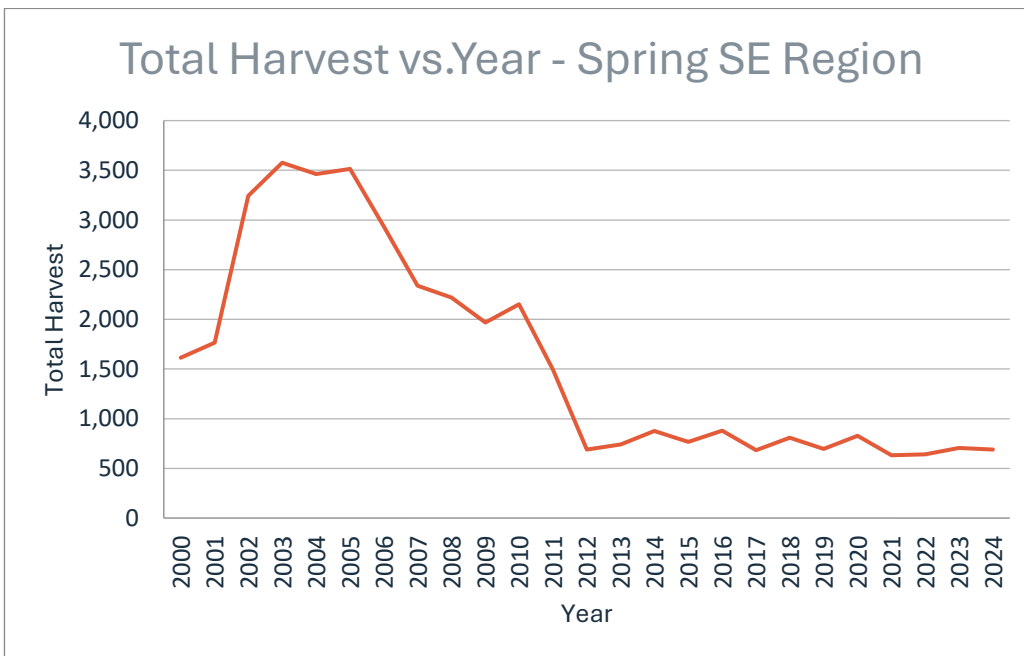


Figure 4 SE region spring turkey harvest

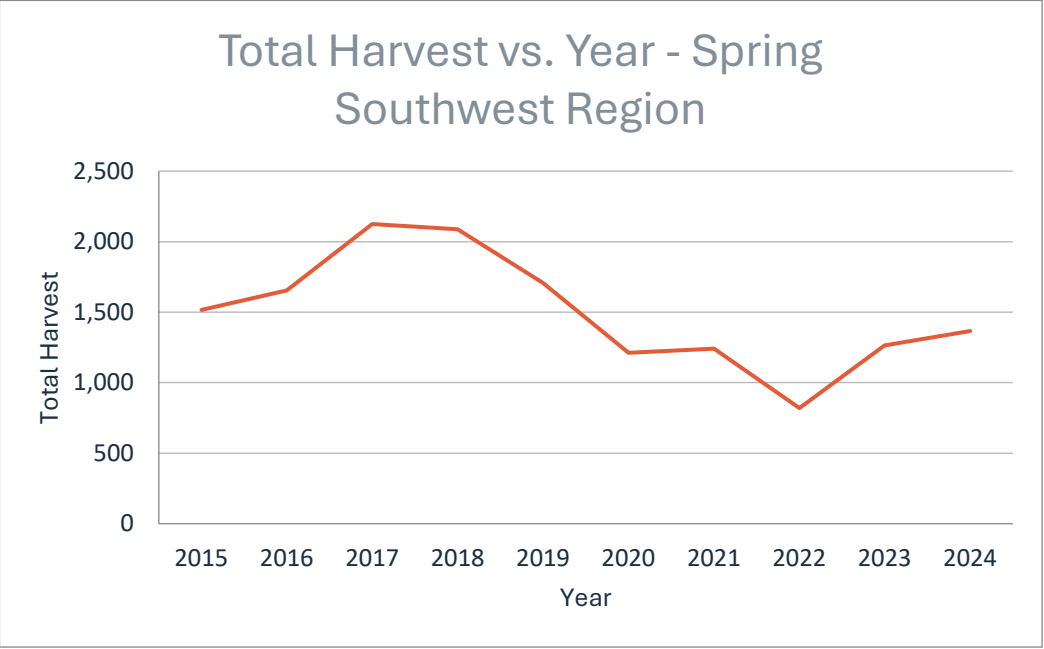


Figure 5 SW region spring turkey harvest

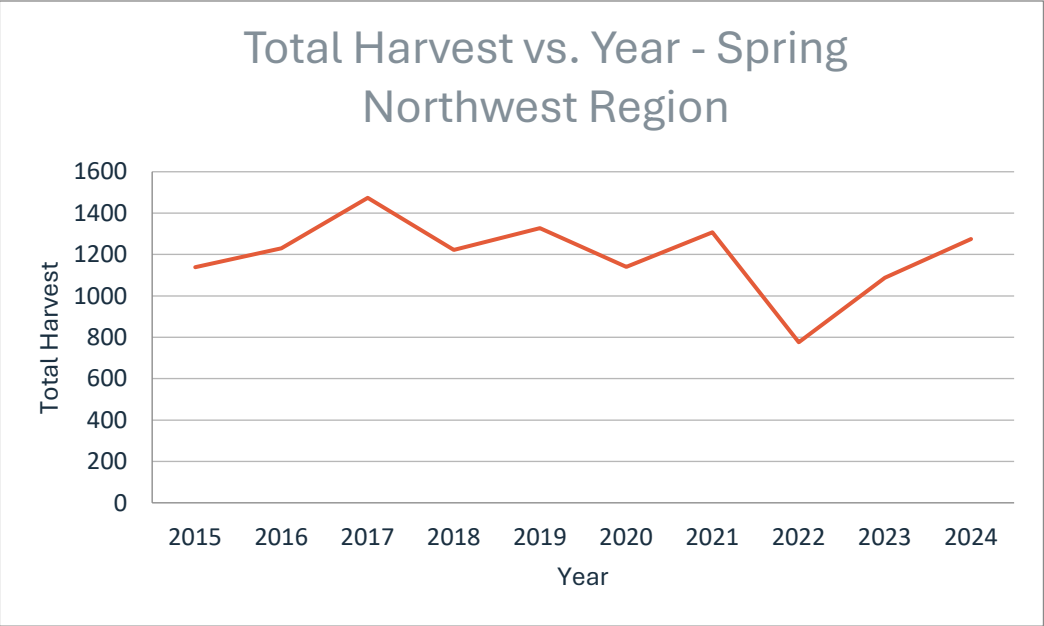


Figure 6 NW region spring turkey harvest

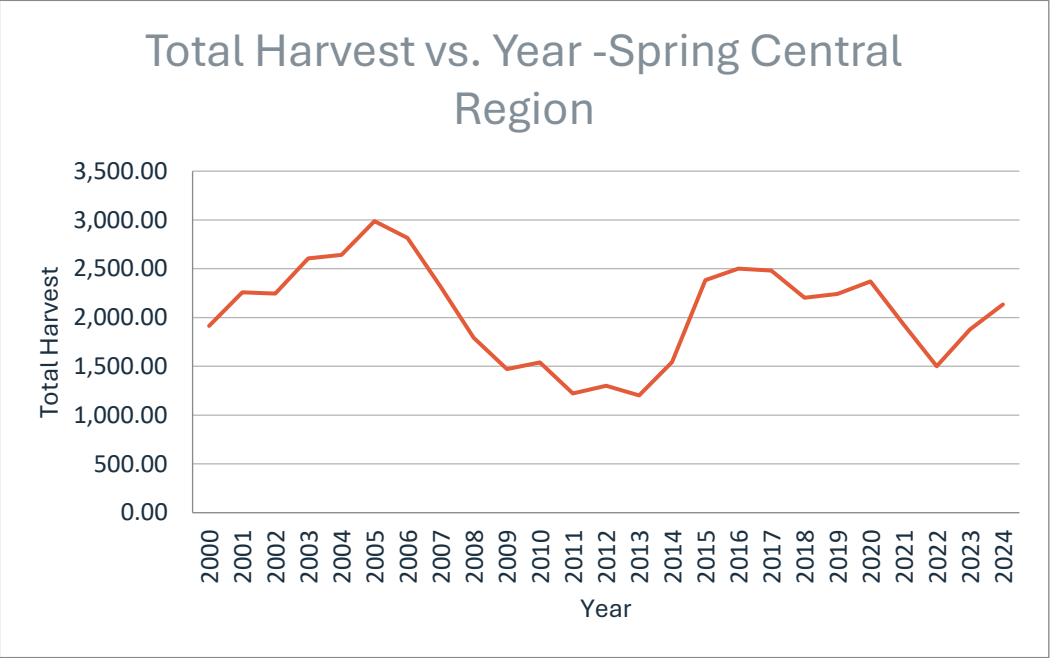


Figure 7 central region spring turkey harvest

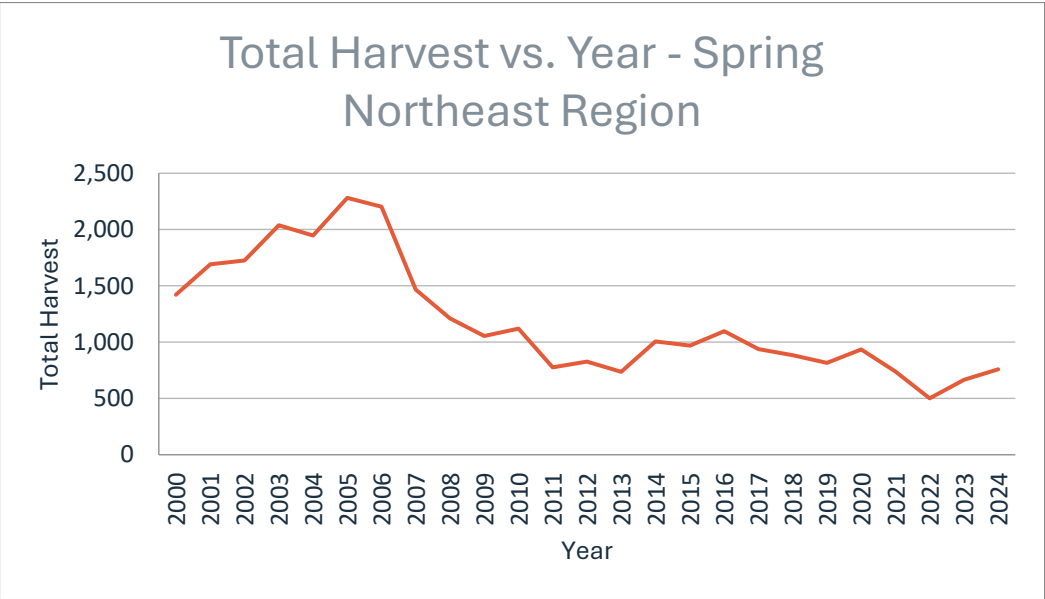


Figure 8 NE region spring turkey harvest

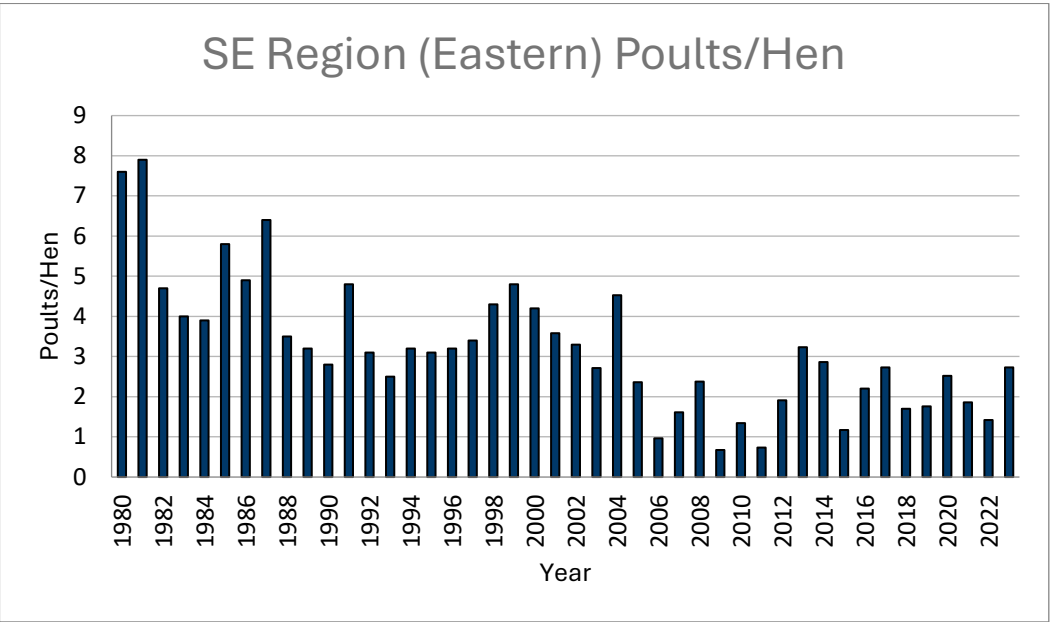


Figure 9 SE region summer brood poulth/hen 1980-2023

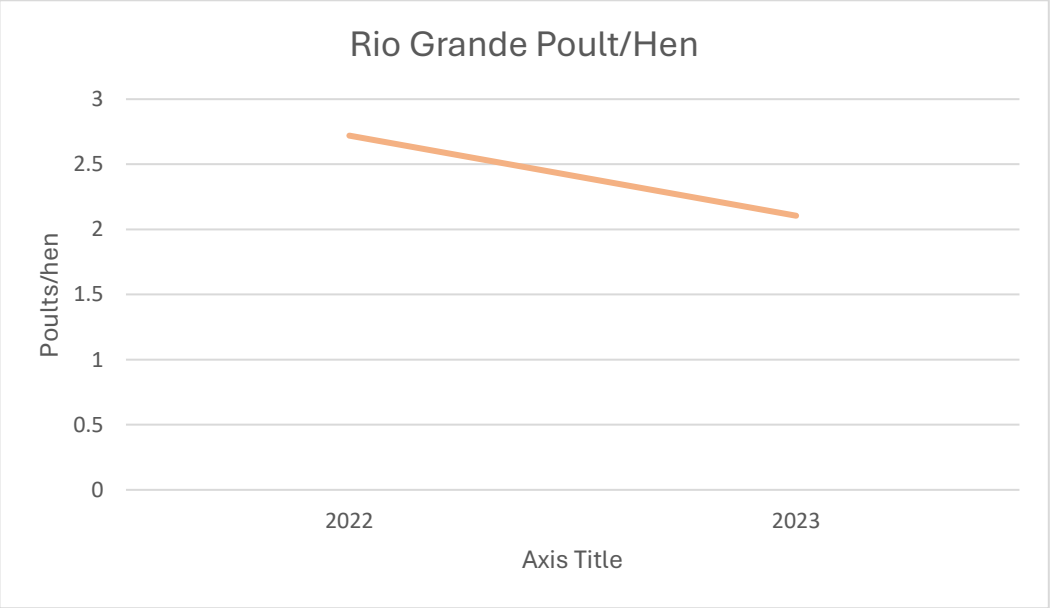


Figure 10 Rio Grande region summer brood poulth/hen 2022-2023

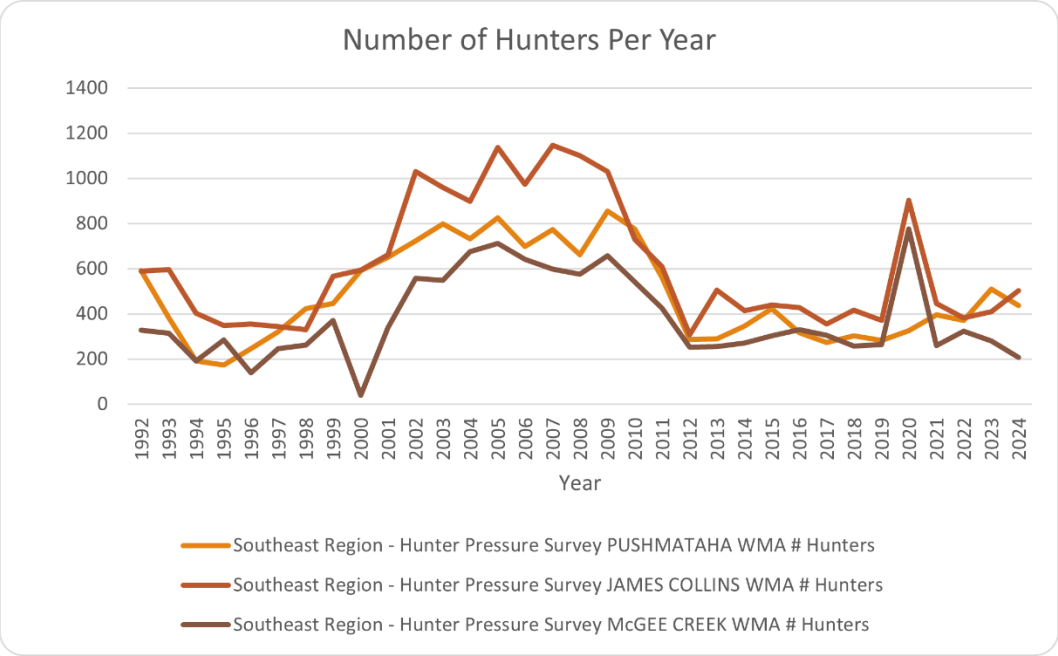


Figure 11 Hunter Pressure Survey

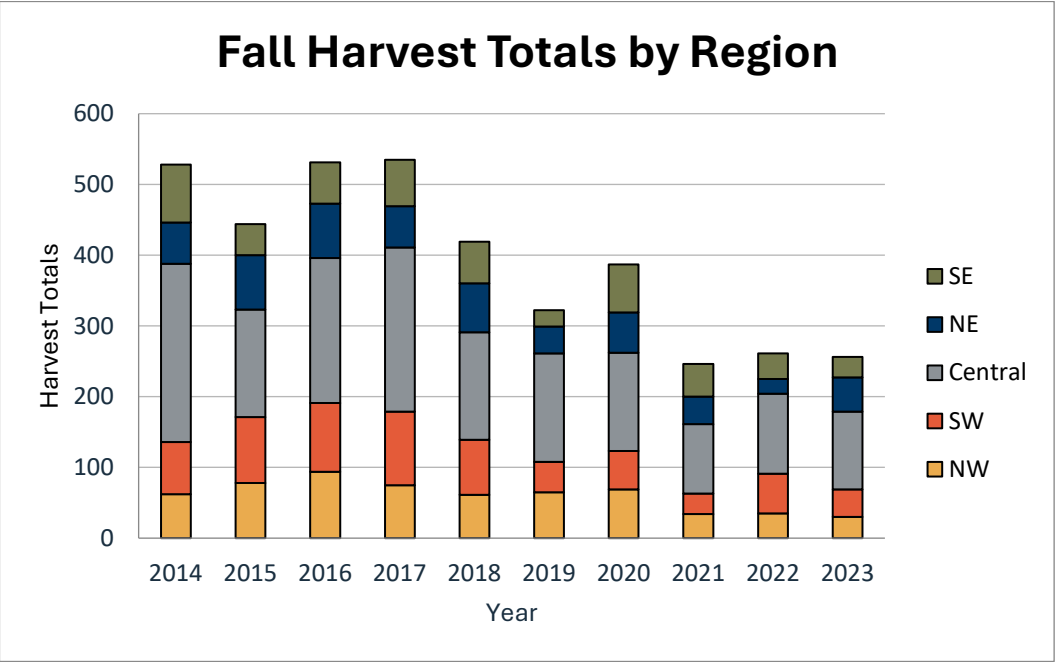
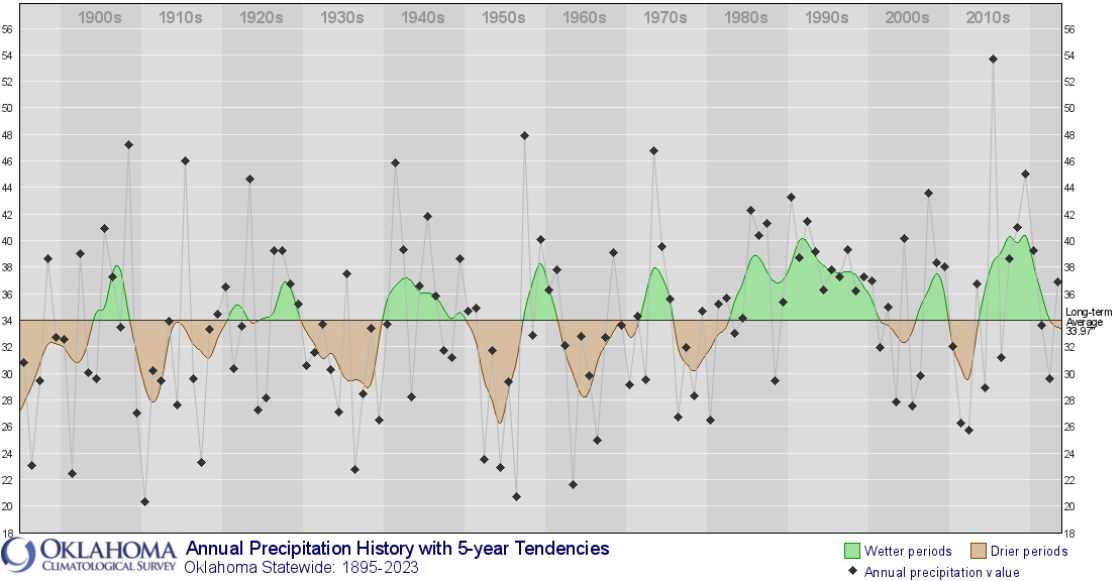


Figure 12 Fall Harvest Totals

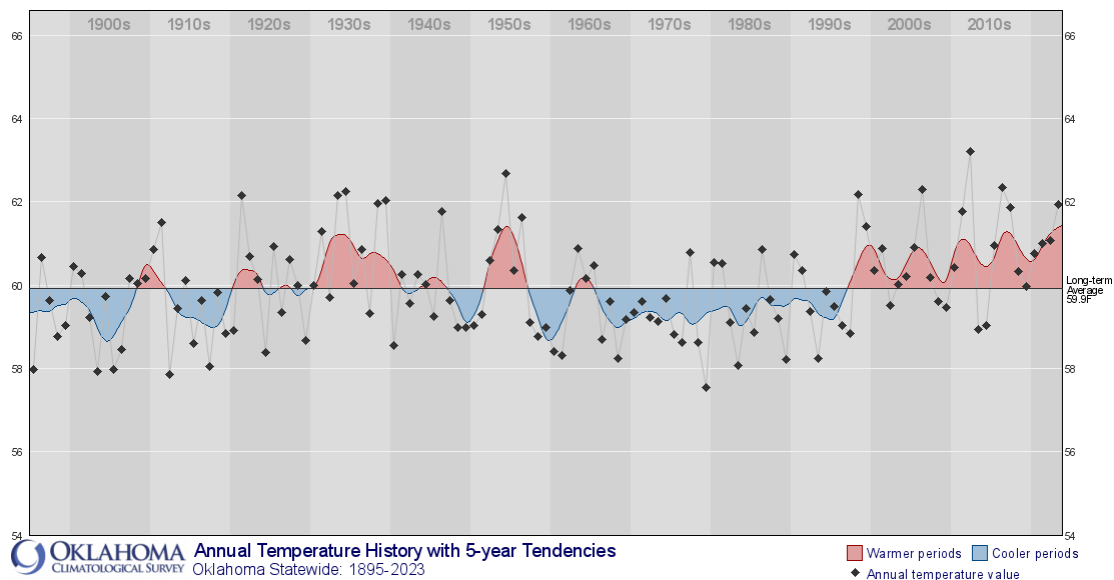
	PUSHMATAHA WMA		JAMES COLLINS WMA		McGEE CREEK WMA					
Year	# Vehicles	# Hunters	# Vehicles	# Hunters	# Vehicles	# Hunters	TOTAL HUNTERS	Average	% Change + or - from Previous	Season Length in Days
1992		591		588		327	1506			31
1993		382		595		313	1290		-14.34%	31
1994		191		403		191	785		-39.14%	16
1995		174		347		284	805		2.54%	16
1996		245		355		138	738		-8.32%	16
1997		321		344		245	910		23.30%	16
1998	234	423		329		262	1014		11.42%	16
1999	240	446		566		371	1383		36.39%	21
2000	329	592	336	594		40	1226		-11.35%	21
2001	350	650	356	662	217	340	1652	551	34.74%	21
2002	393	723	578	1030	319	557	2310	770	39.83%	23
2003	442	798	551	959	319	549	2306	769	-0.17%	23
2004	374	731	505	898	395	675	2304	768	-0.08%	31
2005	428	826	643	1136	572	712	2674	891	16.05%	31
2006	347	698	529	974	386	642	2314	771	-13.46%	31
2007	406	774	635	1145	365	599	2518	839	8.81%	33
2008	331	662	548	1100	345	575	2337	779	-7.18%	33
2009	443	855	557	1029	399	656	2540	847	8.68%	33
2010	407	775	419	730	302	542	2047	682	-19.40%	33
2011	294	562	364	610	268	425	1597	532	-21.98%	33
2012	159	286	183	308	164	252	846	282	-47.02%	16
2013	151	289	277	505	151	254	1048	349	23.87%	17
2014	197	345	244	415	156	271	1031	344	-1.62%	18
2015	232	422	232	439	207	302	1163	388	12.80%	19
2016	194	316	252	428	214	329	1073	358	-7.73%	21
2017	174	274	228	354	192	304	932	311	13.14%	22
2018	183	303	244	417	163	257	977	326	4.82%	16
2019	178	282	236	371	172	263	916	305	-6.24%	17
2020	203	325	564	903	485	776	2004	668	118.77%	18
2021	261	395	278	446	190	260	1101	367	-45.05%	18
2022	209	371	216	382	220	324	1077	359	-2.17%	33
2023	305	509	237	409	202	280	1198	399	11.14%	33
2024	247	436	315	503	158	207	1146	382	-4.09%	33

Table 1 SE area hunter pressure



Precipitation History of Oklahoma – 1895-2023

Image 1 Annual



Annual Temperature History of Oklahoma – 1895-2023

U.S. Drought Monitor Oklahoma

May 14, 2024
(Released Thursday, May 16, 2024)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT

Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	67.36	32.64	12.13	5.91	0.00	0.00
Last Week 05-07-2024	51.62	48.38	20.41	5.91	0.00	0.00
3 Months Ago 02-13-2024	83.39	16.61	3.23	0.19	0.00	0.00
Start of Calendar Year 01-02-2024	55.32	44.68	21.64	3.08	0.00	0.00
Start of Water Year 09-26-2023	34.29	65.71	46.76	30.93	12.91	0.00
One Year Ago 05-16-2023	44.21	55.79	50.19	43.81	30.67	8.88

Intensity:

None	D2 Severe Drought
D0 Abnormally Dry	D3 Extreme Drought
D1 Moderate Drought	D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:

Lindsay Johnson
National Drought Mitigation Center



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

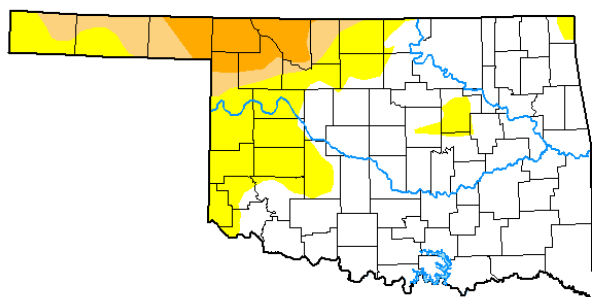


Image 1b Current Drought conditions of Oklahoma

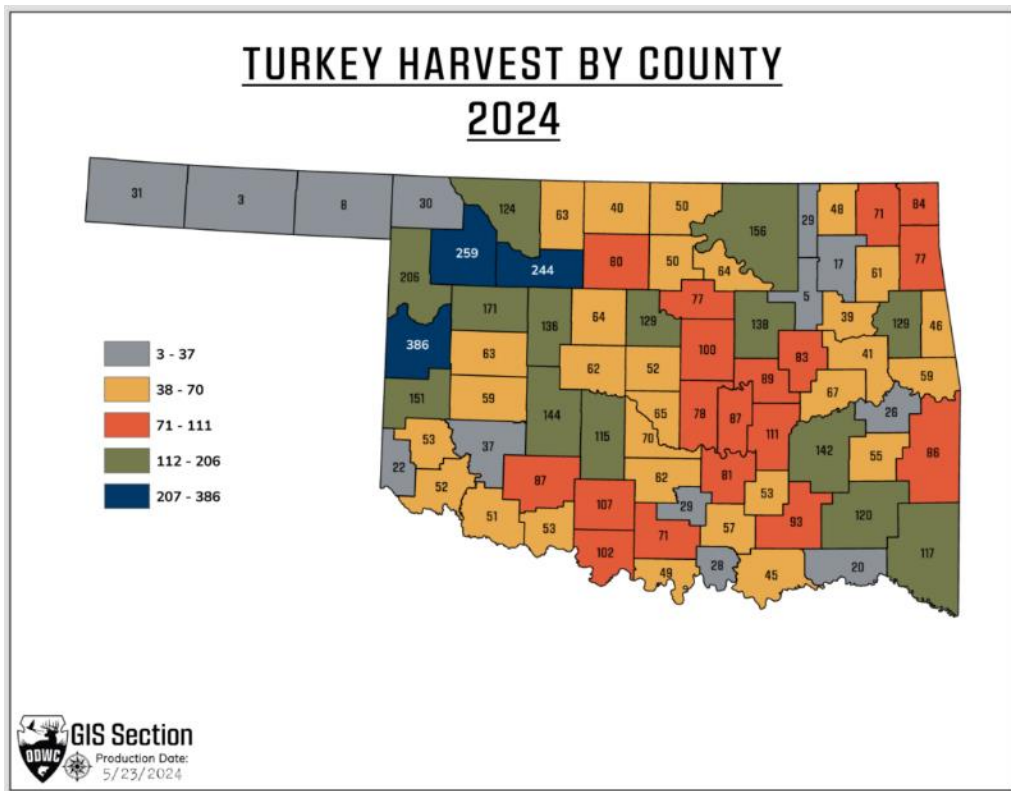


Image 2 Turkey harvest count per county – Spring 2024

Appendix A – Signed turkey regulation changes for Oklahoma 2021



Turkey Resolution
6-21-21 - Signed.pdf

Appendix B – Turkey Research Objectives for Oklahoma



Turkey Research
Objectives.pdf

Oregon Wild Turkey Status Report 2023

POPULATION STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION

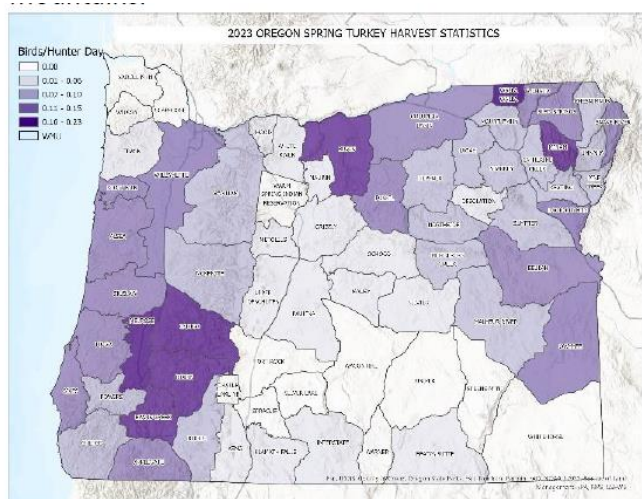
No significant change in Oregon's current wild turkey population estimate of 40,000 – 50,000 birds. All 36 Oregon counties have the potential of turkeys. 2024 Outlook: Production continues to be strong in most areas with little indication of environmental limitations. Nesting and early brood-rearing conditions are primarily responsible for reproductive success. The winter of 2023-24 was average to above-average in terms of precipitation, continuing into spring. Winter temperatures were not particularly severe.

HUNTING

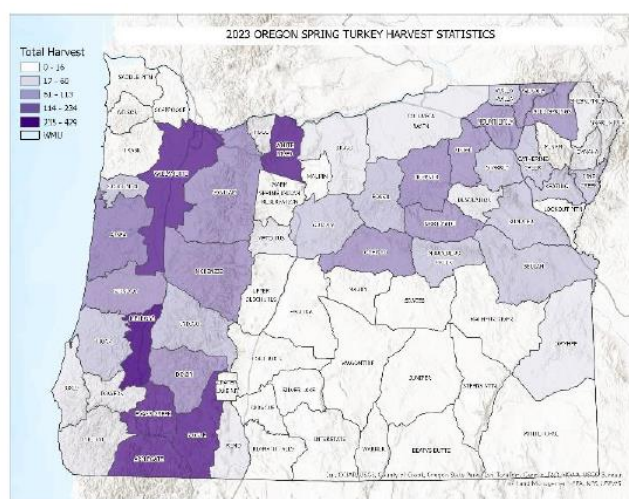
2023 Spring Season

April 15- May 31. Season length unchanged since 1993 (except for addition of youth turkey hunt)

Season Bag limit- 3 bearded birds statewide, but not more than one turkey per day. In 2023, 14,571 turkey tag holders went hunting and harvested 5,619 spring turkeys, down -4% from 2022 (Table 1). Spring tag sales have decreased since allowing choice of spring/fall tags with the SportsPac. Southwest Oregon remains the core area for wild turkey harvest, but 48% of the total harvest occurred east of Cascade Mountains, primarily in the Blue Mountains.



A. 2023 Wild Turkeys Harvested per Hunter Day



B. 2023 Total Harvest per Wildlife Management Unit

2023 Spring Youth Hunt

Oregon held its 18th youth turkey hunt April 8-9, 2023. The hunt takes place the first full weekend prior to general spring season opener on April 15. The season is open statewide for youth age 17 and under. Oregon offers a reduced-price youth turkey tag valid for resident and nonresident youth during youth turkey hunt and/or general season. Youth harvested 242 turkeys during the 2-day youth season and an addition 563 turkeys during the remainder of the spring season. Youth accounted for about 14% of total spring harvest of turkeys in Oregon in 2023.

2022-23 Fall Season

Oregon simplified fall season regulations in 2020 by eliminating the last controlled hunts, removing limits on total tags available, resulting in 2 general season fall hunts: Eastern and Western. Hunters are allowed to harvest up to 2 fall turkeys, of which only one can be from eastern Oregon. The length of the hunting season was extended to January 31st in 2020 to allow hunters more opportunity to address chronic nuisance and damage issues.

In 2021, the Grant County emphasis area was established including the Murderer's Creek, Desolation, and Northside WMU, and southern portion of the Heppner WMU. The eastern Oregon fall general season opened on September 1 in this area in 2021. Another change in 2021 allowed western Oregon hunters to harvest both fall turkeys on the same day. Only one fall turkey may be taken in eastern Oregon under current regulations. In 2022, western Oregon regulations changed to initiate fall turkey hunting on September 1.

In 2022, 11,363 fall turkey tags were sold, up 97% from the previous year. This change was related to the change in SportsPac turkey tag selection options, with more hunters selecting fall tags. Hunter participation increased 30% and hunting effort was up 27%. Total fall turkeys harvested was estimated at 1,546 birds, up 28% from the previous year. Harvest was fairly evenly divided between east and west with 52% of harvest coming from western Oregon.

Beardless Turkey Permit

In an effort to utilize turkey hunters to deal with private land turkey nuisance and damage, the Beardless Turkey Permit was piloted in 2023-24. This product allowed the harvest of 3 beardless or hen turkeys per permit, for the same cost as a turkey tag, within a select area around Grant County. Final harvest number are not yet available, but the district did see good landowner participation and some hazing effects. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission approved the expansion of the product to select units in the Willamette Valley.

Tag & License Fees

Since 2010 youth turkey tags for residents and non-residents cost \$10.50. In 2018, an adult resident turkey tag cost \$25.50 and adult non-resident turkey tags cost \$87.50, up \$1.00 and \$3.50, respectively, from the previous year. Turkey hunters also must have a general hunting license. Annual hunting licenses for adults are \$33.50 for residents and \$167.00 for non-residents, up \$1.50 and \$7.50, respectively, from the previous year. Non-residents have the option of purchasing 3-day license(s) at \$31.50 for each 3-days (up \$1.00 from 2017). Beginning in December 2021, the Department began offering the option for SportsPac purchasers to select either a fall or spring turkey tag.

Turkey Management:

Nuisance and Damage

As in past years, addressing turkey nuisance and damage continues to be the primary management concern among our wildlife districts. The issue is acute on the west side of the state in suburban areas where turkey flocks are increasing, and the growth of the human population expands into rural lands. The suburban/urban areas make it difficult to use the preferred management tool, hunting, to control turkey numbers. Trapping and transplant is not a viable option in many of the circumstances because effective methods like the use of rocket nets are not available or due to staff capacity limitations. In almost every case, the problem is created by landowners providing supplemental feed for the turkeys, either knowingly or inadvertently. A number of cities have attempted to craft municipal ordinances that prohibit the feeding of turkeys without restricting residents from feeding other wildlife, such as songbirds.

ODFW tracks all wildlife complaints through an internal database. In 2023, turkeys were attributed to 212 of the 2,501 nuisance and damage complaints statewide. The majority of turkey complaints were categorized as “nuisance” (68%). Agricultural damage complaints accounted for 12% of the reports.

Trap/Transplant

The Upland Game Bird Program invested in additional seasonal capacity in eastern and western Oregon for the third year in row to assist with trapping, emergency hunts, and landowner complaints. ODFW trapped and relocated approximately 457 turkeys during statewide during the winter of 2023-24. All turkeys were trapped in response to nuisance and damage complaints. Captures occurred in Douglas, Grant, and Union counties. Birds were relocated to 3 pre-approved areas where the turkeys are less likely to become a nuisance and will offer public hunting opportunities.

Hunting Access

In 2023, the Upland Game Bird Program continued efforts to develop a Hunt By Reservation program. Brandon Dyches, the full-time coordinator in cooperation with Pheasants Forever, has now moved on to a different position. Brandon has successfully recruited numerous landowners, developed reservation software, a website, and initiated hunts since 2019. The properties were moved to a lottery system in 2022 due to high demand, a change resulting in positive feedback. The program now has wild turkey, upland game bird, waterfowl, deer, and elk properties in the program. We are working to internalize the coordinator position at ODFW, which will require legislative approval.

Habitat

ODFW utilized game bird stamp and turkey tag funds to purchase 2 skid steers with mulching heads for habitat projects in southwestern Oregon. This machinery will have a direct benefit to wild turkey habitat.



SOUTH DAKOTA

WILD TURKEY POPULATION STATUS REPORT – 2024

2024 Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting – May 7-8, 2024

Meeting Location Venue – Oklahoma-Virtual Meeting

Chad Lehman – Senior Wildlife Biologist
South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks
Custer State Park, 13329 US HWY 16A
Custer, SD, 57730
605-255-4515 / Chad.Lehman@state.sd.us

POPULATION STATUS

Two primary subspecies (eastern and Merriam's turkeys) occur in the state. Eastern turkeys are most common east of the Missouri River in eastern riparian/cropland habitats. Merriam's turkeys primarily occur west of the Missouri River in prairie riparian and ponderosa pine habitats.

REPRODUCTION

We collected turkey brood data from July 1 to August 31, 2023. We record all hens observed with or without broods and the number of poults in each brood during their routine field assignments during the allotted time period. In the Black Hills we counted 324 hens with 1131 poults for a poult:hen ratio of 3.49. Of the 324 hens, 257 of them were in broods.

HARVEST

In 2022, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks sold a total of 20,640 turkey hunting licenses (Fig. 1). Wild turkey harvest appears to be stable or increasing (Fig. 2, 3, 4). Figures 1 and 2 include both spring and fall for licenses sold and harvest. It is important to note that the Black Hills unit jumped in spring harvest success from 30% in 2022 to 39% in 2023 with a shorter season length date (14 days shorter). However, the dates are structured to better align with the start of peak hen incubation and the second gobbling peak which may partially explain the increase in harvest success.

Fig. 1. Number of turkey licenses sold for the state of South Dakota from 1995-2022.

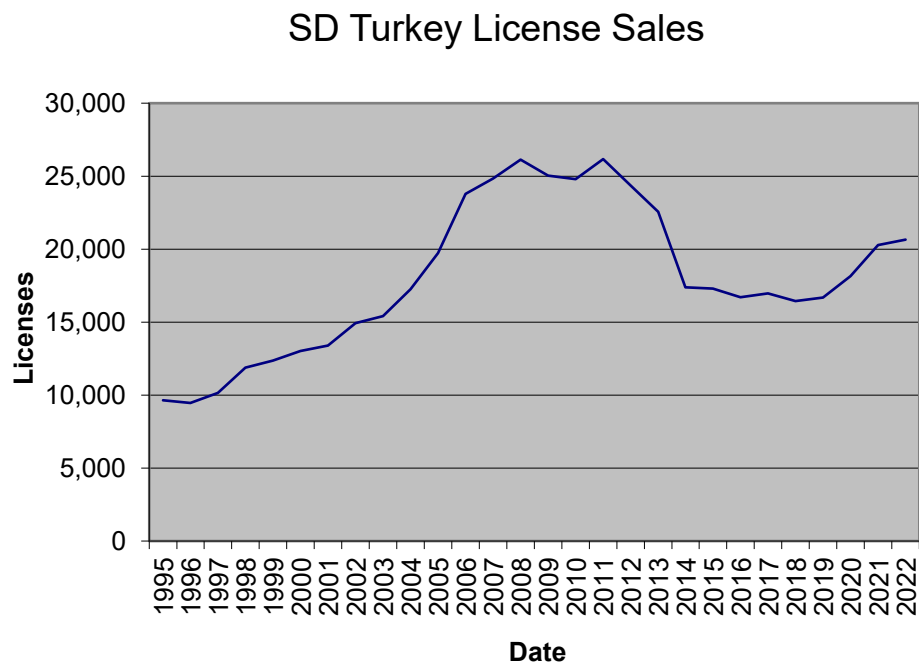


Fig. 2. State turkey harvest projections for South Dakota from 1995-2022.

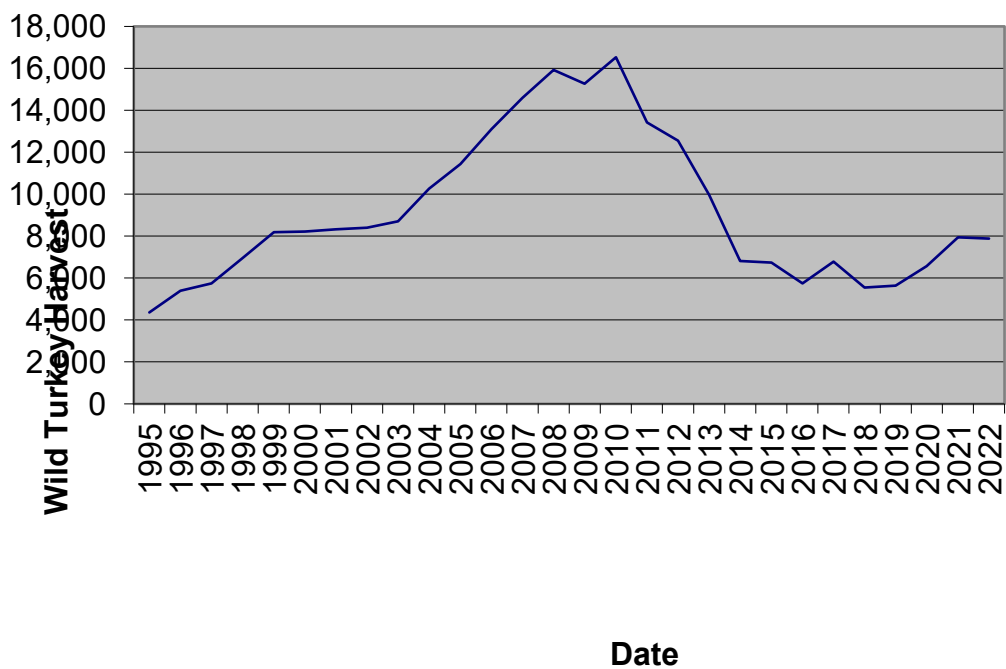


Fig. 3. Black Hills spring harvest projections from 1995-2023.

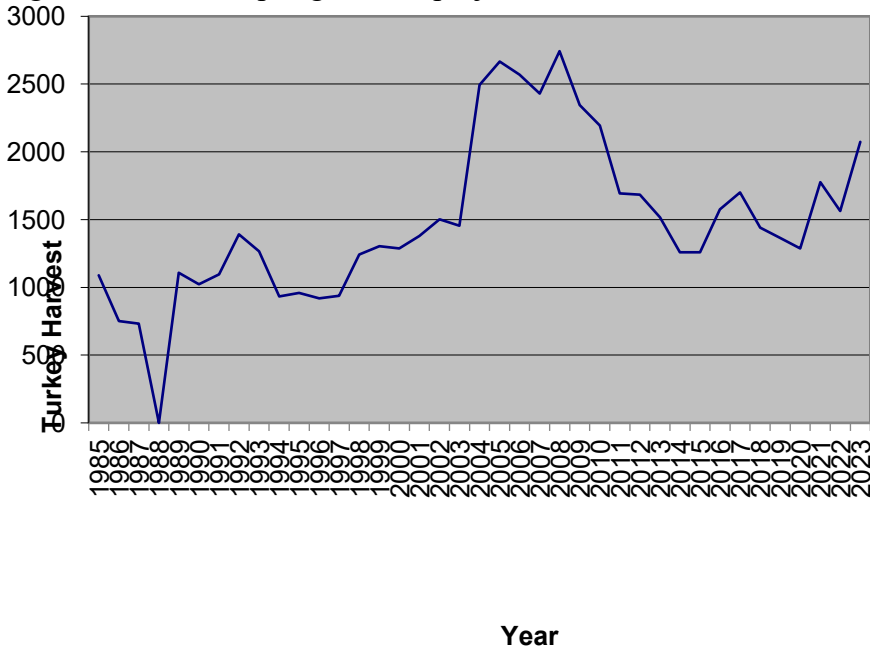
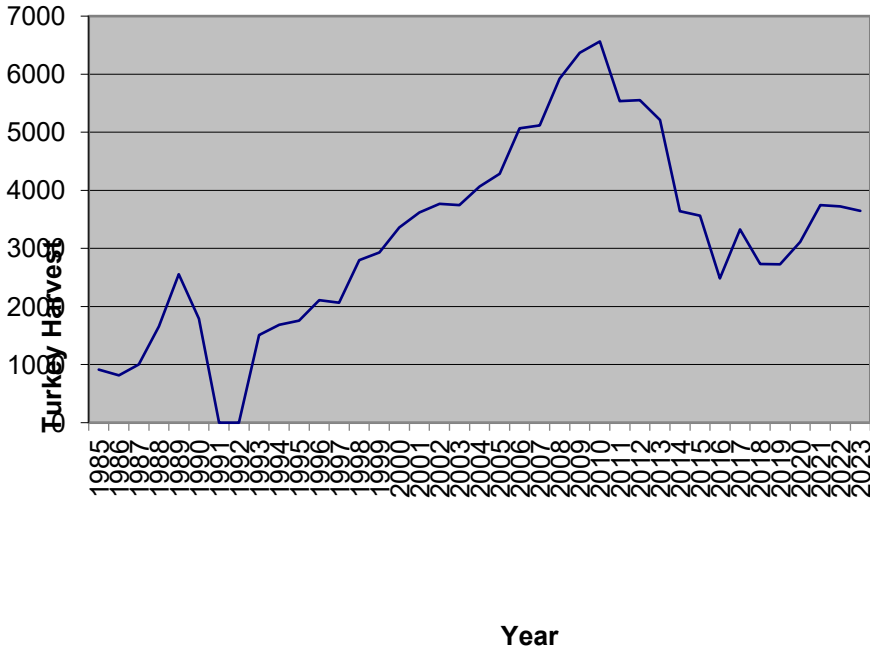


Fig. 4. Prairie spring harvest projections from 1995-2023.



HUNTING INCIDENTS

There were no turkey hunting incidents that occurred in 2023.

RESEARCH

A project has started in Gregory County in 2023 evaluating survival and reproduction of Merriam's turkeys. A total of 80 female wild turkeys (40 adult hens, 40 yearling hens) were radiomarked in winter of 2023. Luke McCray is the M.S. student with West Virginia University and he planning to start his second field season in 2024 and doing a great job. Dr. Chris Rota is the academic advisor on the study. This study is being funded by South Dakota NWTF, SDGFP, and National NWTF.

Recent Wild Turkey Research Publications

Tyl, R. M., C. T. Rota., and C. P. Lehman. 2023. Factors influencing survival of female eastern wild turkeys in northeastern South Dakota. Wildlife Society Bulletin: <http://doi.org/10.1002/wsb.1429>.

Lehman, C. P., Yarnall, M. J., A. R. Litt, C. T. Rota, and J. J. Rotella. 2022. Factors influencing rate of decline in a Merriam's wild turkey population. Journal of Wildlife Management: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.22240>.

Tyl, R. M., C. T. Rota., and C. P. Lehman. 2020. Factors influencing productivity of eastern wild turkeys in northeastern South Dakota. Ecology and Evolution 10(16): DOI: 10.1002/ece3.6583

Yarnall, M. J., A. R. Litt, C. P. Lehman, and J. J. Rotella. 2020. Precipitation and reproduction are negatively associated with female turkey survival. Journal of Wildlife Management 84:1-11.

REGULATION/LEGISLATION CHANGES

In spring of 2023 we changed our season dates for the Black Hills unit. Instead of opening the 2nd Saturday in April it is now opening on the 4th Saturday in April. This is a management change that could potentially protect some gobblers for early season breeding and enhance reproduction of Merriam's turkeys in the Black Hills unit. Further, all bow hunting must now occur at the same start date as the general shotgun seasons. Previous to this year bow hunters had a one week earlier start date. Some units changed in boundary and every 2 years number of licenses may change and are updated in our application.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

Licensing System

The *Go Outdoors South Dakota* system continues to be updated and available for both spring and fall turkey seasons.

<https://license.gooutdoorssouthdakota.com/Licensing/CustomerLookup.aspx>

RELEVANT LINKS

WILD TURKEY MANAGEMENT PLAN IN SOUTH DAKOTA

A revised wild turkey plan has been completed and available for use. Please review our South Dakota Wild Turkey Management Plan for updates and management direction at:

https://gfp.sd.gov/UserDocs/docs/wild_turkey_action_plan_2021-2026_final.pdf

https://gfp.sd.gov/UserDocs/docs/turkey_management_plan2021-2030.pdf

MISCELLANEOUS

In 2021-22, 54 wild turkeys were trapped and relocated in South Dakota. In 2022-23, 50 wild turkeys were trapped and relocated in South Dakota.

TEXAS WILD TURKEY POPULATION STATUS REPORT

WAFWA Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting – May 6 - 8, 2024

Cheyenne, Oklahoma

Jason Hardin – Turkey Program Leader

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

P.O. Box 279

Buffalo, Texas 75831

512-934-8306 / Jason.hardin@tpwd.texas.gov

POPULATION STATUS

The Rio Grande wild turkeys is the most numerous subspecies in Texas with a population estimate of 450,947 birds. The Rio Grande wild turkey population is found in the western 2/3 of Texas, primarily along and west of the Interstate 35 corridor and east of the Pecos River. Texas also hosts a small population of eastern wild turkeys in localized populations in the eastern third of Texas. Eastern wild turkeys number around 10,000 birds. A small population of approximately 500 Merriam's wild turkeys is in the Davis Mountains and Guadalupe Mountains of West Texas. The wild turkey distribution in Texas is illustrated in Figure 1.

In 2021, TPWD staff reengaged in a summer production survey using the recommended standardized approach set forth by the Southeast Wild Turkey Working Group and the National Wild Turkey Technical Committee. In 2023, TPWD staff observed 1,653 wild turkey, 2.71 Poults per Hen, and 3.96 poults per brood.

Texas' Small Game Harvest Survey provides a weak measure of the Rio Grande wild turkey population status in Texas. This survey historically goes out to 20,000 hunters at the end of February each year, but due to low reporting rates the survey effort was increased to 35,000 mail surveys and another 35,000 email surveys. Due to the timing of the survey, hunter and harvest data is not available for the 2023 spring turkey season until summer 2024. TPWD is currently evaluating our Small Game Harvest Survey and plan to readdress the wild turkey specific survey once all analyses are complete.

Texas also required mandatory turkey harvest reporting in all counties with a spring only, 1-gobbler bag limit. Mandatory harvest was again expanded during the 2022-23 hunting season with the option for digital tags for hunters purchasing a Super Combo license online and for Lifetime License Holders. Hunters who opted-in to digital tags were required to reporting their harvested wild turkey immediately upon collection of their harvested bird. Mandatory harvest reporting provides a more accurate and timely assessment of harvest and hunter effort. The TPWD Commission recently approved statewide mandatory harvest reporting of wild turkeys in all seasons. This new regulation will go into effect during the 2024-25 hunting season, which begins September 1, 2024.

There are 198 Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) routes in Texas. Breeding bird survey data shows a significant increasing trend in the Texas wild turkey population from 1966 to 2017 followed by a significant decline from 2018-2022 (Figure 2). Based on a strong reproductive season in 2023 and TPWD’s summer turkey survey numbers, the BBS observations are predicted to continue to increase when 2023 numbers become available.

REPRODUCTION

Texas Parks and Wildlife staff reengaged in a statewide brood survey in 2021. Staff did not reach our minimum goal of 200 unique observations. Staff have expanded the survey to include TPWD-Law Enforcement and will investigate addition expansion into a public survey option.

Table 1: 2023 total number of hens, poults, males, and unknown turkeys observed during the survey in each region and at the statewide scale:

Wildlife Region	Turkey Observations	Poults Per Hen	Poults Per Brood	Hens with Broods	Male to Female Ratio
Region 1	256	3.27	4.32	0.73	1.00
Region 2	771	2.36	3.72	0.64	0.27
Region 3	175	2.59	3.35	0.69	0.12
Region 4	42	4.34	4.35	1.00	0.00
Region 5	409	2.96	4.48	0.58	0.93
Total	1,653	2.71	3.96	0.65	0.46

HARVEST

2022 Spring Turkey Season

In 2022, Texas’ Small Game Harvest Survey numbers were increased from 20,000 surveys mailed to 35,000 surveys mailed to address declining response rates. Of the 35,000 surveys mailed, 5,287 surveys were

returned. In a parallel survey, another 35,000 random hunters received the Small Game Harvest Survey via email concurrently with the paper mail survey. A total of 2,952 email surveys were returned. The survey is mailed just prior to the spring turkey season. Therefore, results of the survey are only for the previous spring season (2022). Survey results are typically published mid-summer. During the 2022 spring turkey season 65,752 hunters reported harvesting 17,246 wild turkeys. Hunters experienced a 29.20% success rate, which is below the long-term mean of 42.43%. Figure 3 identifies long-term spring hunter and harvest trends.

2022-2023 Fall Turkey Season

During the 2022-23 fall turkey season 65,992 hunters harvested 7,699 wild turkeys. This is above the long-term average of 61,341 fall hunters, but below the long-term mean of 21,160 fall birds harvested. There is a general trend away from fall hunting and a growing trend in spring turkey hunting.

2023 Eastern Turkey Season

TPWD requires mandatory reporting for all harvested Eastern wild turkeys. Reporting is completely through TPWD's My Texas Hunter Harvest App or online (www.tpwd.texas/turkey). The season begins annually on April 22 and continues through May 14th. During the 2023 eastern turkey season hunters reported harvesting 196 wild turkeys. This is down -3% from 2022 and down -1% above the 3-years average. The 2024 season is currently ongoing.

2023 TEXAS HUNTING ACCIDENT REPORT

Texas sold 1,236,677 hunting licenses during 2022-23 hunting season. The 2023 Texas Hunting Accident Report identified 11 hunting related accidents. Of those 11 accidents 1 was fatal. Nine (09) of the hunting accidents involved shotguns, 1 involved a rifle, and 1 involved bow/air guns. Of the 11 accidents, 07 were associated with dove hunting, 02 were associated with deer hunting, and 02 were associated with duck/goose hunting. There were no wild turkey hunting accidents reported during the 2022-23 hunting season.

RESEARCH

UAV-FLIR Survey Methodology

The graduate student at University of Missouri recently completed her thesis defense on applications of UAV-FLIR technology for surveying roosted wild turkeys in Texas. Results from this research should be available soon.

Wild Turkey Survival and Habitat Use in the Pineywoods of Texas

Texas Parks and Wildlife staff conducted a pilot study in the Pineywoods along the Louisiana border in 2021. TPWD partnered with Louisiana State University (LSU) in 2022 to expand the project to look at demographics of a native wild turkey population contiguous with Louisiana, a native population that is genetically isolated from other populations in east Texas, and a recently restocked population. A third extant population was included during the 2023 trapping season. LSU is also monitoring wild turkeys in Louisiana to compare demographics across varying ranges and levels of isolation and genetic relatedness to wild turkeys in Louisiana.

Landscape Assessment of Wild Turkey Roosting Habitat in the Texas Rolling Plains

Texas Parks and Wildlife contracted with Texas A&M University to assess landscape changes in the Rolling Plains over the past 20 years. The focus is on changes in historic roosting cover identified by Texas Tech researchers in the early 2000s. In addition, Texas A&M University will look at changes in vegetative cover over the same time (2000-2022). This research is in response to an apparent Rolling Plains Turkey Decline.

Disease Surveillance in the South Texas Wild Turkey Populations

During the 2024 wild turkey trapping season TPWD staff collected 211 serum samples and 213 blood smears for disease testing. Serum samples tested for Avian Influenza, Pullorum-Typhoid, and Mycoplasma through the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL). Of the 211 samples, only one tested positive for Mycoplasma gallisepticum & synoviae.

Blood Smear samples were provided to the Biological Science Lab at Tarleton State University to test for Reticuloendotheliosis Virus (REV) and Lymphoproliferative Disease Virus (LPDV). This is the first large sample effort to test for LPDV in Texas. Of the 213 samples, 4 were positive for REV (1.91%) and 63 or 29% were positive for LPDV. Two of the 4 REV positive birds were coinfecting with LPDV.

REGULATION CHANGES

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission recently approved a suite of new wild turkey regulations. This included closing the season in portions of several counties to support ongoing restocking efforts, reducing the season and bag limit in counties in areas with low wild turkey densities (east of Interstate Highway 35 and west of the Pecos River), removed references to subspecies in the Texas Administrative Code, and added statewide mandatory harvest reporting for all wild turkeys harvested in all counties for all seasons. These new

regulations will go into effect September 1, 2024. All hunters opting-in to the digital tagging option must report their harvested animal immediately upon collection.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

Rolling Plains Turkey Decline

There is an apparent declining wild turkey population in the Rolling Plains in Texas. Staff conducted disease and parasite surveillance in 2021 but found no significant issues. Rates of infection were low and were presented to the working group in 2021. TPWD funded a GIS assessment of landscape features in the Rolling Plains that began in fall 2022 to look for wild turkey habitat changes on the landscape that may be influence wild turkey declines. Staff have not yet discussed changing seasons or bag limits in response to the apparent decline.

HABITAT DELIVERY

Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has contacted with NWTF to deliver state hunting stamp dollars and Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration dollars to focal landscapes in east Texas. There has been an emphasis on creating open forest understory conditions using prescribed fire and midstory herbicide treatments. To date, the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture's Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network has delivered over 10,339 acres in management practices in focal landscapes totaling close to \$1,00,000 in habitat management practices.

RESTORATION

TPWD reengaged in Eastern wild turkey restoration efforts in 2014. Over the past 10 years TPWD, with the assistance of 11 states wildlife agencies and NWTF, has released 1,126 eastern wild turkeys at 13 sites in east Texas. Another 320 birds were released at 4 sites in 2007-08 during the super stocking research. In addition, TPWD released 1,214 Rio Grande wild turkeys at 12 sites along the Trinity River from just south of Dallas County to Leon County. Texas utilizes a super stocking approach to these restoration efforts releasing 80-100 birds per site at a ratio of 1 male per 3 females. Restoration efforts are focused on three priority landscapes (PA): The Neches River PA following the Neches River from Lake Palestine south to the Angelina National Forest; the Trinity River PA from just south of Dallas County south to Walker and Grimes Counties; and the Sulphur River PA following the Sulphur River, White Oak Creek and Cypress Creek watersheds across all or portions of Bowie, Camp, Cass, Delta, Franklin, Hopkins, Morris, Red River and Titus Counties.

During the winter of 2023 TPWD staff released 174 Rio Grande wild turkeys in Ellis, Freestone, Leon, Milam, and Williamson Counties. Rio Grande wild turkeys were trapped in Atascosa, Duval, Frio, Williamson, and Zavalla Counties. Staff released another 09 eastern wild turkeys from South Dakota at a release site in Hopkins Counties.

EVOLVING ISSUES

Digital Tags and Statewide Mandatory Harvest Reporting

RELEVANT LINKS

[Texas Hunting Accident Report \(2002-2022\)](#)

[Texas Hunting Regulations](#)

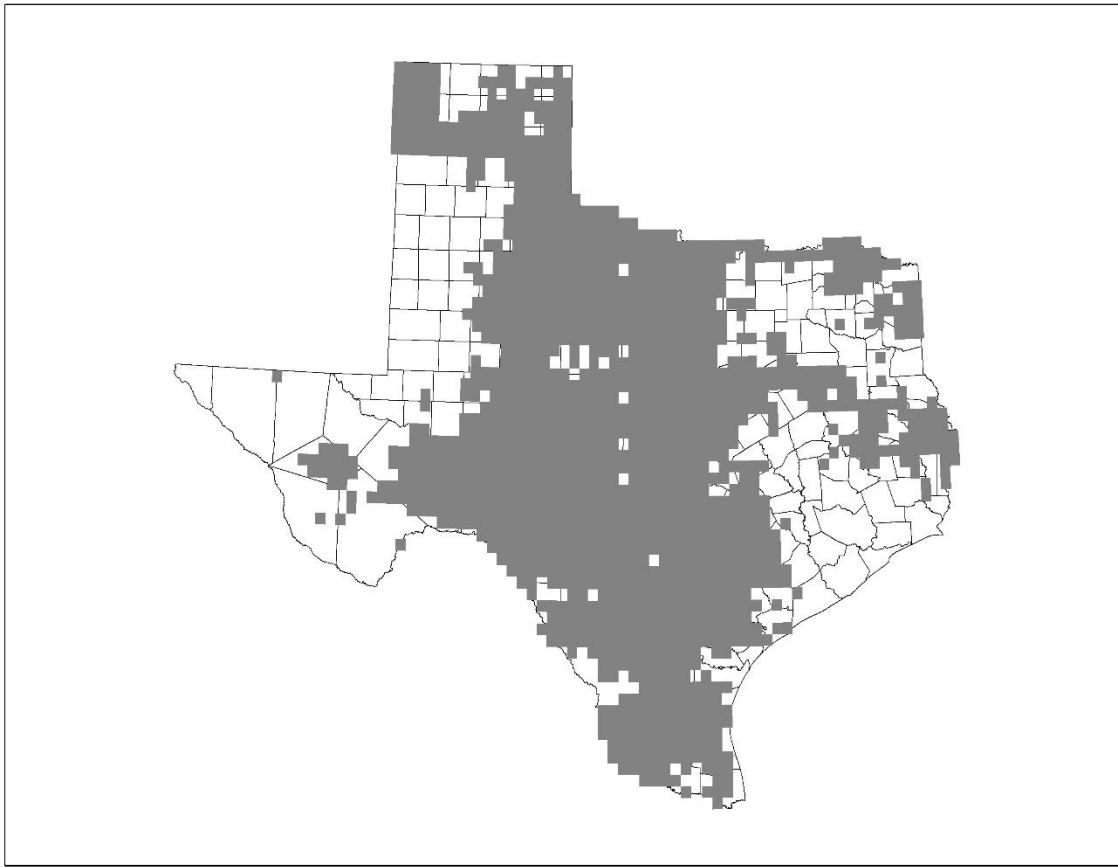


Figure 1. Texas wild turkey distribution.

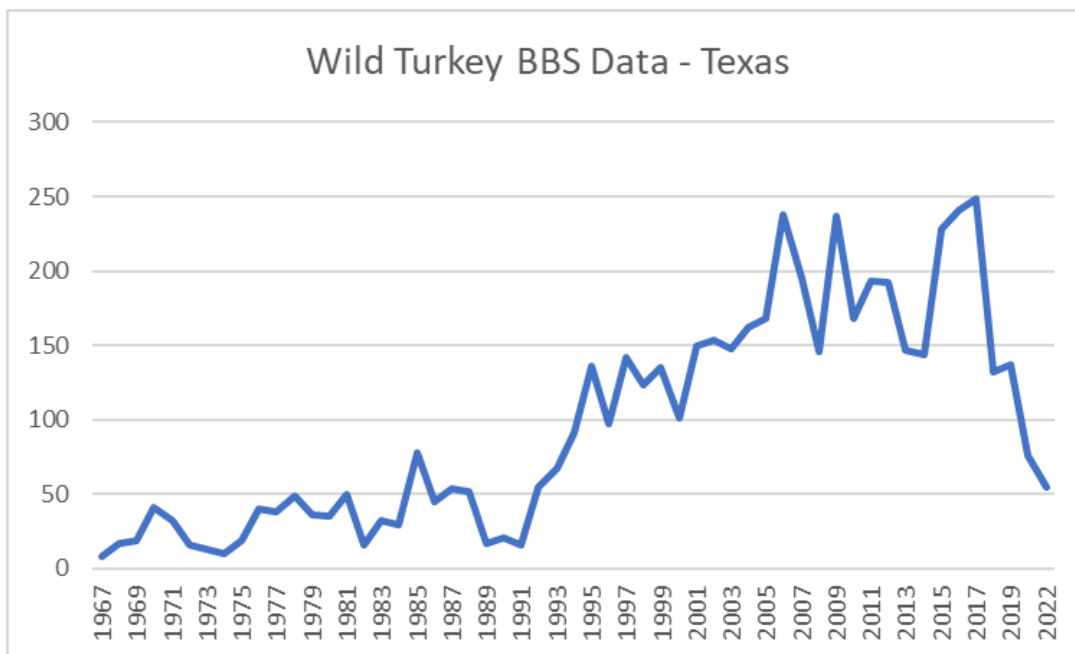


Figure 2. Breed bird survey trends for wild turkeys in Texas (1966-2021).

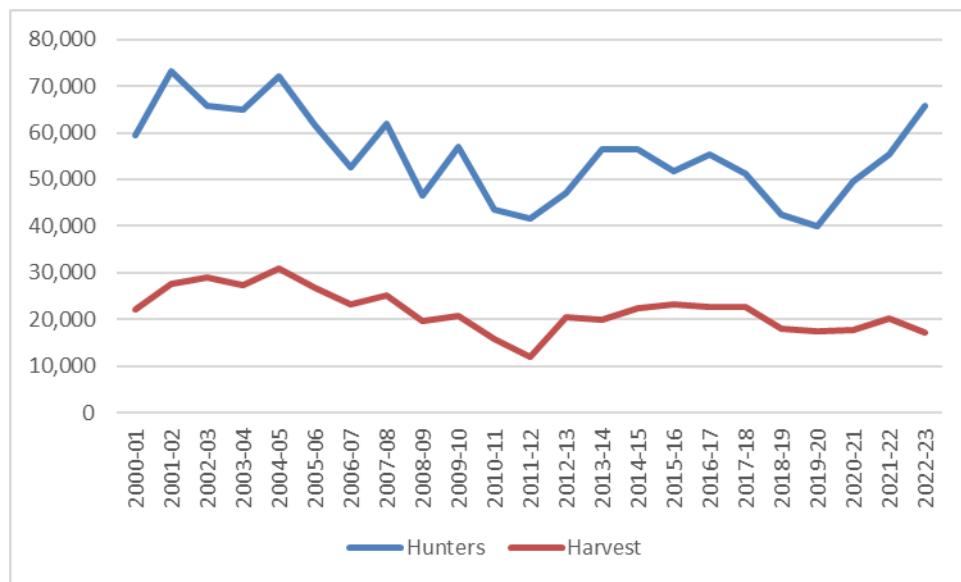


Figure 3. Spring turkey hunters and harvest as determined by TPWD's Small Game Harvest Survey.

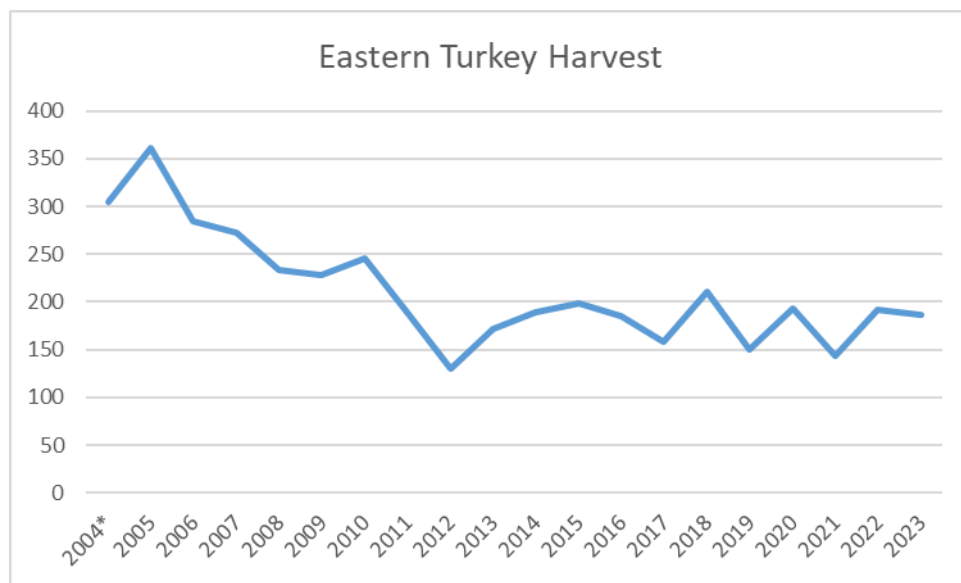


Figure 4. Eastern wild turkey harvest.

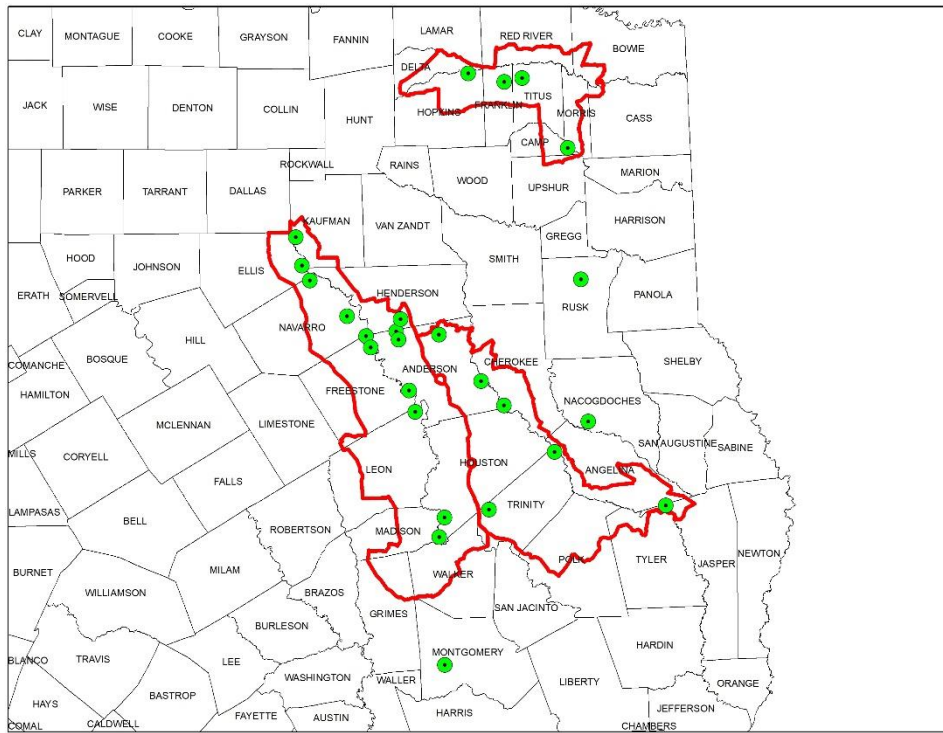


Figure 6. Super Stocking from 2007 to 2024.

2023 UTAH WILD TURKEY STATUS REPORT

Heather Talley, Upland Game Coordinator

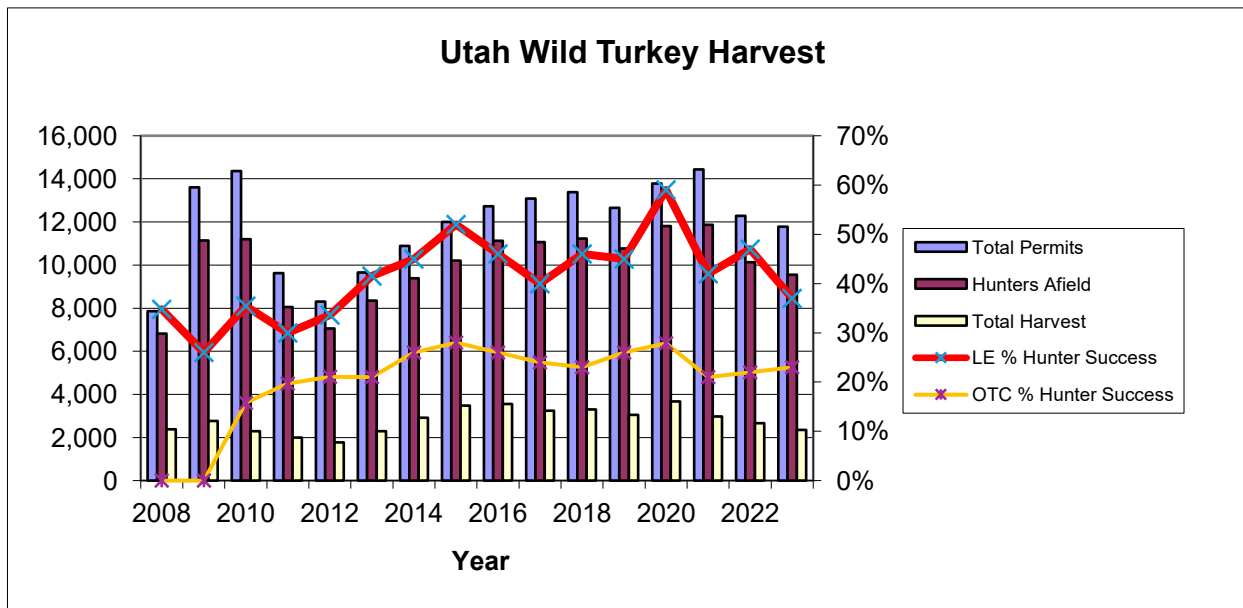


Population Status:

Utah is host to both Rio Grande and Merriam's turkeys — most of the population

resembles Rios, but substantial hybridization between subspecies exists. Population estimates are not formally calculated, but assuming ~10% of the population is harvested during the spring hunts there are approximately 23,450 wild turkeys in Utah.

Harvest trends have been steadily increasing with expanding populations until recently. Statewide turkey populations have declined likely due to drought impacts — less water, vegetation, and insects may have impacted recruitment in the last few years, until the winter of 2022/2023, which produced more snowfall than previous year; dating back to the 80s. This likely resulted in some winter loss in some areas, though supplemental feeding was provided in appropriate locations. Since the following spring and summer provided more mesic areas than usual, production increased though the number of adults had declined. Contrastingly, the winter of 2023/2024 was mild and still provided moisture, creating another spring conducive to high production. We anticipate a population increase this year.



Hunt History

Fall: A fall either-sex hunt was opened in the fall of 2014 (293 permits), permits were expanded to 700 in 2015, 1178 in 2016, 885 in 2017, and 3455 in 2018. In 2019 unlimited permits were available in limited areas in the state for private lands only resulting in 6,167 permits sold, 7,710 in 2020, 4,619 in 2021, and 3,610 in 2022 (this is the only year individuals were limited to one permit per person in the fall). In 2023, permits were reduced and a total of 2,625 permits were purchased.

Spring: The first spring hunt opened in 1967, closed in 1970, then resumed in 1971. Populations remained at a relatively low level until the mid-1980's when populations begin to consistently increase. Through 2007 Rios and Merriam's were managed separately, but as populations increased and subspecies hybridized management was combined.

Season Framework

Hunter requirements:

Required to have passes hunter education if born after Dec 31, 1965. There is no minimum age.

Fall season structure:

Permit numbers are determined by region (five regions exist; though the Northeastern Region does not implement a fall hunt). Within four of the regions, there are hunt areas designed to reduce populations where there are significant human-turkey conflicts. Permits can be purchased over the counter until the permit quota for an area is reached. The hunt is either-sex (though permits are now restricted to two beardless and one either-sex permit per individual — implemented for the first time this fall), and legal weapon include shotgun, rimfire, or airgun (implemented for the first time this fall). Season dates can be set annually within an Oct 1 to Feb 28 time frame. In 2023-2024, season dates were set at Oct 2 – Feb 28 (since Oct. 1 is a Sunday and Utah has a state law that prohibits opening a hunt on a Sunday). The fall season dates are chosen by June 1 each year.

Spring season structure:

Limited Entry: Permit numbers are determined individually for each of the five UDWR regions, and hunt areas include the entire region. Permit numbers aim to harvest 10% of the overall population in the spring with 30% of the spring harvest occurring during the LE hunt. Permit numbers are set annually and take winter conditions, hunter crowding, habitat accessibility, and other factors into account. The spring LE hunt is bearded-only, shotgun or bow. Season dates are April 12-24, 2025. Fifteen percent of LE permits are reserved for youth. If the youth does not harvest during the LE hunt, they may continue to hunt through the youth and general season hunts.

Youth Hunt: The youth hunt is statewide, excluding closed areas and Native American trust lands. The season dates are April 25-April 27, 2025, but if a youth does not harvest during this hunt, they may continue to hunt through the general season.

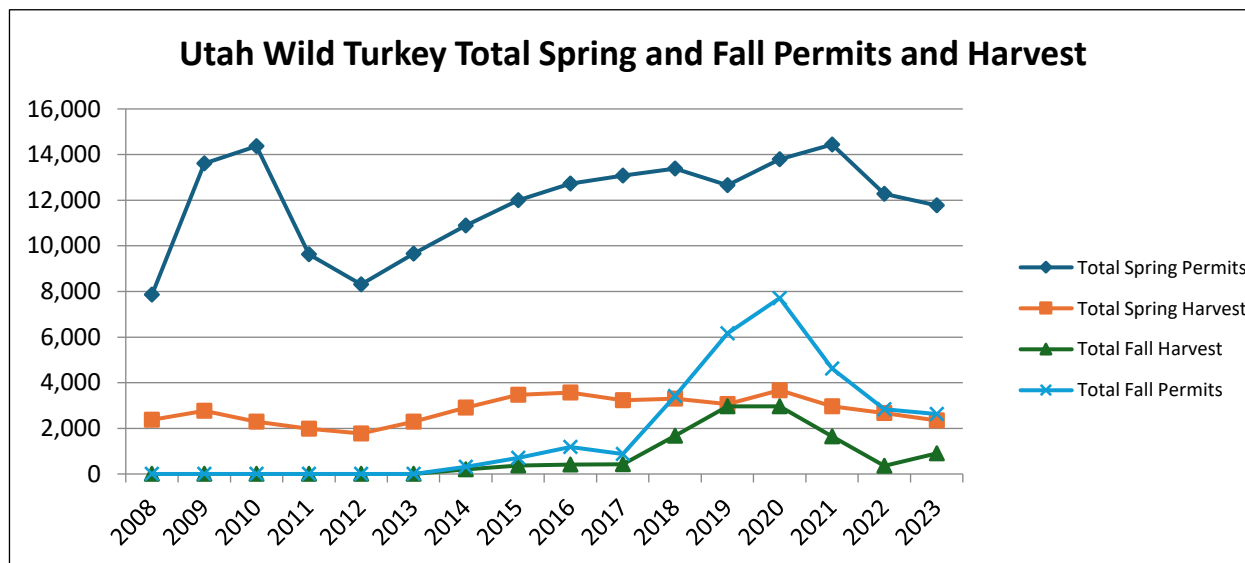
General Season: This is a statewide hunt, excluding closed areas and Native American trust lands. The spring general season is unlimited over the counter. The spring GS hunt is bearded-only, shotgun or bow. Season dates are April 28 – May 31, 2025.

Bag limits: 1 turkey per permit. A hunter is limited to three permits for fall (starting in 2023: one either-sex and two beardless) and one bearded turkey for the spring.

Shooting hours: 30 minutes before official sunrise to 30 minutes after official sunset.

Harvest Data

Harvest data is collected annually via an online and phone harvest survey. The harvest survey provides estimates of total hunters, total harvest, days afield, and success. There has been a long term upward trend in turkey numbers, hunters and harvest.



Nuisance or Depredation

In 2013 legislation was passed that guides management of turkeys causing damage. Utah developed depredation/nuisance guidelines to help facilitate the appropriate response to resolving turkey problems that may arise. Utah has a Turkey Depredation Rule that spells out how depredating (causing visible, persistent, and detrimental impacts to private property) turkeys will be handled. Educational brochures have also been developed to assist landowners that experience turkey-related issues. Nuisance complaints are dealt with by removing and relocating, targeted for fall hunts, awarding landowner permits to target problem turkeys, education, habitat projects and other means.

Translocations

Utah traps and translocates nuisance turkeys to areas of unoccupied habitat or to supplement existing populations. Over the 2017-2018 2154 turkeys were moved within the state and 85 were given to Nevada. In 2018-2019, 2,154 turkeys were translocated within Utah; in 2019-2020, 1,143 turkeys were moved, in 2020-2021, 1,443 turkeys were relocated, in 2021-2022 season, 722 turkeys were moved within the state, in 2022-2023, 1,258 turkeys were translocated, and in 2023-2024, 908 turkeys were translocated.

Research Activities

The research project entitled “The effect of riparian habitat restoration on Rio Grande Turkey habitat use and recruitment in the Central Utah Forests habitat zone” has concluded. The study was implemented to study Rio Grande wild turkeys in the Escalante River watershed to acquire information on nesting habitat, recruitment, and winter habitat use, particularly in response to Russian olive removal. The information is updated here: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5mq4673m>

In 2020 and 2021, GPS transmitters that upload to Argos satellites were deployed. Two of those radios are still functioning on live birds and 7 were redeployed this year after being recovered. Currently deployed Argos enabled GPS transmitters include (need manual updating):

Turkey ID	Date Deployed	Age	Sex	Weight	Capture Location	Last Signal
NR - Pilot Mts 3	2/4/2021	A	F	6.2	Paradise	3/23/2021
NR - Pilot Mts 1	2/4/2021	A	F	6.2	Paradise	8/18/2021
NR - Pilot Mts 7	2/2/2021	A	F	6.8	Paradise	8/18/2021
NR - Pilot Mts 4	2/4/2021	A	F	6	Avon	4/8/2021
NR - Pilot Mts 2	2/4/2021	J	F	6	Avon	5/18/2021
NR - Pilot Mts 5	2/4/2021	F	F	5.3	Avon	3/31/2021
NR- Pilot Mts 6	2/4/2021	A	F	6	Avon	8/18/2021
CR - Davenport 4	1/6/2020	J	F	7.2	Mendon	1/16/2022
CR - Davenport 1	1/3/2020	J	F	6.2	Paradise	11/2/2021

In the winter of 2020-2021 turkey captures and translocations focused on areas in which wild turkeys caused nuisance/depredation complaints. Regional staff had questions on the behavior of individual flocks and radios employed, both to understand movements of the populations generating complaints in the winter, and survival and movements in release areas. To answer these questions GPS logging backpacks were deployed. These store-on-board GPS transmitters have a VHF (very high frequency) signal to locate them in the field and then can be downloaded to a laptop via a UHF (ultra high frequency) antenna.

Specifically, transmitters attached to turkeys released in the Corinne areas appear to have low survival, with one bird having moved to Promontory point. Birds released on Promontory have had relatively high survival and have remained in the vicinity of the release site. Birds in the Provo Bench area move substantial distances along the Wasatch front — up to 15 miles north of their winter urban home range. Transmitters attached to turkeys in the Mona bench area also showed substantial movement, and have left the monitored area. A new release site was being investigated on the Tintic Mountains, however, the data indicates that survival is low and it may not be a viable release site. Birds translocated to the Abajo Mountains showed excellent survival and have demonstrated fidelity to the release site. Birds translocated to Monroe Mountain have had mixed success but have found suitable habitat.

Release Location	Type	Number	Apparent Survival (%)
Tintic Mountains	Translocation	2	0
Mona Bench	Nuisance Population	2	No Data
Provo	Nuisance Population	2	50
Abajo Mountains	Translocation	4	100
Corinne	Translocation	4	33
Promontory	Translocation	3	66
Monroe Mountain	Translocation	3	33

The information received from these transmitters will allow us to better gauge the efficacy of translocations, via the movements of turkeys post-translocation, and their survival. This will increase the success of our translocations and ultimately the turkey population in the state.

Utah may be accepting some Rios from Texas this winter. If that's the case, we plan to deploy transmitters and will have a pilot study design, and start collecting data this year, so a research project can be implemented in 2025.

Regulation Changes (no changes occurring this year)

- In 2023, the Utah legislature has enacted H.B. 469, stating that rabbit, hare, and turkeys (in the fall season only) can be legally harvested with a pre-charged pneumatic air rifle that fires a single projectile with compressed air released from a chamber that is built into the rifle, pressurized at a minimum of 2,000 pounds per square inch from a high compression device or source, such as a hand pump, compressor, or scuba tank. The DWR recommended that the air rifle must be at least a .25 caliber, and shoot a projectile weighing 18 grains or more and produce at least 30-foot-pounds of energy at the muzzle. These recommendations were approved at the Wildlife Board meeting on June 8, 2023.
- -The DWR recommended that fall permits will be issued as two beardless permits and one hunter's choice permit, to target hen harvest, which was also approved.
- The statewide turkey management plan was open in 2022-2023 for revision, and all changes were approved.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Wild Turkey Status and Trend Report STATEWIDE

SARAH GARRISON, Statewide Small Game Specialist

Introduction

Wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) were first successfully introduced in Washington in the 1960's. Attempts to establish wild turkey populations by releasing pen-raised birds from 1913 to 1959 were largely unsuccessful. The success of later releases is attributed to the ability to capture wild turkeys for translocation to Washington. Population augmentation from 1984 through 2003 expanded turkey distribution and increased hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities (WDFW, 2005). Wild turkey populations had reached a low point in the US around the 1930s, and restoration efforts took decades of dedicated work (Healy & Powell, 1999). Establishing populations in Washington was seen as an achievement for this iconic North American species.

Three subspecies of wild turkeys occur in Washington. These occur in varied habitats across their native ranges, but commonalities include mature trees for roosting and mast production near open understory for grass and herbaceous forage (Porter, 1992). Turkeys will use open fields and cropland when roost trees are available nearby, while shrubby habitat can also provide important brood cover and forage (Porter, 1992). The Eastern subspecies (*M. g. silvestris*) persists in low densities in southwestern Washington. This subspecies was sourced from Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Missouri, where oak-hickory and other hardwood forests with abundant hard mast are dominant. The Rio Grande subspecies (*M. g. intermedia*) in Washington was sourced from Texas and now occurs throughout southeastern Washington. In its native range, the Rio Grande turkey occupies plains grasslands, shinnery, prairie, oak-hickory, oak-pine, pinon-juniper, Texas savannah, and shrubsteppe forest from Mexico to Kansas (Beason & Wilson, 1992). The Merriam's subspecies (*M. g. merriami*) is the most abundant in Washington and occurs in the northeastern and central part of the state. Merriam's turkeys are native to mountainous areas of Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona, where they are closely associated with Ponderosa Pine but will also use mixed conifer forests (Shaw & Mollohan, 1992). Some hybridization likely occurs between the Rio Grande and Merriam's subspecies where their ranges overlap.

Management Guidelines and Objectives

In January 2006, the Department adopted a statewide [Turkey Management Plan](#) (WDFW, 2005) to supplement the Game Management Plan in response to increasing turkey populations and management topics. Population management strategies from this plan were included and updated in the 2015-2021 [Game Management Plan](#) (WDFW, 2014). The statewide management goals for wild turkeys are to:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage wild turkeys and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Manage wild turkeys for various recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, wildlife viewing, cultural and ceremonial uses by Native Americans, and photography.
3. Manage statewide wild turkey populations for a sustained harvest.

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This report is a subset of the 2023 Game Status and Trend Report. For the full report, see

wdfw.wa.gov/publications/02474.

Wild Turkey Status and Trend Report 2023

Hunting Seasons and Recreational Harvest

Hunter effort and harvest of wild turkeys are estimated based on the analysis of mandatory hunter reports. Hunters owe reports on all turkey tags, including tags they did not use. Successful hunters are required to submit the date, location, and sex of harvested birds. This mandatory reporting system has allowed for better estimates of harvest and hunter participation than estimates made prior to the reporting requirement.

Within Washington State, Game Management Units (GMUs) have been grouped to define seven turkey Population Management Units (PMUs, Table 1, Figure 1). Changes in harvest have been tracked at the statewide and PMU level as indicators of population trends. Improvements were made to the turkey harvest data analysis routine in 2011 and 2016, which could account for some variations in estimates and should be considered when comparing data across years.

Table 1. Game Management Units (GMUs) included in each Population Management Unit (PMU). PMU PMU Name GMUs Included

PMU	PMU Name	GMUs Included
10	Northeast	101-136
15	Southeast	139-186
20	North Central	All 200 GMUs
30	South Central	All 300 GMUs EXCEPT GMU 382 & 388
35	Klickitat	GMUs 382, 388, 568-578
40	Northwest	All 400 GMUs PLUS GMUs 601-627
50	Southwest	All 500 GMUs EXCEPT 568-578 PLUS GMUs 633-699

The statewide spring general season from April 15 to May 31 has been in place since 2008.

Beginning in 2022, the youth season that precedes the general season was lengthened from 2 to 7 days. The spring season is for male turkeys and turkeys with visible beards only. The spring season limit is three birds, with some area restrictions.

Fall opportunities have varied and were generally expanded over the years. In 2018, the fall general season in GMUs 101-154 and 162-186 expanded to run continuously from September 1 to December 31. Also, that year, the permit hunt in Klickitat County changed to a fall general season opportunity. In 2021, the Klickitat hunt lengthened to match the September 1 to December 31 general season, along with the entire North Central unit (PMU20). This eliminated the Methow fall permit hunt since the area became open to general season hunting. The fall seasons allow harvest of either sex with a bag limit of four birds with some area restrictions as outlined in the WDFW hunting regulations pamphlets.

One permit hunt, the Teanaway, was available in fall 2022. This hunt offered 50 permits in Kittitas County, GMU 335, and allowed harvest of either sex with a bag limit of one bird.

Turkey hunting is open to shotgun, archery, and crossbow hunting during the spring and fall seasons. Beginning in 2022, handguns that meet specific requirements may be used for turkey hunting. Handguns must be legal modern handguns designed for hunting, shooting #4 or smaller

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Wild Turkey Status and Trend Report 2023

shot, and not capable of holding more than three shells. Handgun barrel length must be a minimum of 10 inches, inclusive of choke tube. Modern handguns must shoot a minimum three-inch

shotshell of .410 caliber or larger. Similarly, legal muzzleloading handguns may be used if they are designed for hunting and shooting #4 or smaller shot. Muzzleloading handgun barrel length must be a minimum of 10 inches. Muzzleloading handguns must be .45 caliber or larger. Dogs, baiting, electronic decoys, and electronic calls are not legal in Washington; non-electronic decoys are permitted. In 2006, the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a regulation permitting falconers to hunt turkeys during the fall and winter.

Current regulations are considered relatively conservative. The spring season timing results in the harvest of gobblers after peak breeding. The season ends before most nests hatch, so disturbance is minimized. Fall seasons have been expanded in certain areas to increase hunting pressure in response to increased complaints regarding turkey damage and human-wildlife conflict.

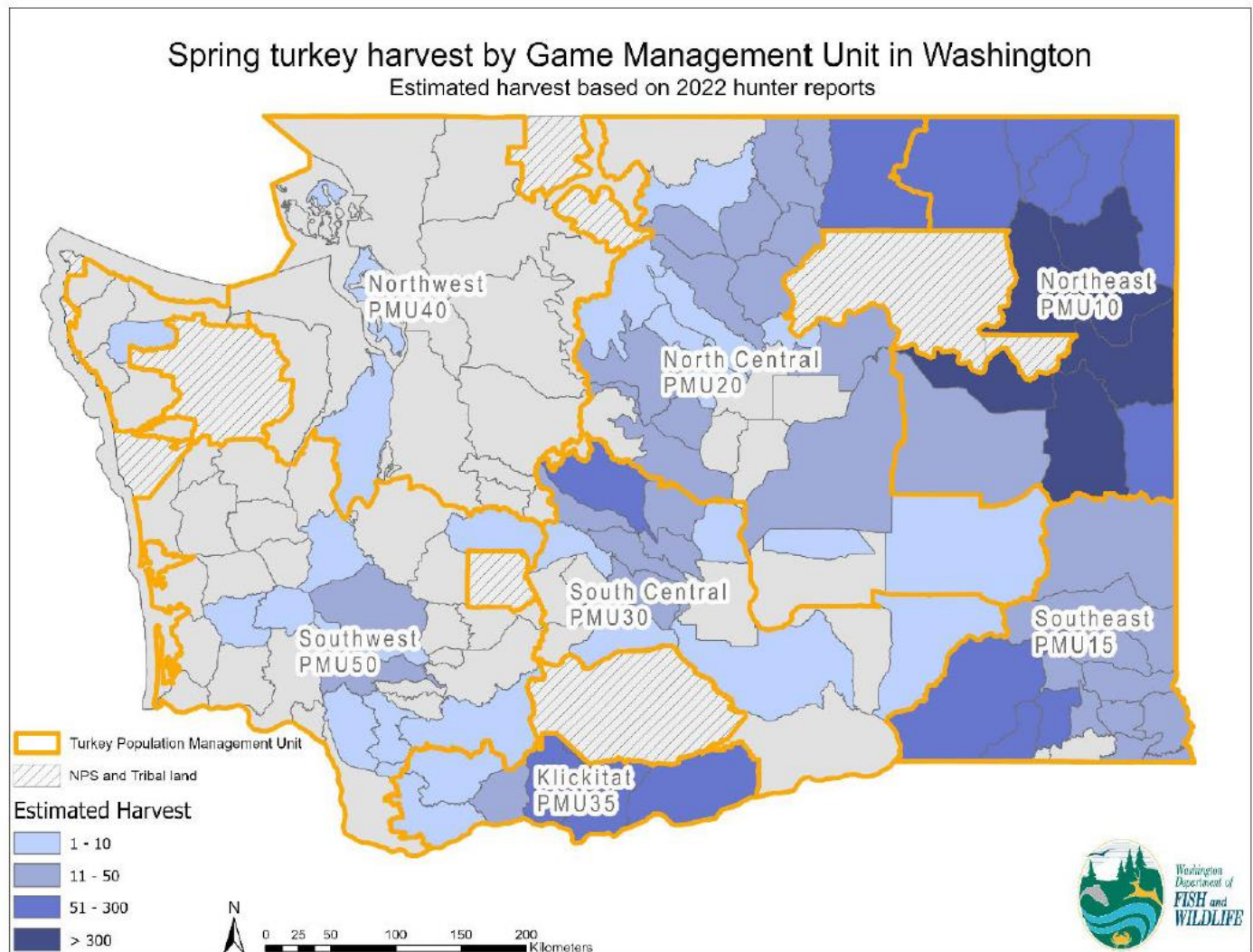


Figure 1. Estimated spring turkey harvest in each Game Management Unit based on 2022 hunter reports.

Statewide participation in spring turkey hunting averaged 11,445 hunters over the past ten years (2012-2021, Figure 2). In 2022, participation decreased 11% from 2021 to an estimated 13,812 hunters, which is 21% above the previous 10-year average. Estimated harvest also remains above average in 2022 at 6,460 birds. In 2022, harvest decreased 13% from the previous year, which is 32% above the previous 10-year average of 4,891.

Depredation on agricultural lands caused by turkeys and conflicts with humans remains a concern in parts of eastern Washington. Liberal fall general seasons are in place here and have recently expanded to help address these issues. This change in season length and extent should be considered when examining trends in fall harvest data. Participation in fall turkey hunting has increased over the past decade (Figure 3). In 2022, an estimated 4,930 hunters pursued turkey in the fall, taking an estimated 2,626 birds. Hunter participation decreased 10% from the previous year but remains 25% above the 10-year average of 3,953 hunters. Fall harvest in 2022 decreased by 4% from 2021 and remains 27% above the previous 10-year average of 2,066 birds.

The majority of spring turkey hunting activity occurs in the northeast (PMU 1-; Figure 4, Table 2). In 2022, spring harvest in this PMU represented 55% of the total statewide spring harvest. The remaining hunting activity is largely distributed throughout eastern Washington, with little hunting in western Washington (PMU 40 and 50) where turkey populations are less robust.

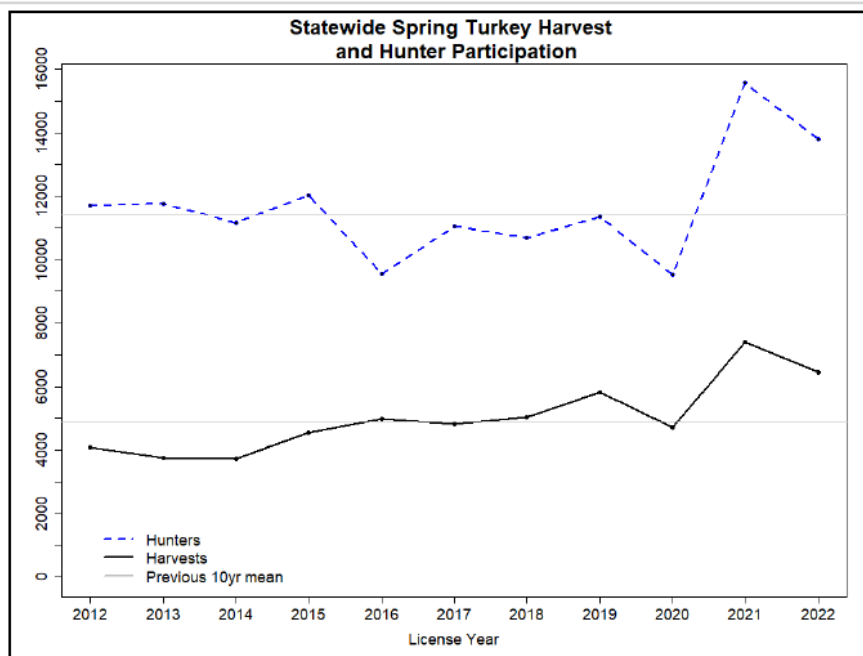


Figure 2. Estimated statewide spring turkey harvest and hunter participation, 2012-2022, with means from the 10 preceding years (2012-2021).

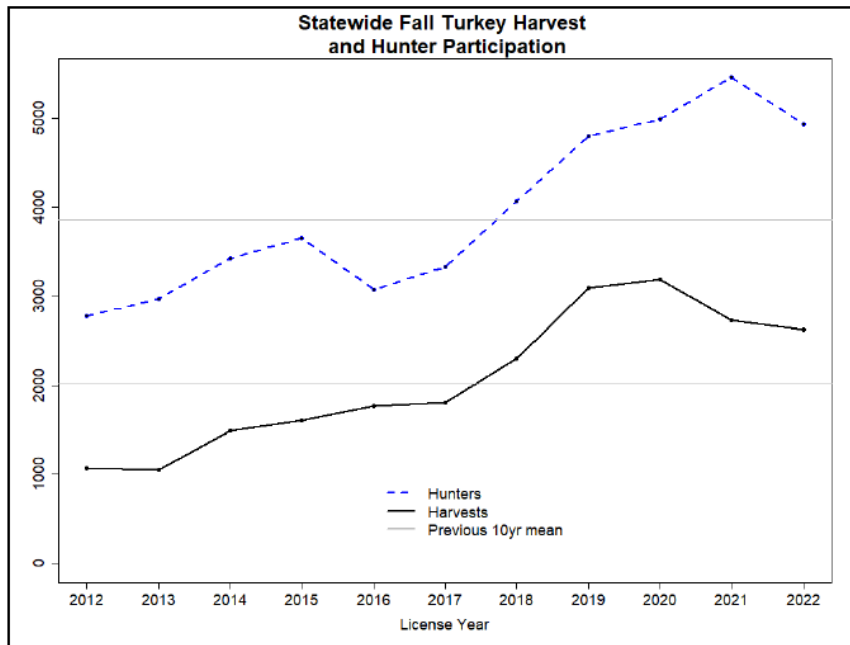


Figure 3. Estimated fall turkey harvest and hunter participation, 2012-2022, with means from the 10 preceding years (2012-2021).

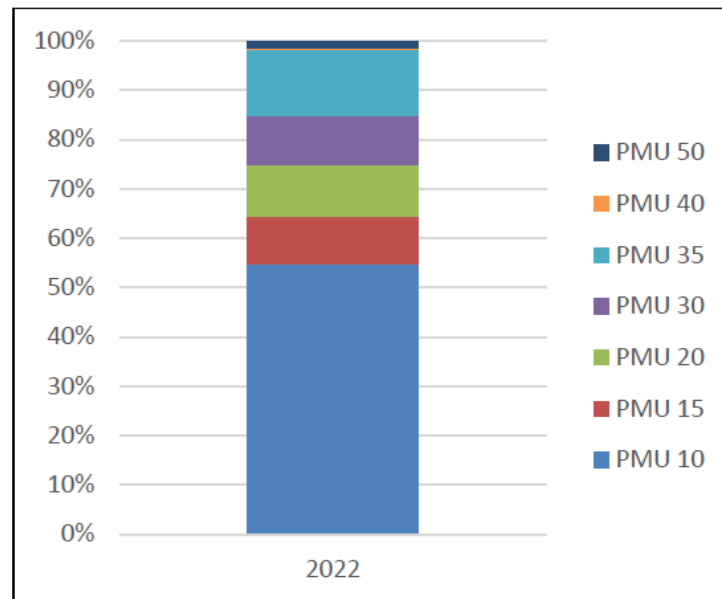


Figure 4. Proportion of days hunted in each Population Management Unit (PMU) out of the total number of days hunted statewide in the 2022 spring season.

Table 2. Estimated spring turkey harvest in each turkey Population Management Unit (PMU), 2012-2022.

PMU	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
P10	2,512	2,400	2,461	3,097	3,421	3,331	3453	3847	3177	5006	4540
P15	642	533	500	531	590	499	563	643	461	673	615
P20	203	188	181	260	270	331	326	480	427	641	448
P30	162	143	137	157	208	175	172	186	156	305	214
P35	514	474	436	475	461	417	456	598	461	729	594
P40	5	5	1	3	2	5	23	12	0	14	13
P50	30	25	25	38	28	56	25	39	24	51	40

Population Monitoring

Harvest and hunter-effort data are used as an index to population trends. Standardizing harvest estimates by the amount of hunter effort expended to achieve that level of harvest can provide some indication of whether populations are increasing, decreasing, or stable.

Over the past decade (2012-2021), hunter success averaged 43% during the spring season (Figure 5). In 2022, spring hunter success remained well above this average, despite continuing a slight decrease since 2019 to 47%. The fall season averaged 51% over the same 10-year period. In 2022, fall success was 53%.

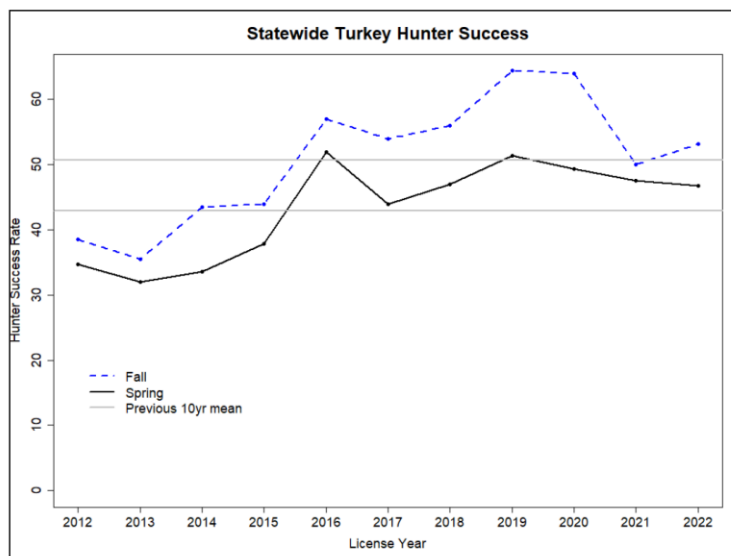


Figure 5. Hunter success rate (harvests per 100 hunters) for the spring and fall seasons, 2012-2022, with means from the previous 10 years (2012-2022).

Within each PMU, the number of days hunted per harvest is variable, but all units show a stable or decreasing trend, indicating that populations at the PMU level are stable to increasing, with the exception of northwestern Washington (PMU 40; Figure 6). Very little hunting activity occurs in this unit, so small sample sizes make any assessment of trends difficult.

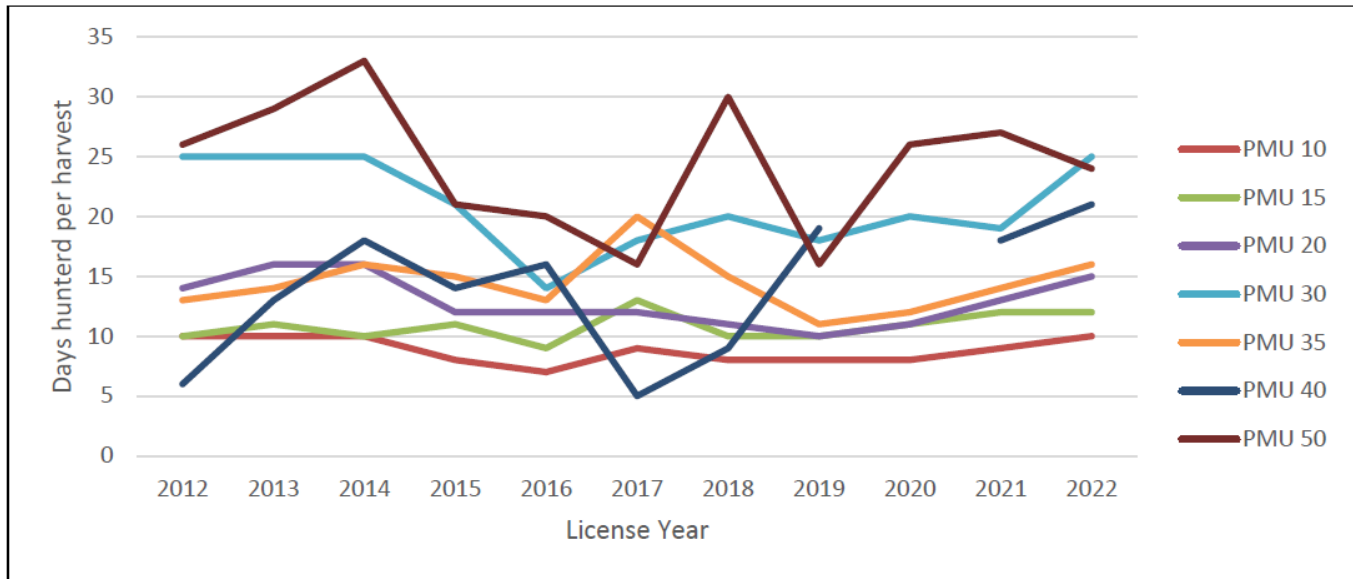


Figure 6. Number of days hunted per successful harvest during the spring season in each Population Management Unit (PMU), 2012-2022.

In 2022, WDFW initiated public brood surveys for wild turkey (wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/game-bird-survey) following a protocol developed by the National Wild Turkey Federation Technical Committee (2019)[1]. These data provide an index to turkey population productivity that is independent of harvest data. Technical committee members Reina Tyl and Zak Danks conducted data analysis for each participating state. Of 373 turkey observations submitted during July and August of 2022 in Washington, 269 observations met the criteria for analysis, representing 2,312 turkeys. The majority of observations came from the northeast PMU 10. The statewide male:female ratio was 0.27. Estimates of poults per hen (2.77), poults per brood (3.61), and the proportion of hens observed with a brood (77%) indicate a stable population. Maintaining participation in the brood survey will be important to continue this monitoring in future years and to assess population trends. Increased participation will be necessary to assess population trends for each PMU.

Spring of 2021 was unusually warm and dry, leading to a record-breaking heat wave in June that may have impacted brood survival. This was followed by an extended drought season that likely limited forage throughout the summer. Conversely, the spring of 2022 was unusually wet and cool, which may have been detrimental to hatching poults but led to improved forage production throughout the season. Despite these extreme weather conditions, turkey populations in Washington appear robust and largely unimpacted at the population level.

WDFW is seeking additional cost-effective methods for monitoring turkey and other upland species. In 2023, WDFW funded a research project with the University of Idaho Drone Lab to

assess the use of drones for detecting and identifying pheasants and turkeys. Both thermal imagery and regular (Red Green Blue) imagery are being assessed. Research is ongoing and results should be available in 2024.

Habitat

Turkeys are generalist species that can occupy diverse habitats (see Introduction) and utilize a wide variety of food sources. Grasses, including cultivated varieties, and mast such as acorns, pine seeds, and berries are especially important (Evans-Peters, 2013). Habitat enhancement priorities are identified in the 2015-2021 Game Management Plan (WDFW, 2014). Projects that increase habitat values for multiple wildlife species, in addition to turkeys, are of special interest. In 2021, WDFW began offering annual habitat funding for turkey habitat enhancement projects in addition to funding already provided through other programs like the Private Lands Access Program (see the Private Lands Access Program chapter in this report for more information). During the 2022-2023 funding cycle, WDFW invested \$50,000 in these supplemental habitat projects, including collaborating with the National Wild Turkey Federation to continue support for the Middle Wind Habitat Improvement Project on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. This project will aid in the thinning of approximately 120 acres of overstocked Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) stands and assist in funding of seed spreading within disturbed sites in the project area. Improving habitat for Merriam's turkey in this area is intended to help draw turkeys onto public land and decrease their use of private lands. Other projects included seeding forbs and planting trees in an area of Whitman County impacted by the Babb Road fire and seeding forbs and planting cottonwood trees in a riparian area of Walla Walla County.

Population Augmentation

There were no new releases of turkeys in any PMU across the state, and none are planned in the future. Turkeys are present in most of the areas that would be considered suitable habitat. Concerns related to human-wildlife conflict have precluded introductions in the recent past. WDFW management plans identify trapping and translocation as a potential response to damage and complaints, but in these cases, turkeys are only being moved to areas where turkey populations of the same subspecies already exist. Few translocation activities have occurred in recent years.

Management Conclusions

Turkey populations across the state appear stable to increasing, with the largest concentrations in eastern Washington. After several years of increasing hunter success, the recent decline may indicate that populations are stabilizing. It will be important to continue close monitoring to ensure increased fall seasons are not adversely impacting spring hunting opportunity. Turkey damage and complaints are being reported from eastern Washington, especially Spokane County. Additional hunting opportunities have been created in these areas to help address these complaints. WDFW will continue reviewing ways to focus hunter effort and other management tools in areas with private lands experiencing damage. Management decisions will seek to maintain high hunter success rates in the spring while also addressing human conflict issues. The Wildlife Conflict chapter in this report is provided for more information.

Determining population trends for wild turkey in western Washington is limited by available data. Wild turkeys are likely reproducing at low levels but maintaining a viable population in PMU 50. Low harvest in this area may be further limited by restricted access opportunities.

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WYOMING WILD TURKEY POPULATION STATUS REPORT, 2024

Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting: May 7-8, 2024

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POPULATION STATUS

Wyoming does not directly measure, estimate or model wild turkey numbers. Instead, spring gobbler harvest is used to index wild turkey populations (Figure 1). Following a population peak in 2009, wild turkey numbers declined dramatically, especially in the Black Hills, and bottomed out in 2014. In 2016 & 2017 overwinter and spring weather conditions favored productivity and survival, and wild turkey numbers responded and increased substantially in most parts of the State. The 2018/19 winter was moderately severe and resulted in reduced survival and reproductive success. This was followed by generally mild winters and dry, warm spring weather in 2020 and 2021, which lead to excellent poult production and annual survival. As a result, populations again increased. In 2022 and 2023 poult production returned to near average values and the winter of 2022-23 was severe in parts of Wyoming. However, most areas inhabited by wild turkeys saw normal to moderately severe winter conditions. Consequently, the response in wild turkey numbers across the state has been a bit of a mixed bag, with some areas witnessing substantial increases over the past three to four-years, while in other locations wild turkey numbers have been more stable or dropped slightly.

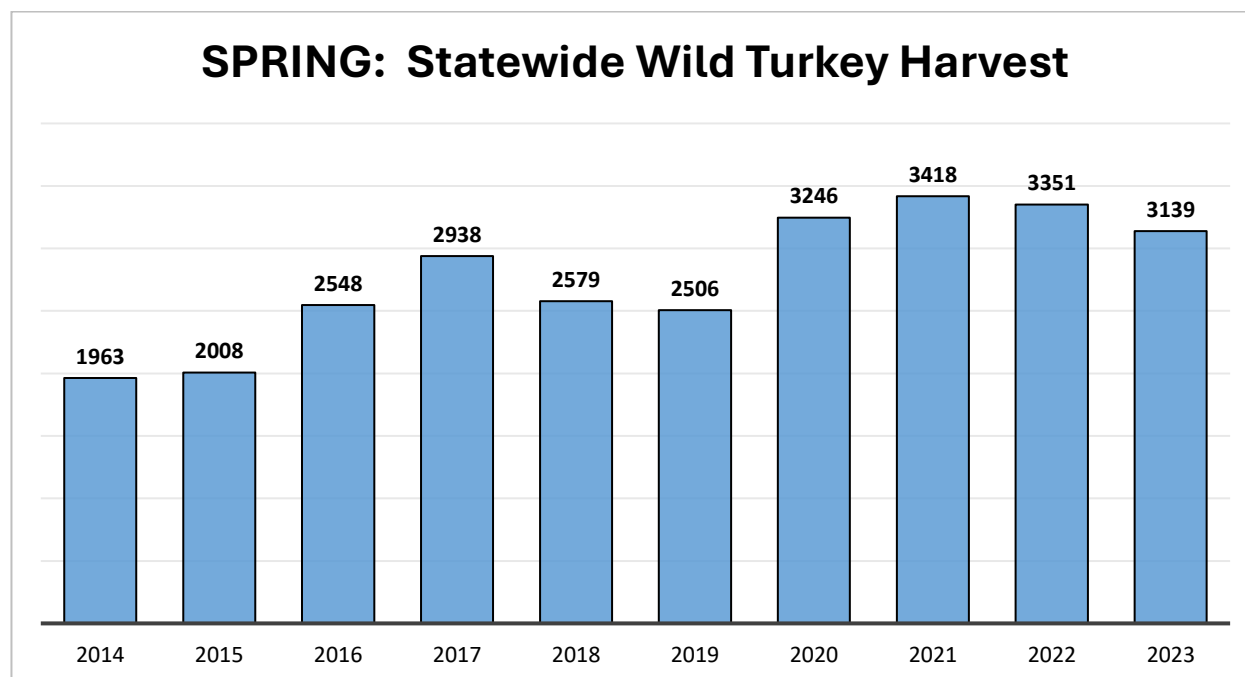


Figure 1. Wyoming Statewide Spring Gobbler Harvest.

REPRODUCTION

The Black Hills are the only area in Wyoming where regular, systematic poult surveys are conducted. Wyoming Game and Fish Dept. personnel and personnel from other State and Federal agencies count and classify by age and sex wild turkeys during the month of August. In 2020 and 2021, poult production and survival in the Black Hills were some of the highest recorded (Figure 2). In 2022 and 2023, observed poult:hen and poult:brood ratios were closer to long-term averages. The 2022 values are likely biased low due to barren hens, because yearling Merriam's hens are generally less than 30% successful at producing a brood in the Black Hills. Consequently, we have found the poult per brood ratio to be a better indicator of relative reproductive success and future harvest potential.

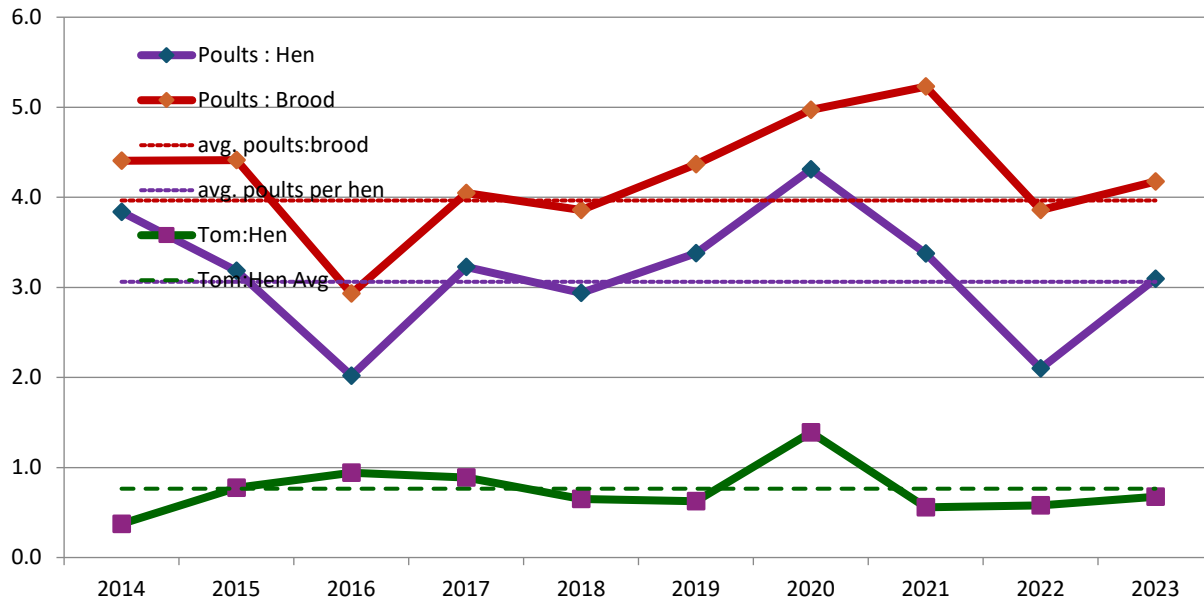


Figure 2. Wild turkey productivity and August tom:hen ratios in the Black Hills of Wyoming (2014-2023). Dashed lines represent long-term (1998 – 2023) mean values.

HARVEST

2023 Spring Turkey Season

Wild turkey numbers began to rebound in 2020 and COVID mitigation measures that year resulted in increased resident hunter participation. Spring of 2020 saw a 33% increase in resident hunter numbers from the previous 8-year average, a period during which overall resident participation did not vary widely. However, non-resident participation dropped significantly in 2020 with COVID travel restrictions, but increased to historically high numbers in 2021 (Figure 3). The combination of hunter participation responses to COVID restrictions in 2020 and 2021, along with an increasing wild turkey population, led to a peak harvest in 2021. The 2021 harvest exceeded that of 2010 when wild turkey populations were in all likelihood higher. In 2022, even with robust wild turkey populations, resident hunter participation fell back to about the mean level experienced since 2010, while non-resident hunter numbers remained high (Figure 3). This may account for the slight drop in total harvest at a time when wild turkey numbers were on the rise. It is also notable that in the Black Hills, which provide Wyoming's primary public land hunting opportunity and are responsible for over half of the State's spring harvest, non-resident hunter participation is now over 50% greater than that of residents (Figure 3a).

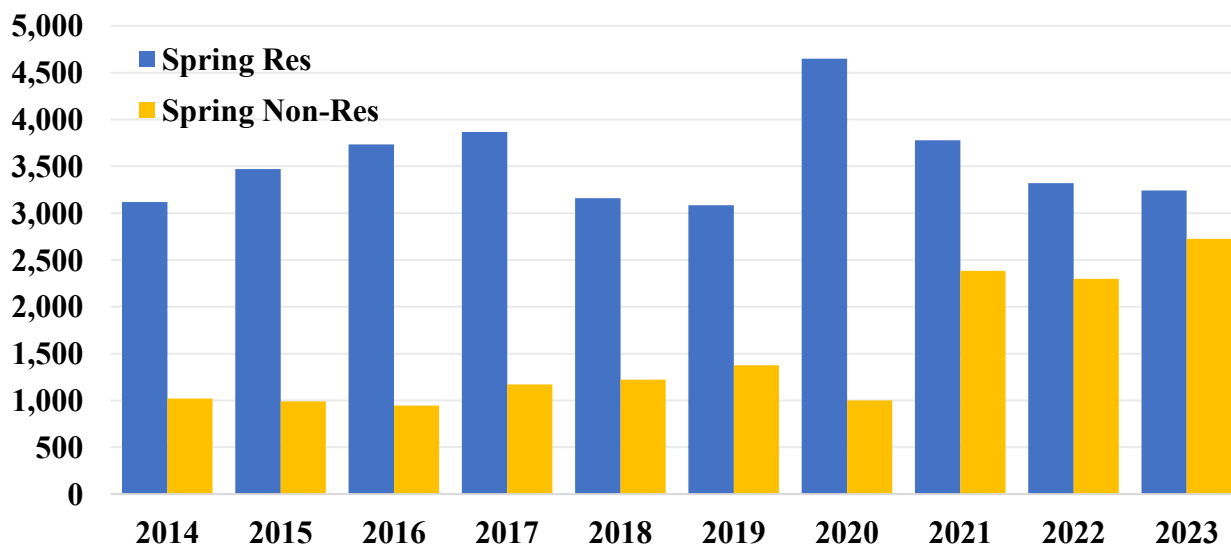


Figure 3. Wyoming Statewide Spring Wild Turkey Hunter Number by Residency

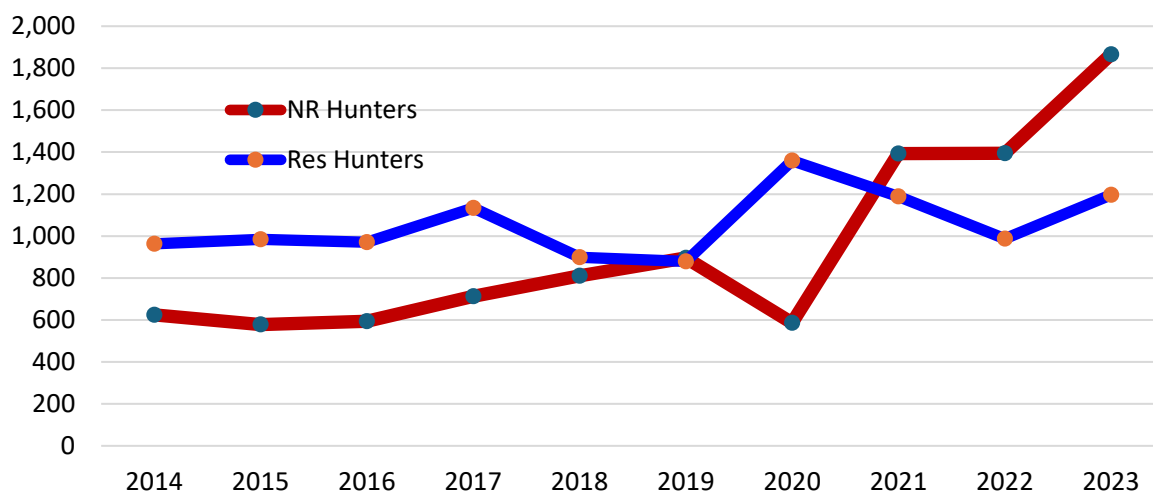


Figure 3a. Wyoming Black Hills Spring Wild Turkey Hunter Number by Residency

Total hunter success generally increased as populations of wild turkeys increased between 2014 and 2017 before dropping slightly in 2018 and again in 2019 as populations declined (Figure 4). As populations began to rebound in 2020, hunter success climbed. In 2021, nonresident success continued to increase, while success for residents declined even though by all appearances turkey numbers had increased and total harvest was up. Success continued to decline into 2023 along with total take. But again, this is in contrast the general perception that wild turkey numbers have generally held steady or increased statewide over the past two years.

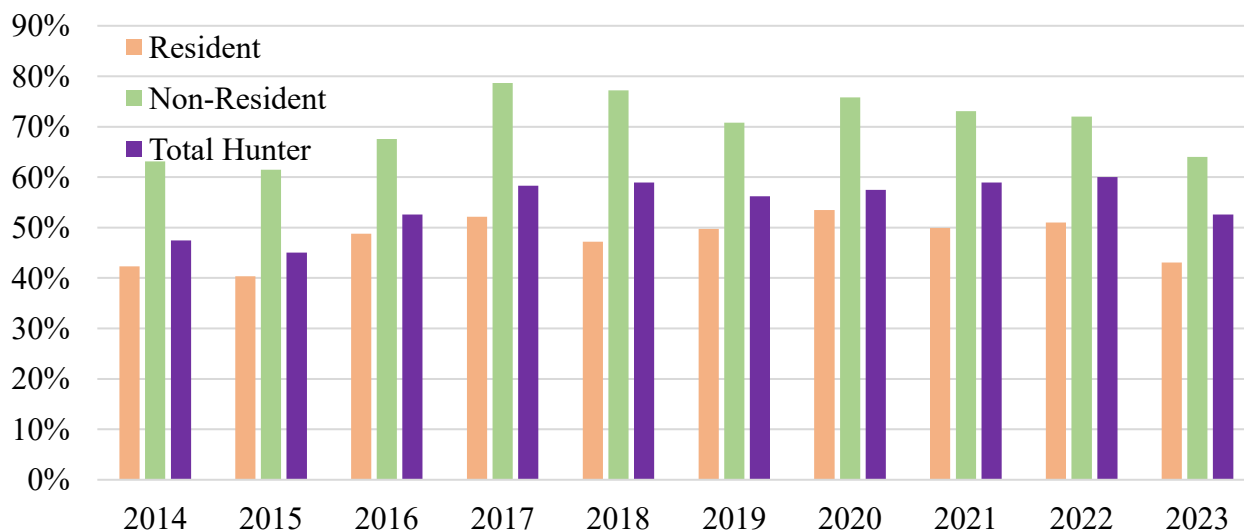


Figure 4. Wyoming, Statewide Spring Wild Turkey Hunter Success.

Spring hunter effort, as measured by days hunted per harvest (Figure 5), normally follows an inverse pattern to hunter success. Total hunter success (resident and non-resident combined) increased from 2020 through 2022 as effort declined, while in contrast total harvest dropped slightly. This suggests that while total harvest declined a bit, wild turkey numbers continued to increase between 2020 and 2022. The 2023 drop in spring harvest dovetails with the decline in success and increase in effort, and may in fact reflect an overall reduction in the statewide population of wild turkeys. However, as noted below, fall harvest steadily increased between 2021 and 2023 (Figure 7), suggesting an increasing population.

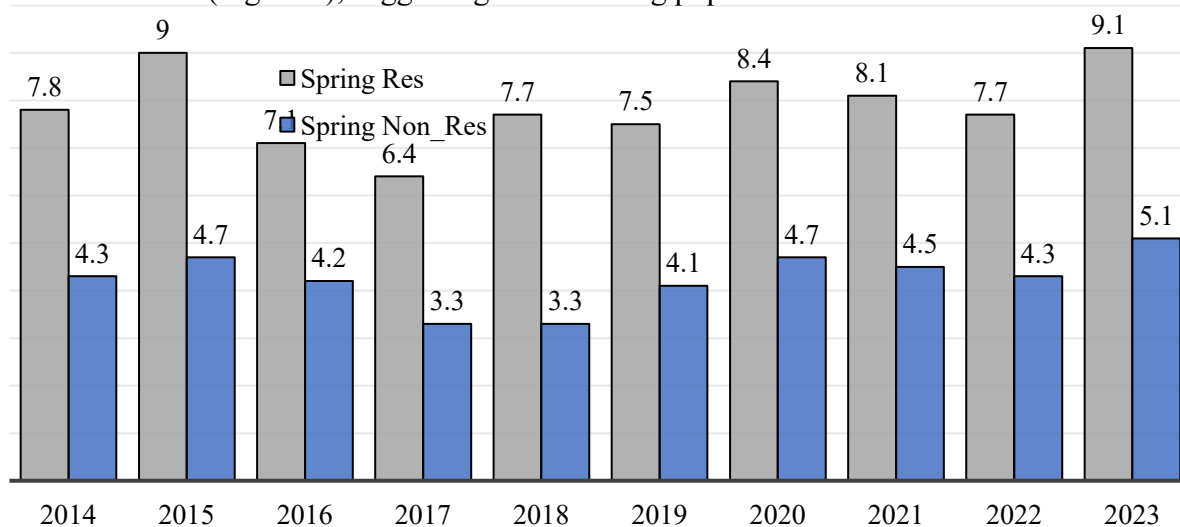


Figure 5. Wyoming, Spring Wild Turkey Hunter Effort (days per harvest) by residency.

2023 Fall Turkey Season

Between 1990 and 2010 participation in fall wild turkey hunting declined 25%, while participation in spring hunting doubled. In recent years, resident fall participation has fluctuated, but generally remained stable, while nonresident hunter numbers have increased slightly (Figure 6). However, 2023 preliminary harvest data suggests there was about a 30% - 40% increase above what has been about the average fall, resident

participation. This may be an extrapolation issue, as the fall survey was not conducted until this spring, or may just reflect hunter numbers tracking a general increase in wild turkey populations around the State.

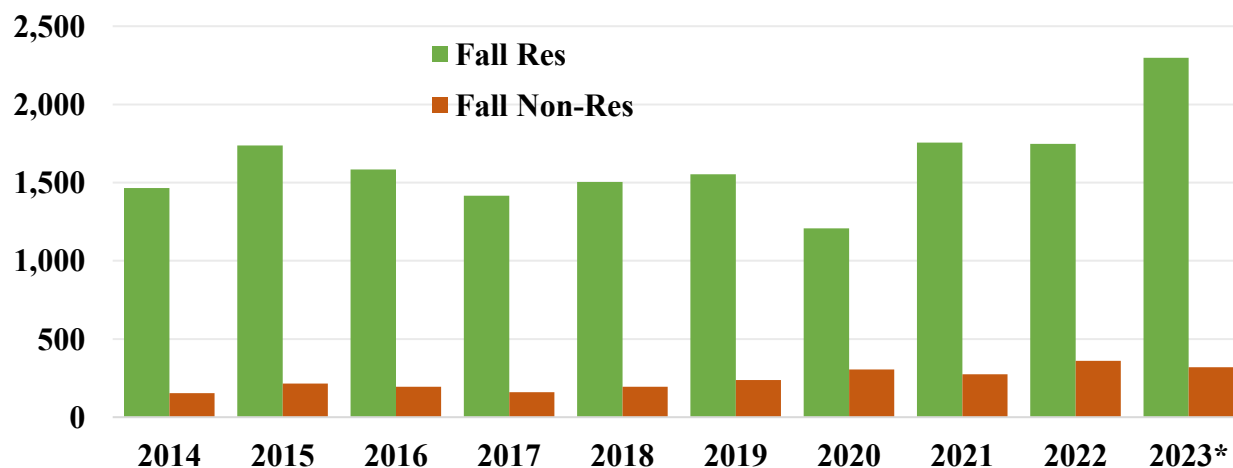


Figure 6. Fall wild turkey hunter numbers by residency (**preliminary, not final harvest data*)

Over the past decade and a half, trends in fall harvest of wild turkeys have generally mirrored those of the spring (Figure 7). However, since 2020 this has not been the case. Rather, total fall harvest follow a trend opposite that of the spring. Hunter number do tend to track bird numbers, and it may be more prudent to infer population trends taking into consideration both fall and spring harvest data since 2021. For when taken together, spring and fall harvest statistics generally paint a picture of an increasing statewide population.

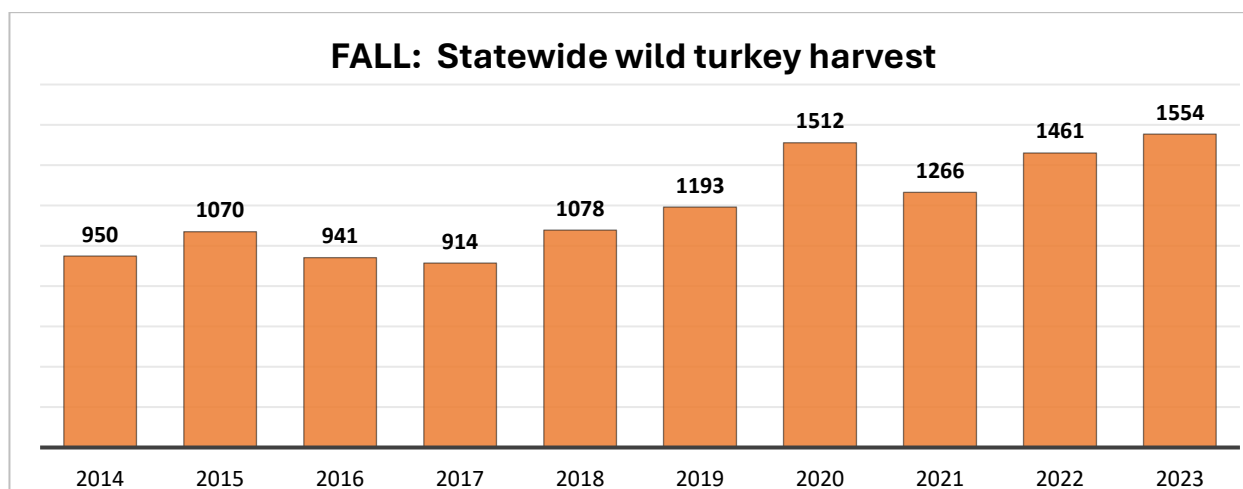


Figure 7. Total, statewide fall wild turkey harvest.

REGULATION / LEGISLATION CHANGES

To simplify wild turkey hunting regulations and group hunt areas by management strategy, the number of wild turkey hunt areas was reduced from fourteen to five in 2014. In 2021, the General License spring season opening date was standardized to April 20 in four of the five hunt areas. With this change, spring closing dates for all hunt areas were standardized to May 31. Standardization of fall hunting season dates was made in 2023, with an archery season running the month of September in four of five hunt areas, followed by the regular hunting seasons being open from Oct. 1- Dec. 31. In 2024, the decision was made to move to a single, statewide hunt area for wild turkey. With this change, fall hunting season dates were standardized to Sept. 1 – 30 for archery hunting, and Oct. 1 – Dec. 31 for the regular hunting season on all license types. Further, the spring 2025

hunting season opening date for General licenses was standardized to April 20, while the Type 3 license season was opened in some counties April 1, with the remaining counties where valid opening April 20. The spring closing date for all license types remained May 31.

With the move to a single, statewide hunt area for wild turkey, the management strategy for General License hunting now emphasizes spring gobbler hunting with limited, either sex fall hunting. With regard to managing for limited either sex fall hunting under the General License framework, there has been a significant shift in hunter participation from predominately fall to predominately spring hunting over the past forty years. Consequently, fall take of hens on General Licenses is now thought to be below the 10% level at which wild turkey populations can be negatively affected. However, to address damage and depredation complaints in some counties, a Type 3 license is issued in both the fall and spring to promote maximum combined harvest to reduce wild turkey populations in those areas.

Occupied wild turkey habitat in counties where the Type 3 license is valid consist primarily of private land, and damage complaints are common when wild turkey populations are high. Further, in most of these same counties, the spring season opens early for Type 3 licenses. The April 1 opening date being intended to negatively impact breeding when compared to the later, statewide opening date for General Licenses (April 20). The latter date being designed to allow some mating by dominate toms and provide dominate hens the opportunity to begin nest initiation before hunting begins.

In addition to the move to a single, statewide hunt area for wild turkeys along with standardization of season dates, several other changes were made to the wild turkey hunting regulation. These included: bringing the requirement for retention of evidence of sex during the spring season in line with that of big game; and the requirement of a Department issued permit to hunt wild turkeys during the spring on the Department's Yellowtail Wildlife Management to control hunter pressure and harvest on this popular WMA.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

- The Department may again be looking into going to shotgun / archery, or limited range weapon only for the spring hunt.

RELEVANT LINKS

Wyoming Game and Fish Dept. main website: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/>

Harvest Data: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/hunting-trapping/harvest-reports-surveys>

Geospatial Data: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/geospatial-data>

Hunt Planner: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Hunting/Hunt-Planner>

Regulations: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/regulations>

MISCELLANEOUS

- Trap and Translocations: This winter a total of 137 wild turkeys were trapped and translocated. All of the trapped birds came from urban or suburban areas in and around Casper, were banded with rivet leg bands, and released in a variety of occupied habitats. Several of the translocated toms have been harvested by hunters this spring.
- Lethal Removal: In 2023, three "Chapter 56" lethal removal permits were issued to take nuisance and depredating wild turkeys. Two of the permits were issued to Department personnel and one to a municipality. A total of 113 birds were harvested, and 6 wounded with no known fate. Thus far in 2024, 20 wild turkeys have been taken on renewed permits.

Appendix 1

Wyoming, Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 adopted wild turkey hunting seasons with changes

2024 Fall Season

Hunt Areas, Season Dates and Limitations.

Hunt Area	Type	Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
Opens	Closes				
1	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30		Any wild turkey, archery only
1	Gen	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey
1	3	Sept. 1	Sep. 30	750	Any wild turkey valid within Converse, Natrona, Campbell, Johnson and Sheridan Counties, archery only
1	3	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey valid within Converse, Natrona, Campbell, Johnson and Sheridan Counties
2	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30		Any wild turkey, archery only
2	Gen	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey
2	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	400	Any wild turkey valid within Converse and Natrona counties, archery only
2	3	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey valid within Converse and Natrona counties
3	Gen	Sep. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey
3	3	Sep. 1	Dec. 31	350	Any wild turkey
4	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30		Any wild turkey, archery only
4	Gen	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey
5	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30		Any wild turkey, archery only
5	Gen	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey

2025 Spring Season

Hunt Areas, Season Dates and Limitations.

Hunt Area	Type	Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
Opens	Closes				
1	Gen	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard (Hunter Management Area permission slip required to hunt on the Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area)
1	3	Apr. 1	May 31 Apr. 19	100 700	Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard valid on private land in Natrona, Campbell, Johnson, and Sheridan Counties
1	3	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard valid in Converse, Natrona, Campbell, Johnson, and Sheridan Counties
2	Gen	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard
2	3	Apr. 1	Apr. 19	250	Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard valid in Natrona County
2	3	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard valid in Converse and Natrona counties
3	Gen	Apr. 1	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard
3	3	Apr. 1	May 31	400	Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard
4	Gen	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard, except the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission's Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area shall be closed
4	1	Apr. 20	May 31	50	Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard
5	Gen	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard

Appendix 2

OTHER CHANGES TO WILD TURKEY HUNTING REGULATIONS

Evidence of Sex. During the spring season in those hunt areas limited to the taking of male wild turkeys or any wild turkey with a visible beard, ~~a visible beard shall remain naturally attached to the carcass as a means of identification in the field and while the wild turkey is being transported.~~ proof of sex shall accompany the turkey carcass, attached or unattached while the wild turkey is in transportation from the site of the kill to the residence of the person taking the wild turkey, or delivered to a processor for processing. Proof of sex for male wild turkeys shall include either one leg including the spur, or a patch of skin with the breast feathers and beard attached; and for female wild turkey (bearded hen) a patch of skin with the breast feathers and beard attached.

Yellowtail WHMA Permission Slip Required. During the spring season, no person shall attempt to take a wild turkey on the lands of the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission's Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area without possessing a valid Hunter Management Area permission slip issued to them by the Department for said management area and the date(s) of any attempt to take.

National Wild Turkey Federation Reports

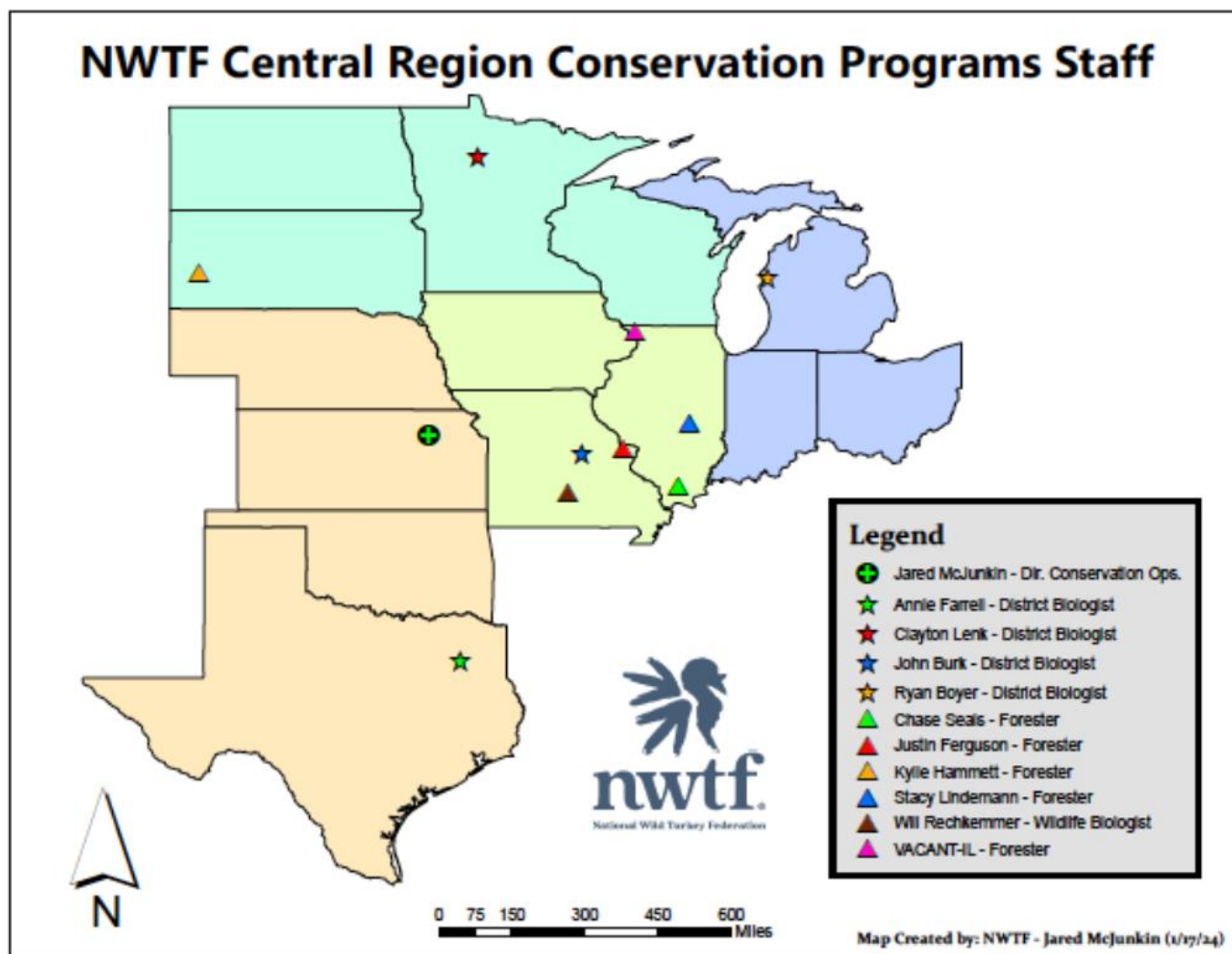
WAFWA WILD TURKEY WORKSHOP | CHEYENNE, OK MAY 6-8, 2024

NWTF CENTRAL REGION CONSERVATION UPDATE

Submitted by: Jared McJunkin | Director of Conservation Operations

CENTRAL REGION OVERVIEW

The focus of the portion of the NWTF's Central Region that overlaps with the WAFWA region continues to be primarily riparian restoration, along with some forest stand improvement projects. In the Eastern portions of the Central Region, our focus is more on forest restoration, specifically white oak, and oak savanna restoration. The bulk of this report is focused on the following states, ND, NE, KS, OK, SD, & TX.



STAFFING UPDATES

- **South Dakota Forester** – We recently refilled this forester position, Kylie Hammett, located in the Black Hills, focused on delivering technical assistance to private landowners through Natural Resources Conservation Service and South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks programs.
- **Nebraska Wild Turkey Program Manager** – We are actively recruiting for a Wild Turkey Program Manager, in partnership with the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission. This staff overseeing the NGPC Wild Turkey Program, including data collection & evaluation, coordinating research efforts in the state, harvest surveys, as well as making harvest and season recommendations to the NGCP Commission.

NWTF 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The NWTF was founded in 1973 and we celebrated our 50th Anniversary in 2023 by working with state legislatures and Governor’s across the region to secure recognition of this milestone. In the Central Region, we were recognized in 13 of the 14 states by State Legislatures or Governors.

CONSERVATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS (BY STATE)

Below are FY2023 accomplishments for the WAFWA states encompassed in the NWTF’s Central Region. In total, 81,186 acres were conserved/enhanced across these six states.

State	Conserved/Enhanced Acres	State	Conserved/Enhanced Acres
Kansas	22,720	Oklahoma	32,167
Nebraska	5,710	South Dakota	9,508
North Dakota	1,026	Texas	10,055

HUNTING HERITAGE SUPER FUND PROJECTS

The Super Fund remains an integral funding source for much of the conservation and hunting heritage delivery efforts in the Central Region. Below are allocations from each respective state’s Super Fund for 2024. In total, the NWTF provided **\$459,604 in Super Funds**, which was matched with **\$38,400,000 from partners!**

Kansas — **\$89,236** allocated towards the mission, matched with **\$2M** from partners

- Save the Hunt — **\$33,486** approved to support education/outreach including NWTF Outreach programs, JAKES, 4H Shooting Sports, and NASP
- Save the Habitat — **\$55,750** was directed to conservation efforts including projects on KDWP (Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks) Wildlife Areas, equipment purchases to enable habitat work such as prescribed burning and tree planting, NWTF’s Waterways for Wildlife Initiative and wild turkey research.

Nebraska — **\$22,493** allocated for Save the Habitat. Save the Hunt.

- Save the Hunt — **\$17,493** was awarded in support of education/outreach efforts including NWTF Outreach programs, 4H, NASP, other shooting sports programs
- Save the Habitat — **\$5,000** was directed to conservation efforts for NWTF's Waterways for Wildlife Initiative

North Dakota — **\$51,000** allocated for mission related activities matched with **\$3.8M** from our partners.

- Save the Hunt — **\$15,000** was allocated to support hunting heritage events and programs.
- Save the Habitat — **\$36,000** allocated to conservation efforts like the Waterways for Wildlife Initiative, tree planting, NDGF Wild Turkey Research, and invasive species removal on private lands in the badlands of ND.

Oklahoma — **\$110,284** allocated towards the mission, matched with **\$1M** from partners

- Save the Hunt — **\$41,284** approved to support JAKES, scholarships, WITO, Wheelin' Sportsmen, R3 support, Oklahoma FFA, NASP, and the Scholastic Shooting Sports Program.
- Save the Habitat — **\$69,000** directed to conservation efforts, including projects on ODWC WMAs (Wildlife Management Areas) and Waterways for Wildlife

South Dakota — **\$44,250** allocated for mission related activities matched with over **\$30.3M** from our partners

- Save the Hunt — **\$17,250** awarded in support of the SD Wildlife Federation's youth camp, hunter education classroom improvements, and youth events.
- Save the Habitat — **\$27,000** directed to conservation efforts including the Waterways for Wildlife Initiative, support of the Black Hills Forester position, SDGFP Research in Gregory County, and others.

Texas — **\$142,341** allocated towards the mission, matched with **\$1.3M** from partners

- Save the Hunt — **\$67,716** approved for FY23 to support education/outreach (NWTF Outreach programs, 4H Shooting Sports, NASP, Texas Youth Hunting Program/Adult Learn to Hunt Program, etc.)
- Save the Habitat — **\$75,625** was directed to conservation efforts for FY24 including \$40,625 for conservation projects with partners such as TPWD (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department), \$5,000 for wild turkey research and \$15,000 towards NWTF Initiatives (Waterways for Wildlife and Habitat for the Hatch).

CONSERVATION DELIVERY, AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Kansas

- Wild Turkey Management Committee — provide input on management, statutory changes, etc.
- Continued involvement in the Kansas Forest Service Advisory Board

- DCO (McJunkin) joined the leadership team for the Kansans for Conservation Coalition, an effort to establish a long-term, sustainable funding source for conservation delivery in Kansas.

Nebraska

- Conservation Roundtable — serve on sustainable funding subcommittee and E. red cedar committee
- NWTF partnered with NGPC to host a Wild Turkey Program Manager position
- Nebraska Environmental Trust Grant – all forest stand improvement work was completed and wrapped up by the end of June 2023, totaling 936.63 acres conserved/enhanced across 3 wildlife management areas

North Dakota

- Biologist Support Agreement — Partnership and continued support of the NWTF District Biologist position.
- Turkey Tag Auction — ND-NWTF auctioned three ND spring turkey tags at the 2024 national convention raising \$6,500 to be used on conservation in the state.
- North Dakota Industrial Commission — Awarded \$200k in Outdoor Heritage Funding and currently working on getting projects lined up.

Oklahoma

- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation — Several large-scale riparian and invasive species removal projects on ODWC WMAs through Super Fund and Waterways for Wildlife
- Oklahoma Conservation Commission — hosted an initial meeting to establish a partnership in February 2024

South Dakota

- Black Hills Forester — Support for the NWTF Forester Position in Rapid City from multiple partners including SD NWTF, State, and Federal agencies.
- USFS — Currently working with the USFS through the W4W Initiative on an upcoming project.

Texas

- NETX CDN Habitat Incentive Program — NWTF and TPWD work cooperatively with the Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network (LMVJV) to conserve and enhance habitat on private lands through the Habitat Incentive Program. Since inception in 2017, NWTF and partners have delivered over \$1.28M on the ground in cost-share assistance, impacting over 28,000 acres of private lands in Eastern wild turkey restoration areas.
- Texas Longleaf Team — NWTF staff serve on the steering committee and the project review working group.
- Upland Game Bird Advisory Committee — NWTF District Biologist was added to TPWD's Upland Game Bird Advisory Committee, a seat previously held by the NWTF-Texas State Chapter President. The committee recently brought forth recommendations for wild turkey regulation changes including closing parts of several counties, adjusting bag limits for certain areas, and removing subspecies designations from regulations.
- Continued involvement in the USDA NRCS's State Technical Advisory Committee and Wildlife Subcommittee

Continued assistance to TPWD in coordination of Eastern Wild Turkey Super Stocking efforts

U. S. Forest Service

- **Region 2** — New Forest Supervisor on the BHNF (Black Hills National Forest), but we have not met with them yet.
- **Region 8** — See policy section on support letter submitted to Texas National Forests & Grasslands

WILD TURKEY RESEARCH

NWTF continues to work with our state agency partners in the region in support of wild turkey research. A list of current projects in the six WAFWA states in the Central Region are listed below. We have worked to help determine needed research and are providing NWTF State Super Funds in many states. Additionally, NWTF recently opened another request for research proposals for National funding.

- **Kansas:** Kansas State University – Wild Turkey Poult Foraging Ecology and Nutrient Availability
- **Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas:** lead by Texas Tech University (including contributions from 7+ universities) - A Distribution Level Health Assessment of Rio Grande Wild Turkeys.
- **Nebraska:** University of Nebraska-Lincoln - Evaluating the Spatial Distribution of Potential Wild Turkey Nest Predators in Western Nebraska.
- **North Dakota:** University of North Dakota – Estimating Survival and Productivity of Translocated Turkeys
- **Oklahoma:** Oklahoma State University - Wild Turkey Population Ecology and Disease Monitoring
- **Texas:** Texas A&M University – Impacts of Woody Understory Vegetation and Invasive Species on Roosting Habitat Potential for Wild Turkey
- **Texas:** Texas Tech University – Rio Grande Wild Turkey Habitat and Genetic Connectivity, Disease Prevalence and Survival in the Texas Edwards Plateau Ecoregion
- **South Dakota:** West Virginia University – Vital Rates and Population Growth of Merriam’s Turkeys in South-Central South Dakota

WATERWAYS FOR WILDLIFE INITIATIVE

The W4W initiative remains a focus for staff in the NWTF’s Central and Western Regions. Staff recently concluded the 2024 Request for Proposals, reviewing and ranking 43 proposals for funding. Sixteen projects were approved providing \$215,000 in NWTF funding supporting projects across eight of the ten W4W initiative states. NWTF funds were leveraged at a rate of almost 48:1 with more than \$16.3 million in partner funding. Projects will potentially impact more than 5,725 acres, 16,480 adjacent upland acres and 62.5 stream miles across the ten-state footprint of the W4W initiative. In just three years, the W4W initiative has allocated more than \$600,000 in funding, matched with more than \$24 million from partners and will improve 42,663 riparian acres and 79 stream miles.

SUMMARY OF 2023 & 2024 W4W PROJECTS IN KS, NE, ND, OK, SD, & TX

State	Project	Award	Total Costs	Acres
KS	South Fork Republican River Restoration — invasive removal (Russian Olive, Eastern Red Cedar and saltcedar) to improve in the Republican River system	\$10,000	\$125,000	350
KS	Bryson WMA Riparian Vegetation Management — invasive species removal (Eastern red cedar and locust) with mulch mixed with mud to be used in Low-Tech Process Based in-stream structure maintenance	\$200,000	\$1,679,169	320
ND	Painted Woods Creek Addition — acquisition in southeastern McLean County, North Dakota, adding to the Painted Woods Creek WMA bringing the WMA to 1,191-acres	\$25,000	\$950,000	166
NE	Habitat Improvement and Bovee Fire Recovery — riparian restoration on the Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest along the Niobrara River in Nebraska, consisting of mechanical and chemical treatment of invasive species	\$5,000	\$99,113	56
OK	ODWC Canton WMA Cedar Removal — restoration of 215 acres of riparian habitat along the Canadian River on Canton Wildlife Management Area in northwest Oklahoma through Eastern red cedar removal	\$20,000	\$100,000	215
OK	Black Kettle WMA Riparian Restoration Project — restoration of riparian habitat along the Canadian River on Black Kettle Wildlife Management Area through Eastern red cedar removal	\$22,000	\$100,000	463
OK	Polecat Creek Restoration Project — restoration along Polecat Creek, part of the Arkansas River system, on Heyburn Wildlife Management Area in Oklahoma through Eastern red cedar removal	\$10,000	\$40,000	40
SD	Castle Creek Fencing Kinney Canyon Walk-in Fishery — effort to protecting 1.5 miles of streambanks in the northern Black Hills via livestock exclusion fencing around the streambanks for a critical portion of Castle Creek. The fencing will be designed to stop livestock access to the creek but still provide easy access to recreational users.	\$10,000	\$130,300	3
SD	Partnering to Enhance Key Upland and Riparian Habitats on Private Lands — partnering with the Private Lands Section of South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Department to improve riparian habitat and water quality through improving or enhancing grazing infrastructure.	\$10,000	\$40,000	350
SD	Oxbows of the Big Sioux River — educational brochures for 100,000 visitors the park has each year to educate and bring awareness to the importance of the Big Sioux River	\$500	\$2,000	0
KS	Stanford Tract Acquisition and Restoration — acquisition of 181 acres along Buffalo Creek to add to Jamestown Wildlife Area. followed by restoration of riparian, wetland, and grassland habitats to create more wildlife habitat in the Republican River corridor	\$15,000	\$815,000	17
CO/KS	Arkansas River Salt Cedar Control & Native Grass Establishment — restoration of riparian habitat along 25 stream miles of the Arkansas River in western Kansas and eastern Colorado through invasive removal	\$25,000	\$1,299,800	1176
SD	Cottonwood Creek Restoration — streambank stabilization and water quality improvement project along Cottonwood Creek, a tributary to the Cheyenne River via livestock exclusion fencing, tree, and shrub planting, and installing Beaver Dam Analogs	\$5,000	\$60,000	5
SD	Fall River Woody Draw Restoration — livestock exclusion project, along with tree and shrub plantings to promote wildlife habitat and increase water quality of Moss Agate Creek, a tributary to the Cheyenne River	\$17,500	\$35,658	23
OK	Cottonwood Regeneration and Demonstration on Beaver River WMA — riparian habitat improvement along the Beaver River in the Oklahoma panhandle through invasive species removal and cottonwood planting.	\$10,000	\$92,500	10
TX	Matador WMA O.X. Spring and Pease River Improvement — invasive woody removal (redberry juniper, saltcedar, honey mesquite) in riparian areas by mechanical mulching	\$10,000	\$40,000	10
OK	Lexington WMA Turkey Roost Tree/Riparian Zone Restoration — Eastern Red Cedar removal, through mulching, to be maintained with fire in the future	\$10,000	\$88,291	156
Total =		\$405,000	\$5,696,831	3360

NATIONAL FORESTRY INITIATIVE (NFI)

The NFI was developed in partnership with the NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Services). The goal of which is to help private forest landowners across the country steward their forested lands. Working out of NRCS field offices, 31 foresters in 24 states deliver technical and financial assistance through Farm Bill conservation programs administered by NRCS on private lands. These foresters provide additional support for NRCS staff in developing forest management plans and advising landowners on best management practices that benefit forest and wildlife resources. Below are accomplishments to date (conserved and influenced acres combined). We have two NFI foresters in the Central Region; Texas (currently vacant) and Nebraska, located in Lincoln and hired in January 2024.

CONSERVATION POLICY – SUPPORTED KEY POLICY/LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

The NWTF engages in State and Federal conservation policy, when appropriate and when policy potentially impacts our mission directly. District Biologists continue to serve as policy leads in their states, working with Conservation leadership, and our National Policy Team to evaluate and engage accordingly with key legislation. It has been another active policy year, with lots of activity around second amendment and gun legislation. We also have faced challenges with agency funding levels, agency Commission reform attempts, and hunter access issues and are hopeful to see some positive changes to legal equipment for wild turkey hunting in some states. Below is a summary of some of policy items we have engaged in the past year and currently in the Central Region's six

WAFWA states:

- **Farm Bill** — We have been collectively working internally and externally over the past 20 months to guide decision makers in Congress as they craft a new Farm Bill for the next five years. NWTF Farm Bill priorities have been shared in many venues and our staff continue to engage in work groups, committees, and other groups working to ensure conservation priorities are part of the next Farm Bill.
- **Fundraising (South Dakota)** — The NWTF has been supportive of specialty license plates to generate funding to support habitat restoration and conservation for South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks.
- **Oklahoma (Fees & Funding)** — The NWTF continues to support the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation in their efforts to modernize their license fee structure, securing some authority to increase certain license/permit fees.
- **Texas** — Request from Tall Timbers LLC and other partners to sign on to letter urging the Texas National Forests and Grasslands to establish bobwhite quail management areas in the next Forest Plan revision. NWTF signed letter submitted to U.S. Forest Service Forest Supervisor.

MISCELLANEOUS

- **Playa Lakes Joint Venture** — NWTF staff continue service on JV (Joint Venture) Management Board, including assisting with successional planning and nationwide search for JV Coordinator position. The JV's next meeting is scheduled for late June in Lamar, CO.
- **Northern Great Plains Joint Venture** — Staff continue to serve on the JV Management Board with the next meeting happening in May in Lewiston, MT

- Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture – NWTf staff continue to serve on the JV Management Board with the next meeting happening in Nocona, TX

NWTF West Region Conservation Update

WAFWA Wild Turkey Workshop – May 6-8, 2024

Submitted by: Patt Dorsey Director Of Conservation Operations – West Region

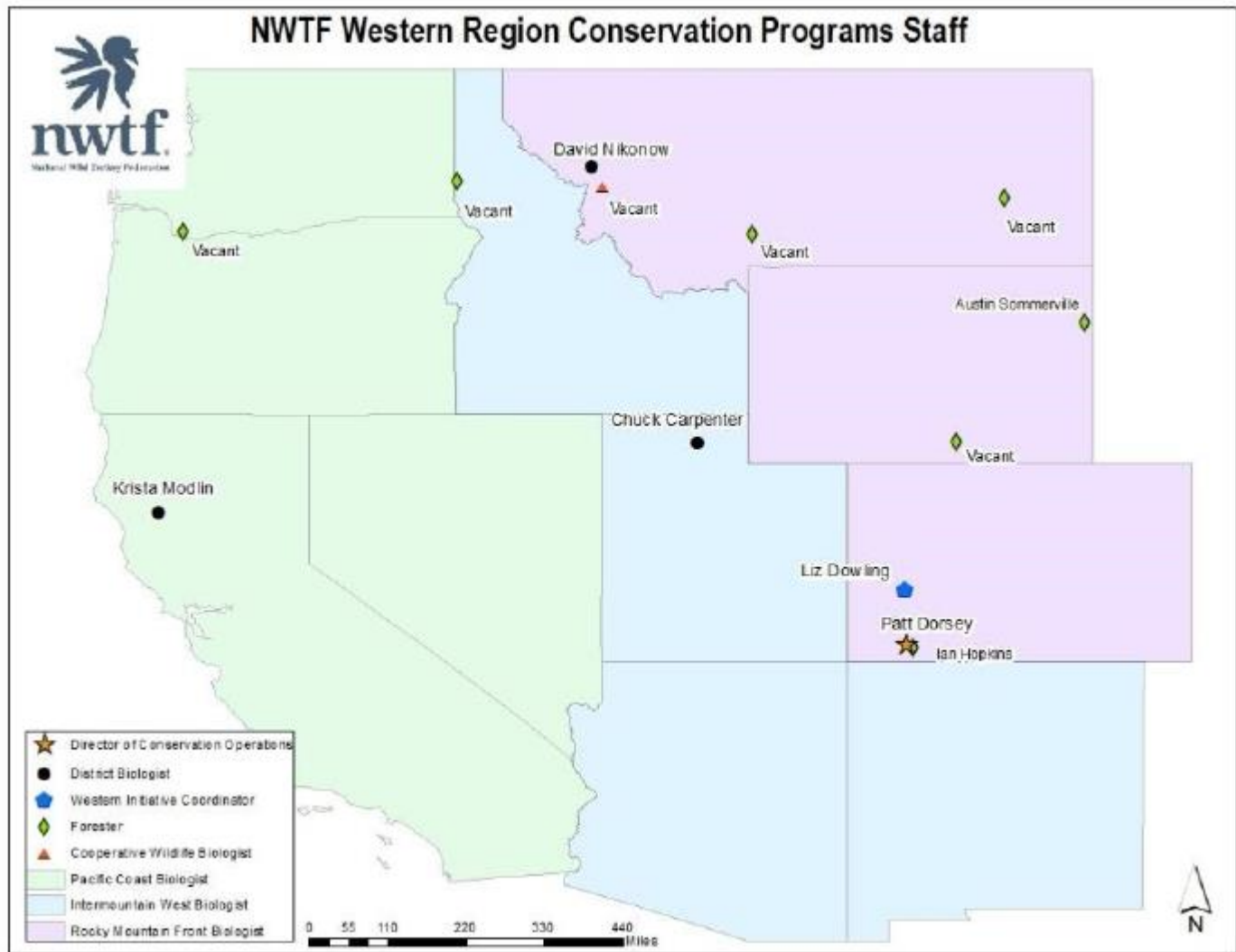
NWTF Staff and Contact Information:

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David Nikonow	Rocky Mountain Front	CO, MT, WY	dnikonow@nwtf.net	(406) 531-0637
Patt Dorsey	West Region DCO	West	pdorsey@nwtf.net	(303) 775-6902
VACANT	Cooperative Biologist	Western MT (USFS/MFWP)		
Elizabeth Dowling	Western Initiatives Coordinator	RMRI	edowling@nwtf.net	(914) 490-1718

Personnel Changes

Collin Smith left the NWTF in December 2023. We are happy to have hired David Nikonow, who was working as an NWTF cooperative biologist (for the USFS Region 1 and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks). David is familiar with the landscape and partners in Montana. We also hope to hire someone to fill the new vacant cooperative biologist position in Montana.

With Collin's departure, we also realigned the district boundaries slightly, with CO and ID shifting. Chuck Carpenter will now cover AZ, ID, NM, and UT. David Nikonow will cover CO, MT and WY.



NWTF 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The NWTF was founded in 1973 and 2023 marked our “Golden Anniversary!” We set a goal to get “50th Resolutions” in all 50 state legislatures and/or Governor’s proclamations. We were able to get resolutions in: Idaho, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

STATE-BY-STATE

In 2023, we set an organization-wide goal of improving or enhancing 1 million acres of wild turkey habitat. For FY2023, our accomplishments for the WAFWA states encompassed by the NWTF’s Western Region are:

- 1 ● Habitat Conservation – **200,604.2 acres** conserved/enhanced o **Arizona** - 486 acres Conserved/Enhanced
- 2 o **California** – 6,522 acres Conserved/Enhanced (including wildfire crisis work)
- 3 o **Colorado** – 42,802 acres Conserved/Enhanced (including Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative partner work)
- 4 o **Idaho** – 2,106 acres Conserved/Enhanced

- 5 o **Montana** – 39,394 acres Conserved/Enhanced
- 6 o **New Mexico** – 1792.7 acres Conserved/Enhanced
- 7 o **Oregon** – 1,671 acres Conserved/Enhanced (including wildfire crisis work)
- 8 o **Utah** – 105,212.5 acres Conserved/Enhanced
- 9 o **Washington** - 43 acres Conserved/Enhanced
- 10 o **Wyoming** – 575 acres Conserved/Enhanced
- 11 o **Wyoming**–16,800 access acres

Additionally, we created or maintained hunting access on **16,800 acres**

HUNTING HERITAGE SUPER FUND PROJECTS

Below is a summary of State Chapter Super Fund commitments for FY23.

Arizona – \$8,000.00 allocated from super fund

- **\$1,000** for support of youth dove and turkey hunts, Wheelin’ sportsmen
- **\$2,000.00** State Scholarship
- **\$5,000.00** Allocated up to \$5,000.00 for data charges related to GPS tracking of turkeys in AZ

California – \$21,500 allocated from super fund.

- **\$8,000** for support of a youth hunt in Redding, California, support for veterans program, and to provide a Sacramento Refuge Hunt Coordinator
- **\$10,000** for oak woodland restoration
- **\$2,000** for prescribed burn project
- **\$1,500** for continued support for Gaines & Associates to represent NWTF in all state legislative, regulatory and administrative policy arenas

Colorado – \$28,000 allocated from super fund.

- **\$15,000** allocated in recently closed RFP. Project selection has not yet been made.
- **\$3,000** to support the Colorado Wildlife Conservation Project (CWCP), and three sportsmen’s legislative/commission events
- **\$10,000** to assist with the acquisition of the 4,061 acre Escalante Ranch into BLM management

Idaho – \$16,412.00 allocated from Super Fund

- \$5,000.00 Scholastic 3-D archery targets for youth archery in Idaho
- \$9,462.00 Purchase of 365 Groasis tree water boxes from Trees Please to be used and distributed on habitat work throughout Idaho.
- \$1,950.00 Two projects that will open up 10 acres of property to recreationalist along the snake river, materials for invasive species removal, and information kiosk.

Montana – \$7,000 allocated from Super Fund

- \$3,000 towards USFS Frenchtown Face prescribed fire on the Lolo NF
- \$4,000 towards USFS Little Snowies Weed Mitigation on the Helena Lewis and Clark NF

New Mexico- \$2,500.00 allocated from super fund.

- **\$2,500.00** Women in the Outdoors, Hunters who Care, NWTF scholarship
- Currently discussing funding a guzzler project on Horse Mountain located in The Bureau of Land Management Socorro Field Office area.

Oregon – \$16,878 allocated from superfund

- **\$500** for youth pheasant hunt
- **\$1,378** for support for the Oregon Hunt by Reservation Program at ODFW
- **\$15,000** for habitat restoration

Utah – \$4,850.00 allocated from super fund.

- **\$1,500.00** Save the Hunt – Jakes events
- **\$1,250.00**, NWTF scholarship, Archery in Schools.
- **\$1,600.00** Archery in Schools
- **\$500.00** Farmer compensation to leave standing crops to mitigate nuisance bird issues
- **\$1,500.00** Salt Creek Chapter Jakes event

Washington- \$1,541 allocated from super fund.

- **\$541** for JAKES youth hunts
- **\$1,000** for lobbyist support

Wyoming – \$3,000 for Access Yes Wyoming program

CONSERVATION DELIVERY, AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES:

Arizona:

- The General Spring Stewardship project is currently on hold due to contractor related issues. The General Springs Stewardship will go out to bid this summer and forestry activities will resume when restrictions related to the Mexican Spotted Owl (MSO) are lifted. Currently, three wildlife crews are conducting surveys, but they have not yet confirmed nest locations or determined the presence of any birds. It is likely that the restrictions will stay in place through the nesting season, and work will resume in September.
- We added \$100,000.00 in funding for the General Springs project through the Inflation Reduction Act.
- We are exploring the possibility of initiating a stewardship project on the Prescott National Forest, and additional stewardship projects on the Coconino National Forest.
- NWTF state chapter plans on paying all of the Movebank GPS charges associated with AZGFD birds with GPS transmitters. The total for just this current year's (2023) deployment is \$4,350.00.

California

- California wildfires continue to threaten conservation and habitat management. California has lost millions of acres of habitat for wildlife over the last few years due to severe wildfires. NWTF continues to implement important fuels reduction in strategic areas to provide forest resilience to future disturbance. ○ The NWTF is working with multiple partners to implement stewardship projects with one on the Eldorado National Forest, one on the Sequoia National Forest, one on the Klamath National Forest and one on the Six Rivers National Forest. Partners on these projects include the Great Basin Institute, Cal Deer Association, and Mule Deer Foundation. These projects focus on fuels reduction projects in areas that are adjacent or within large fire scars. The projects on the Eldorado were affected by the Caldor fire in 2021 and the Mosquito Fire in 2022. The projects on the Sequoia National Forest were affected by Castle wildfire in 2020 and the KNP Complex fire in 2021. The project within the Klamath National Forest was affected by the Antelope wildfire in 2021. Our newest stewardship on the Six Rivers was impacted by the Lightning Complex wildfires in 2023.
- The project within the Klamath National Forest is the first project to be completed under the Wildfire Crisis Strategy.
- Prescriptions for the Sequoia National Forest's Eshom project shifted from a fuels reduction project, to piling and hand line preparation for future prescribed burn maintenance.
- Projects scheduled with the Eldorado National Forest have been delayed for the immediate future due to the wildfire response and shift of priorities.
- Our new stewardship on the Six Rivers National Forest is the Knopki Restoration Project. This project includes about 1500 acres of post-fire hazard tree removal, commercial thinning, fuel break construction, oak woodland restoration and Beargrass restoration.

- The NWTF also partnered with USFWS in 2023, hosting a mentored hunt program for first time turkey hunters on the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The success rate among novice hunters was 80%.

Colorado

- The Hubbard stewardship is complete, pending final inspection of last fall's treatments once snowmelt allows for inspector travel. The North Fork HPP Committee has been engaged and provided funding to service work within this project.
- Initiated a new “Mt. Lamborn” stewardship agreement on the Paonia Ranger District of the Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison National Forest (GMUG). This stewardship aims to improve habitat quality for elk and deer on winter range in selected areas across the district. The district is partnering with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, National Wild Turkey Federation and Bureau of Land Management on this project. We are planning to treat 25,450 acres using prescribed fire and mechanical treatments within mountain shrub oak and pinyon/juniper communities. The proposed treatments would be located in four main areas: low-lying areas surrounding Mt. Lamborn and Lands End Peak, Cathedral Peak, Buckhorn Gulch, and McClure Pass. The project is currently slated to take around 10 years. The North Fork HPP Committee has been engaged and provided funding to service work within this project.
- NWTF is supporting the Escalante Ranch acquisition into BLM management through a \$10,000 super fund award and \$25,000 Waterways for Wildlife Initiative award.

Idaho

- In Idaho, NWTF continues to focus on habitat management projects in cooperation with IDFG, primarily on state WMA's. Local chapters have successfully delivered habitat projects with funding acquired through the Idaho Commissioners Community Challenge Grant program. Many of these projects have consisted of tree, shrub and forb plantings to restore and enhance wildlife habitats. In the coming years NWTF's conservation efforts in Idaho are poised to expand on federal and state lands. With a significant amount of funding for forest management being provided through the recently passed Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill (BIB), initial efforts for forest management will be ramping up in SW Idaho among other western states. NWTF will be working with its federal and state partners to assist where opportunities for shared stewardship exist.
- Submitted three grants to this year's Commissioners Community Challenge Grant Program. One for Southeast region tree propagation, the second for Magic Valley tree rehabilitation, and third for State Scholastic Archery program.

Montana

- The NWTF is assisting the Bitterroot NF with efforts to accelerate forest management at scale to mitigate for potential impacts from catastrophic wildfire and to improve wildlife habitat. In 2023, NWTF administered the first phase of the Stevensville West Central Fuels Reduction Project totaling 1,758 acres. We will complete the remaining 550 acres in Phase 2 in the 2024 field season.
- The NWTF continues its partnership with the USFS and FWP Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program to collaboratively fund the NWTF Western Montana Cooperative Biologist position, which increased the

amount of wild turkey habitat conserved or enhanced on western Montana National Forests and state lands by over 4,250 in 2023 and 18,666 acres since September 2015. Through the provision of the biologists' technical assistance in the design stage of project development, forest management projects primarily targeting fuels reduction are more effectively able to enhance and increase habitat diversity for wild turkeys, forest grouse and other wildlife. This position is now vacant and all parties are working to backfill the position.

New Mexico

- NWTF's premier project is the Zuni Mountains Stewardship project on the Cibola National Forest. The project is part of the Zuni Mountains CFLRP. ○ We are transitioning the contract to another contractor in an effort to streamline stewardship and increase completed acreage. This has been a major success, as we nearly doubled the acreage output in 2023, with a total of 1792.7 acres completed during the operating season. As of the end of FY 2023, we have treated a total of 12,707.8 acres on this project (including Bluewater acres).
- Zuni pre-work meetings have occurred and cutting has commenced as of 4/15/2024.
- 170 loads of logs were allocated from the Zuni project to Wood for Life, a program that supplies fuel for Indigenous communities that rely on firewood for heating.

Oregon

- The NWTF supported Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's proposed turkey regulation changes. Stewardship projects in Oregon focus on important aspen stand restoration as well as promoting late and old structure forests. The aspen stand restoration projects are important for wildlife conservation as aspen is a limited and important habitat type for numerous species. ○ The Son project on the Ochoco National Forest completed 451 acres of thinning. This 10-year agreement closed in October 2023.
- The Starr Aspen project on the Malheur National Forest completed 93 acres of forest thinning in 2022 and a mile of fence construction was completed in 2023 to protect some of the restored aspen stands. This project will close in the fall of 2024.
- The Sunflower Juniper Removal Project on the Ochoco National Forest is about 2,000 acres and focuses on removing western juniper to promote native grasses and enhance bitterbrush and sagebrush habitat. Turkeys were successfully released in the project area in both 2000 and 2006. We should start implementation in fall 2024.
- The NWTF is also working on a new agreement on the Malheur National Forest called the Damon Project, which focuses on about 450 acres of aspen restoration.
- The NWTF has one Wildfire Crisis Strategy project in Oregon on the Fremont-Winema National Forest. The Hawks project focuses on fuels reduction. The timber portion of the project is complete and we hope to complete the biomass portion of the project this year.

Utah

- Participated and supported the Utah Turkey Management plan proceedings, accepted in spring 2024.

- Chuck Carpenter was voted onto the ranking committee for both the Southeastern region and Central region of Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI). Ranking committees are made up of personnel from federal, State, and local agencies to ensure the best projects get brought forward to the state for budgetary and sports group funding. At the sportspersons group WRI funding meeting on 4/10/22, \$4.8 million dollars for habitat and watershed improvement projects were funded by various sporting groups.

- Utah's WRI is a partnership-based program aimed at improving high priority watersheds throughout the state. It is the primary tool for NWTF's conservation delivery in Utah. In 2023, the NWTF contributed **\$99,566.34** to Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI) projects. These funds were allocated to 22 projects that will both improve watershed health, forest health and create viable habitat for wild turkeys and numerous other wildlife, effectively conserving over 105,212.5 acres. ○ 2023, through WRI NWTF, we established and funded a joint position with Utah DNR, allocating **\$15,000.00** for a seasonal turkey trapper in the Central region. This initiative aimed to alleviate the pressure of nuisance bird trapping on the division, contributing to wildlife management efforts in the region. In 2024 we have agreed to fund an additional trapping position in the Northern region.

- We purchased a fuels trailer for helicopter prescribed burning for Utah Forestry Fire and State Lands, totaling **\$45,000.00**. Through WRI, our objective is to burn 10,684 acres of private land on the San Pitch Mountains in Central Utah next year, enhancing wildfire management efforts throughout Utah.

- The Upper Provo Watershed Restoration Project on the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest is in Phase 8. The phase was broken up into 3 contracts and awarded in August 2023. One contract included 1,174 acres (692 acres of hazard tree removal, 463 acres of lop & scatter, and 19 acres of wetland restoration) and 328 acres of optional items. The second contract includes 1,268 acres (584 acres of conifer thinning & aspen enhancement and 684 acres of acres of small wood thinning). The third contract includes 1,103 acres (100 acres of machine piling and 1,003 acres of mastication). To date, 463 acres of lop & scatter, 109 acres of conifer thinning & aspen enhancement and 253 acres of small wood thinning have been completed.

Washington

- The conservation objective for Washington state is to increase available forage, year-round/diverse habitat and to redistribute Merriam's Turkeys from private lands adjacent to the project area to public lands.

- In 2022, WDFW partnered with NWTF on the Wind River Project on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest for turkey habitat enhancement. The WDFW funds were used to enhance 132 acres of foraging habitat in 2022.

- In 2023, WDFW and NWTF partnered to complete phase 2 of the Wind River project. The WDFW funds were used to thin 20 acres of overstocked Douglas Fir stands that were adjacent to the meadow enhancement that was completed in 2022.

- In 2023, WDFW and NWTF also completed a habitat restoration project on the Columbia Land Trust. This project included 12 acres of non-commercial thinning and 10 acres of noxious weed treatment in the fall of 2023. In the spring 2024, we will prepare 300 acres for prescribed burning.

Wyoming

- The NWTF is currently assisting the Medicine Bow-Routt NF and Thunder Basin NG with forest, riparian, sage-steppe and recreation management efforts through a Waterways for Wildlife Initiative grant and project layout/management by NWTF District Biologist.

BIG SKY FORESTRY INITIATIVE

The Big Sky Forestry Initiative will help deliver NWTF's mission through the promotion of natural resource conservation by addressing critical ecological challenges in Montana. The Big Sky Forestry Initiative will build partnerships and combine resources for additional funding assistance across Montana where ecosystems require restoration. Forging strong partnerships with numerous organizations and agencies will strengthen public acceptance and increase credibility. Protecting shared values, setting shared priorities, and implementing work with shared investments will be high priority to achieving success.

In June 2023, NWTF volunteers and NWTF staff held a fundraising event in Bozeman, MT to support this initiative. With those funds, the NWTF is working with the Helena - Lewis and Clark National Forest in the Elkhorn Wildlife Management Unit to help implement invasive weed treatments.

Our initial project in this initiative is the "West Central" project on the Stevensville Ranger District in the Bitterroot National Forest. Improvements would increase wildlife forage and help insure the area provides quality habitat in the future. The entirety of the project area is 5000 acres (hand and mechanical work is 2440 acres), of which the work covered under this agreement would set the landscape up for over an additional 2700 acres of broadcast burning. We completed thinning treatments on 1,750 acres in the 2023 field season.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN RESTORATION INITIATIVE

The Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative was co-convened by the NWTF and the USDA Forest Service in 2019 with the goal of increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration in Colorado to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire, enhancing wildlife habitat, and protecting water sources and infrastructure, communities, and recreational opportunities. By bringing partners together, partners have benefited from pooled resources of funding, facilitation, communication, and staff resulting in landscape level scale progress.

RMRI was developed as a national pilot under and still adheres to the USDA's Shared Stewardship Strategy focused on four shared values: Forests and Wildlife Habitat; Water; Communities and Recreation. This past year, efforts were continued in the three landscapes: Southwest, Upper Arkansas and Upper South Platte. In 2023, several projects throughout all three landscapes were awarded Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program (COSWAP) funding as a result of the RMRI partnership. This year, accomplishments on the RMRI-Southwest landscape included 25,053 acres of forest restoration on federal land and 1,391 acres of private, state and tribal land. Partners in the RMRI Southwest landscape leveraged over \$20 million for planning and implementation of projects on public and private lands. Partners accounted for 13,869 acres of hazardous fuels reduction treatments in the WUI on both public and private lands. In the Upper Arkansas landscape, 10,531 acres were completed on public and private forest land. Last, in the Upper South Platte, 5,000 acres were restored across the landscape. Overall, we saw an increase in acres restored in each landscape from last year. Across the three RMRI landscapes a total of 41,975 acres were completed in 2023. To read more about our 2023 accomplishments, check out our **2023 RMRI FACT SHEET**.

In addition to acres completed, RMRI hosted a meeting and field tour in the Upper South Platte Landscape. We gathered for a half day meeting with our Leadership Team and hosted a day in the field to share the accomplishments and the unique challenges in this landscape. To read more about this event - Press Release

SUPPORTING THE “WILDFIRE CRISIS STRATEGY”

It's been a little over one year since the NWTF signed the first “keystone agreement” with the USFS to help implement the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The Wildfire Crisis Strategy is an initiative aimed at treating 20 million acres of national forest land and 30 million acres of other federal, state and private land over the next 10 years. USFS Chief Randy Moore, anticipates this goal will require the USFS to increase by 4X the amount of forest restoration work happening on the landscape. The NWTF's agreement includes \$50 million to help implement that work. Disturbance resilient forests complement wild turkey habitat enhancement goals.

Our first project was in Region 5 on the Klamath National Forest, where we completed 6,073 acres of habitat enhancement with the California Deer Association. We are currently working in Region 6 on the Fremont-Winema National Forest in Oregon. We have additional projects lined up in California, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado and hope to begin implementation in 2024.

To ensure that we have the capacity to deliver this work, we also signed a capacity agreement with the USFS to hire term positions, solely for wildfire crisis work. The additional capacity ensures that our district biologists can continue to work with state wildlife agencies on other important stewardship/habitat restoration work.

U. S. FOREST SERVICE

- We currently have agreements and are actively working to help implement the USFS' Wildfire Crisis Strategy in USFS Regions 5 and 6. We are currently working on agreements with the intention to start implementation on projects in Regions 1, 2, and 4. Wildfire Crisis Strategy work is focused on the USFS's identified high priority

firesheds. They are primarily focused on wildfire risk reduction to communities and the surrounding areas. Funding is provided through provisions in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

- 1 ● We currently have traditional stewardship work in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Traditional stewardship projects have diverse goals and scopes of work, however the overarching goal is to create forests that have a more natural stand composition and are resilient to disturbance, including wildfire, climate change, insects and disease infestations.
 - o Region 1 – 1 active project; Bitterroot NF in Montana - Stevensville West Central Fuels Reduction project.
- 2
 - o Region 2 – 2 active projects and 1 pending; Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison (GMUG) NF in Colorado- Hubbard Stewardship project, GMUG NF - Mt. Lamborn stewardship, and we are pursuing a Master Participating Agreement to assist Thunder Basin NG in Wyoming with the Weston Hills Juniper Reduction project.
- 3
 - o Region 3 - 2 active projects and in discussions about other projects. Cibola NF in New Mexico - Zuni Mountain Stewardship, Coconino NF in Arizona - General Springs Stewardship. We have had discussion with the USFS about adding new stewardship projects on the Coconino.
- 4
 - o Region 4 - 1 active project; Uintah-Wasatch-Cache (UWC) NF in Utah - Upper Provo Watershed Restoration Project Phase 8.

5 o Region 5 - 3 active traditional projects and one wildfire crisis strategy project; The traditional projects include one on the Eldorado NF, one on the Sequoia NF and the newest on the Six Rivers NF. The active Wildfire Crisis Strategy project is on the Klamath NF.

6 o Region 6 -2 active traditional projects and one wildfire crisis strategy project, all in Oregon, however, we are exploring stewardship options in Washington leveraging funding from WDFW; The two traditional projects include one on the Malheur NF and the other on the Ochoco NF. Our Wildfire Crisis Strategy project is on the Fremont-Winema NF.

7

WATERWAYS 4 WILDLIFE (W4W) INITIATIVE – WEST REGION PROJECTS

The NWTF’s Waterways for Wildlife Initiative is a broad, riparian initiative encompassing 10 states and targeting more non-traditional partners. The Waterways for Wildlife Initiative includes Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming. The goals for the initiative are to conserve/enhance 75,000 acres over the next 10-years and 50+ million in funding to accomplish the work. The following projects in the NWTF’s Western Region projects were approved for support.

The following is a synopsis of West Region projects that were funded in 2023:

FY 2023		
State	Project	Grant Amount
CO	First Creek Waterway Project on First Creek, a tributary of the South Platte River, with the US Fish and Wildlife Service at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.	\$10,000
MT	Dugas Conservation Easement Fence, Tree, and Irrigation Project on a Conservation Easement along the Missouri River in Cascade County.	2,500
	Mill Creek Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Conservation Project	7,500
	Wildcat Bend Acquisition on Lower Yellowstone River, assisted with a fee-title acquisition in Rosebud County that will be transferred to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks.	25,000
	Phase 2b Flint Creek Riparian Habitat Restoration Project in Granite County.	10,000
NM	Post-Fire Restoration of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area's Wild Turkey Sanctuary	5,000
WY	West Slope Riparian Enhancement - Bear Creek Conifer and Invasive Tree Removal in the Bighorn Mountains in North Central Wyoming.	5,000
	Weston Drainage Juniper Removal with the USFS Thunder Basin National Grasslands.	20,000
	Hesse Ranch Beaver Dam Analog Structures installing 30 beaver dam analogue structures on 1.5 miles of the North Fork of the Red Fork Powder River in Johnson County, Wyoming.	5,000
	Squaw Creek/Baldwin Creek Russian Olive Removal near Lander, Wyoming.	2,500
	TOTAL FY 2023	\$92,500

The following is a synopsis of West Region projects that were funded for 2024:

Funding 2024				
State	Project	Status	Matching Funds	Grant Amount
CO	Escalante Ranch: Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (CO) - This project is in cooperation with The Conservation Fund, Bureau of Land Management, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The goal is to acquire and convey to the BLM, the 4,061-acre Escalante Ranch within the BLM's Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area which is a large conservation and riparian project that will support key wild turkey habitat in western Colorado.	Active	\$11,675,000	\$25,000
CO	Conejos River Restoration Project (CO) - This project is in cooperation with the Colorado Rio Grande Restoration Foundation, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and many others addressing streambank stabilization, floodplain reconnection, channel morphology reconstruction, backwater and wetland restoration, and irrigation infrastructure replacement on 2.5 acres and 1 stream mile.	Active	\$963,442	\$25,000
CO	Rocky Mtn. Arsenal NWR - First Creek Restoration (CO) - This project is with the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, American Conservation Experience and CO Dept of Public Health & Environment. The project will use a tractor with a seed drill attachment to plant a sandyland prairie mix across the 60 acres of the burn site in the Spring of 2024 before vegetation begins to grow. Shrubs and cottonwood trees will be planted enhancing .5 stream miles and 25 acres.	Active	\$113,414	\$5,000
MT	Fifer Gulch Stream Restoration Project (MT) - This project is in cooperation with the George Grant Trout Unlimited and Montana Trout Unlimited and intends to restore the currently ditched and incised lower Fifer Gulch channel will be restored to a sinuous channel with a focus on the restoration of connectivity between the channel and adjacent floodplain on 5 acres and .2 stream miles.	Active	\$285,000	\$25,000
MT	Flint Creek Riparian Restoration - Phase 3 (MT) - The Phase 3 Flint Creek Riparian Habitat Restoration Project is part of a long term, multi-phased effort by Trout Unlimited, state agencies, and other partners to benefit and improve multiple fish and wildlife populations. The project will implement active revegetation, a grazing management plan and streambank restoration on approximately 5,000 feet of eroded stream channels.	Active	\$490,000	\$10,000
MT	Northwest Energy - MO River Restoration (MT) - This project is in cooperation with NorthWestern Energy and Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon. Partners will plant 200 cottonwood trees, install an 8-foot-tall wire mesh fence, install well and irrigation lines with drips to restore cottonwood regeneration along 6.5 acres and .27 miles of the Missouri river.	Active	\$91,730	\$2,500
WY	Middle Fork Crazy Woman/Poison Creek BDAs (WY) - Like many of the riparian areas in the southern Bighorn Mountains, this stream exhibits channelization, loss of deciduous riparian woody species, and a disconnected floodplain. Partnering with Wyoming game and Fish, this project will plan to install a total of 26 beaver dam analogs (BDA) on .75 miles on the Middle Fork Crazy Woman Creek and 10 of .25 miles of Poison Creek.	Active	\$65,000	\$10,000
WY	Cold Creek Riparian Improvement (WY) - This project is in cooperation with Wyoming Game and Fish and seeks to restore 100 acres across 1.4 stream miles through the construction of beaver dam analogs and planting of trees and shrubs. Treatments will reduce erosion and sedimentation while maintaining water on the landscape longer throughout the year.	Active	\$25,000	\$8,000
WY	Six Mile Creek Wet Meadow Enhancement (WY) - This project is in cooperation with Sheridan Community Land Trust, Wyoming Game and Fish, The Nature Conservancy, and Sheridan County Conservation District. It will restore a series of wet meadows along Six Mile Creek through the construction of 50 Zeedyk structures on 1.25 stream miles impacting 104 acres.	Active	\$65,000	\$7,000
Total FY 24			\$13,773,586	\$117,500

National Forestry Initiative (NFI)

The NFI was developed in partnership with the NRCS. The goal of which is to help private forest landowners across the country steward their forested lands. The NFI program began in the early summer of 2019, and was recently expanded and extended through September 2027. Working out of NRCS field offices, 31 foresters in 24 states deliver technical and financial assistance through Farm Bill conservation programs administered by NRCS on private lands. These foresters provide additional support for NRCS staff in developing forest management plans and advising landowners on best management practices that benefit forest and wildlife resources. Below are accomplishments to date (conserved and influenced acres combined).

One of the administrative issues with the NFI has been the turnover rate. We have 10 positions located in WAFWA states, seven have been vacant since the summer of 2023. NWTF has been actively recruiting replacements for these vacant positions during the fall of 2023, and the spring of 2024. While this is inherently challenging, it is good for forest management work overall as many of these positions have been picked up as full-time employees with a state or federal agency.

National Forestry Initiative (Western Region)	Acres (conserved and influenced) 1/1/23 through 12/31/23
Idaho (vacant - will be refilled in Moscow)	N/A
Montana (both Bozeman and Miles City are vacant to be refilled)	6,316.4
Wyoming (1 position placed in Newcastle additional vacant position will be in Saratoga)	217
Washington (vacant, originally in Chehalis will be moved to Vancouver)	N/A
Colorado (one position currently in Durango an additional vacant position to be placed in Durango to cover Pagosa Springs to Cortez)	213.2
National Accomplishments	33,185

CONSERVATION POLICY – SUPPORTED KEY POLICY/LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

The NWTF is actively engaged in State and Federal conservation policy. Our staff and members send email alerts, monitor and advocate for sound conservation policy, etc. Although we are active, we are also selective in what, how, when and where we engage. We engage only on issues that tie to our mission of wild turkey conservation and hunting heritage. We advocate for science as a basis for the delivery of wildlife management.

Firearms Legislation - Due to the number of firearms bills that passed in California, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington last year, we actively engaged in new bills affecting the implementation and impact of those bills. We also monitored litigation that was filed. Last year Arizona, Colorado, Washington and Oregon passed legislation that creates waiting periods, increases the age for firearms ownership, increases the civil liability

on the firearms industry and/or dealers. In some cases, the firearms industry was defined to include non-profit organizations that might raffle or auction firearms as part of a fundraising event.

Arizona

The Arizona State Chapter was engaged in a number of special land designations this year. Under the National Park Service, Arizona has 22 National Parks, two National Heritage Areas, 46 National Historic Landmarks, 10 National Natural Landmarks, and two World Heritage Sites. Under the Bureau of Land Management, Arizona has six National Monuments, three National Conservation Areas and Similar Designations, 47 Wilderness Areas, and two Wilderness Study Areas. There have been some instances where access was restricted following designation, causing concern in the sporting community.

This year, the State Chapter engaged in conversations around the designation of the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument. The conversations recognize the need to protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the National Monuments, while designating the amount of land that is reasonable to do so. These discussions are nuanced and complex.

We are closely monitoring several Arizona bills alongside our partners. HB 2021(in House) and HB 2022(in Senate) are particularly concerning as they aim to discourage conservation easements. Additionally, HB 2376 requires approval from both the Governor and Legislature for any land sold to the federal government, while HB 2377(in Senate) mandates a cost survey of all federal lands, resembling an audit prior to any requests. All three are assumed to die on the floor.

California

The California State Chapter works with other conservation and hunting groups through its association with Bill Gaines and Associates. Last year they engaged in two firearms bills and one hunting heritage bill last year. AB 28 - added a State Excise tax to firearms purchases. The California State Chapter opposed, and the bill passed. AB 1507 - Fixed a restriction on firearms on state property. The California State Chapter supported the fix, however this bill died in committee. SB 772 - would raise the maximum age to purchase a "youth hunting license" from 15 years of age to 17 years of age. The California State Chapter supported this bill, however it died in committee.

Colorado

The Colorado State Chapter works with other conservation and hunting groups through its membership in the Colorado Wildlife Conservation Project (CWCP). The NWTF was one of the original founding member organizations. Last year they engaged in three firearms related bills. SB 23-169 - Increasing minimum age to purchase firearms was opposed by the Colorado State Chapter. Through CWCP we worked to amend. The bill passed. 23-1219 - Waiting period to deliver a firearm. Worked to amend. The bill passed. West CO

In addition to active engagement, we monitored two habitat management related bills and one access bill. HB 23-1246 - Support in-demand workforce (community colleges) because of the implications for habitat management. This bill passed which was favorable. HB 23-1165 - County Authority to prohibit firearms discharge, died in committee, which was a favorable outcome. HB 23-1066 - Public Access landlocked by private lands, died in committee.

Through the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative's Workforce Subcommittee, NWTF supported SB 23-005 - Forestry and Wildfire Mitigation Workforce, a habitat management related bill. This bill passed.

Outside of the legislative realm, we were engaged with Colorado Parks & Wildlife in a number of ways, including: welcoming Director Davis, supporting the draft wolf plan and 10J rule, supporting big game license number reductions due to severe winter, etc. We also engaged with the BLM, signing onto a CWCP letter on the BLM Big Game RMP Amendment.

We also sponsored and participated in Sportsmen's Day at the Capitol in April 2023.

Colorado: Out-of-state animal rights activists are driving a campaign to collect signatures and add a "Ban on mountain lion, bobcat and lynx hunting" on the 2024 Colorado ballot. The NWTf has determined that this initiative has serious ramifications for the science-based wildlife management that has been repeatedly proven successful. We are actively engaged with the conservation community on this issue.

Idaho

The legislative period in Idaho proved positive for sportsmen, with support for several bills. Notably, HO484 was amended to provide an exemption from disclosure of game locations from records requests and was enacted. However, S1217, which prioritized public access points over private interests, did not pass. Similarly, S1231, which aimed to restrict permits or licenses for individuals with unpaid wildlife fines, did not advance. Additionally, we opposed HO484, which proposed the annual review and reset of all seasons by IDFG instead of bi-annually, and it did not progress.

Montana

In Montana, we engaged in two bills, a habitat management bill and the other related to hunting heritage. Specifically, we signed a coalition letter supporting SB442, a bill that would appropriate a percentage of revenues derived from marijuana sales tax to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' "Habitat Montana" program, habitat projects and improvements to public roads that see increased use by the public during hunting season. The bill passed and was vetoed by Governor Gianforte. HB 372 was a bill to add a constitutional "right to hunt" amendment. This bill died in committee.

Nevada

The Nevada State Chapter recently increased its visibility as a member of a newly formed Nevada sportsmen's coalition. The Chapter participated in the first coalition gathering with the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, the Nevada Department of Wildlife and the Nevada State Sportsmen's Caucus.

They monitored one firearms-related bill, AB 355 - Prohibits persons under the age of 21 Firearms. This bill passed and was vetoed by Governor Lombardo.

New Mexico

New Mexico's budgetary session initially appeared straightforward, yet a few bills emerged for consideration and were subsequently passed. Among them, HB129 garnered attention, proposing a mandatory seven-day waiting period for all firearms. While the state board monitored these developments, it refrained from taking a stance either in favor or against the bill.

Oregon

The Oregon State Chapter is consistently active in Oregon state policy. The chapter is an active member of the Oregon Sportsmen's Conservation Partnership (OSCP) and engages primarily with that coalition. In 2023, they engaged in one hunting heritage issue, two firearms related issues, one habitat management issue and one issue related to wildlife commission reform. Commission reform is of concern to the NWTF as it may impact the tenets of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation or the hunting heritage part of our mission. House Joint Resolution 5 - would have added a constitutional "Right to Fish, Hunt, Harvest and Gather." This was supported by the State Chapter and died in committee. HB 2999 was a habitat bill related to habitat connectivity, specifically wildlife crossings and corridors. The OSCP and the NWTF supported the bill that died in committee. The chapter opposed two firearms related bills: HB 2005 - undetectable firearms and SB 348 FIREARMS - implementing unlawful firearms. HB 2005 passed with amendments and SB 348 died in committee. The state chapter supported HB 3086 - State Fish and Wildlife Commission Reform, a proposal to balance the commission by providing geographic representation across Oregon. This bill passed and will ensure that rural and urban Oregonian values are represented.

On the policy horizon

Oregon: Activists are collecting signatures to add an "Abuse, Neglect, and Assault Exemption Modification and Improvement Act" on the 2024 Oregon ballot. Currently known as Initiative Petition 3, this proposed ballot initiative would criminalize hunting, fishing, trapping, and raising/slaughtering livestock. It also defines many animal breeding practices as sexual assault. NWTF is actively engaged with the conservation, agriculture, and dog communities on this issue.

Utah

Utah legislation impacting hunters saw notable changes this year. We supported HB262, granting Utah DNR the first right to any SITLA land for sale before private bidding, which passed. Additionally, our backing for HB 382, shifting the 3% credit card fee to consumers instead of DNR, also succeeded. We monitored HB 496, which decreased the value of multi-use on public lands and grazing, and it passed into law.

Washington

Washington was very active with respect to state policy in 2023. The Washington State Chapter worked with the Washington Fish and Wildlife Conservation Partnership (WFWCP) to effectively manage wildlife policy. The state chapter engaged in ten issues: seven that were firearms related, one wildlife management issue and two bills that involved fundraising and non-profit operations. With respect to firearms related legislation the state chapter opposed six of the seven proposed bills and missed the commenting deadline on the other one. The chapter opposed: SB 5232 - Enhancing requirements for purchase firearms, HB 1130, which placed additional responsibility on the firearms industry in gun violence, SB 5078, which was essentially the senate version of HB 1130, HB 1143 involving requirements for purchase, HB 1144 involving enhancing requirements for purchase (rolled into HB 1143), and SB 5669 right to purchase. They missed the commenting deadline for HB 1240. SB 5675 - regarding the makeup of the commission and had implications for wildlife management. The State Chapter supported the bill through the WFWCP letter, however the bill died in committee.

The remaining two bills, in which we engaged, related to fundraising activities. Washington's fundraising statutes were enacted in the 1970s and include several things that need modernized to facilitate non-profit fundraising. For example, current statutes include limitations on the price of raffle tickets, the ability to take credit card payments at events, etc. We were supportive of two attempts to modernize non-profit fundraising

in Washington, e.g., SB 6183 and SB 6190. Both bills died in committee. The NWTF is also a participant in the Fundraising Subcommittee within the WFWCP to continue updating Washington's fundraising constraints.

Wyoming

Due to its effects on wildlife management, the Wyoming State Chapter monitored HB 123 - Antler collection, last year, but did not officially support or oppose.

Meeting Notes

Managing Wild Turkey Conflicts

- Brian Wakeling presented an update on the manuscript to the group

GPS Transmitter Discussion

- The group discussed GPS transmitters used on wild turkeys in current and past projects
- Casey Cardinal agreed to start a working document with the group to serve as a resource for GPS transmitter use

Hands on Training

Walk in Traps for Wild Turkey

- Kyle Hand and Jason Hardin discussed walk in traps and all present members assisted in the construction and deployment of various walk in traps

Pneumatic Net Cannons

- Rick Langley discussed the use to net cannons and all present members assisted in the construction and deployment of pneumatic net cannons.

BBS TrendsforWild Turkey

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The Department has been monitoring Gould's turkey populations through spring surveys since 2006. Historically, survey sites were concentrated in areas of known roost sites or near water sources. Recent surveys have been targeted on GPS transmitter locations. Counts have ranged from a low of 18 in 2006 to a high of 295 in 2024.

Harvest Regulations

Current Regulations

Legal shooting time is ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset. Legal sporting arms include: any shot gun including muzzle loading shotguns using shot only, and bow and arrow. General turkey licenses are available over the counter, though there is a draw for hunts on special areas. The spring season runs from April 15–May 15, with a bag limit of 2 bearded turkeys. Fall seasons run from September 1–30 for archery, and November 1–30 for any legal sporting arm. The fall bag limit is 1 turkey.

Harvest Reporting

From 1961 to 2006 the Department collected turkey harvest information through mail surveys. No post-season turkey harvest survey 2006–2010. Beginning in 2011, turkey harvest reporting was conducted online. From 2011–2013, turkey harvest reporting was voluntary, and then turned mandatory in 2013–2014. Current reporting rates average approximately 80%.

Hunter and Harvest Estimates

The number of spring hunters and harvest have generally been on the rise. An estimated 8,742 individuals hunted in spring 2023, harvesting an estimated 2,447 birds.

0200040006000800010000120001960197019801990200020102020 **Year New Mexico Spring**

Turkey Estimated Hunters Estimated Harvest *Missing Spring Data for years: 1988, 1995-1996, 1998-1999, 2003, 2006-2010

Figure 3. New Mexico wild turkey spring harvest

The number of fall turkey hunters dropped from 20,000 hunters to 3,000 hunters with end of the concurrent deer and turkey fall season. A turkey specific license was not required until 1983, so early estimates of fall turkey hunters were likely not accurate. The separated fall turkey license

has allowed the Department to better approximate fall turkey hunters and harvest (Figure 4). Harvest estimates have varied from a high of 1,393 (1983) to a low of 108 (1997). Fall hunting was lower in the 1990s and early 2000s, with a slight resurgence of fall hunters in the last 10 years. An estimated 3,601 individuals hunted in fall 2023, harvesting an estimated 983 birds.

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Mexico Fall Turkey Estimated Hunters Estimated Harvest *Missing Fall Data for years: 1988, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2006-2010

Figure 4. New Mexico wild turkey fall harvest

Research Efforts

Gould's Turkeys

From 2018 to the present, 58 hens and 43 males have been captured and fitted with GPS backpacks. Some transmitters collect three locations every other day, and all transmitters capture a nightly roost location. Information on reproduction, survival, and habitat use has been obtained from the transmitted birds. Some interesting observations include a male moving over 25 miles from capture location, and several hens going to Mexico and returning to New Mexico. The GPS data has also helped target survey areas for the annual spring survey, improving minimum population counts.

Merriam's Turkeys

In 2024, the Department commenced an investigation on female Merriam's turkey survival, breeding season habitat use, and reproduction in New Mexico. During the spring, 17 hens and 2 males were captured and fitted with GPS backpacks. Turkeys were captured in 3 out of 4 regions of the state. This study will be expanded in future years to have up to 140 marked hens across the state.

Disease

Since 2020, Avian Pox has been documented in several locations in New Mexico. In the last several years, turkeys with lesions have been reported near Las Vegas, NM and Bosque del Apache NWR near San Antonio, NM. During Merriam's turkey captures in March-April 2024, oropharyngeal swabs were taken to test for HPAI and Mycoplasmas. HPAI was not detected in any samples. At one ranch in the

Northeast region, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (Mg) and *Mycoplasma synoviae* (Ms) were detected in trapped birds.

Nuisance/Damage Complaints

The Department has received several nuisance and damage complaints regarding wild turkeys in the last year. Primary complaints involve turkeys congregating on agricultural lands or in urban areas. As these lands are under private ownership, hunting pressure is much lighter, leading turkeys to linger in these areas. Several options the state is pursuing to alleviate these issues is encouraging landowners to sign up for Open Gate, the New Mexico private land access hunting program, and translocating turkeys to augment populations in non-problem areas.

Trapping and Translocation Efforts

The Department's long-range management plan includes trapping wild turkeys from areas with large, healthy populations and relocating them to areas with smaller populations or areas where turkeys were previous extirpated. Turkeys have been moved within the state since 1939. A summary of translocations since 2000 can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. New Mexico wild turkey translocations from 2000–present. Capture

		Release		Male		Female		Total	
Year	Month	Location	Location	Adult	Juv	Adult	Juv	Birds	Subspecies
2000	Mar	Vermejo Park	Pelona Mt.	17	5	6		28	Merriam's
2002	Mar		Texas		Near Roswell	102			Rio Grande
2004	Feb		Chama		Luera Mts.	20			Merriam's
2004	Feb		Chama		Datil	19			Merriam's
2004	Feb		Chama		Sandia Mts.	22			Merriam's
05/06	Winter		Sacramento Mts.		Monticello Canyon, Horse Mt., and NE of Farmington	45			Merriam's
06/07	Winter		Sacramento Mts.		Guadalupe Mts.	18			Merriam's
06/07	Winter		Chama		Magdalena Mts.	17			Merriam's
07/08	Winter		Mayhill		Guadalupe Mts.	10			Merriam's
2008	Summer	Huey WMA	Delaware River	33	5	9		47	Rio Grande
08/09	Winter		Mayhill		Guadalupe Mts.	15			Merriam's
2014	Feb		Cimarron		Guadalupe Mts.	47			Merriam's
2014	Feb	AZ	Peloncillos Mts.	11	1	6	2	20	Gould's
2015	Feb	AZ	Peloncillos Mts.	9	6	3		25	Gould's
2016	Feb	AZ	Peloncillos Mts.		5	10		15	Gould's
2017	Feb	Raton	Guadalupe Mts.		4	1		5	Merriam's
2017	Feb	Raton	Guadalupe Mts.	4	12	16	18	52	Merriam's
2018	Feb	Santa Rosa	NE Roswell, NM	12	4	10	10	36	Rio Grande
2018	Mar	Raton	Guadalupe Mts.	15	16	17	24	72	Merriam's
2019	Feb	Raton	Cebolla Mesa	11	22	19		52	Merriam's

NORTH DAKOTA WILD TURKEY POPULATION STATUS REPORT – 2023

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POPULATION STATUS The Department uses several population techniques to obtain trends on our wild turkey population. We have a landowner survey that is sent to most landowners who have turkeys wintering on their land. Our district biologists and game wardens annually record observations of wild turkey hens, broods and poults on standardized pheasant brood routes during July and August. We also have our field staff collect incidental turkey brood data from June 1 to September 1.

REPRODUCTION The 2023 brood survey showed an increase in the total number of adult turkeys observed (5.9 vs. 1.9, 210%) and in average brood size (4.92 vs. 7.46, 51%) from 2022. The number of poults per adult hen was up 226% (.49 vs. 1.60) and number of broods was up 184% (13 vs. 37) from 2022.

HARVEST 2023 Spring Turkey Season The state uses twenty-two hunting units during the spring season. These units include all of North Dakota's 53 counties. During the spring of 2023, the entire state was open for wild turkey hunting except for unit 21 in the southwestern part of the state. This area has been closed for the past ten spring hunting seasons because of low turkey numbers in this unit. Licenses are issued by weighted lottery after the number of gratis licenses is deducted from the total available. Only residents are eligible to apply for spring licenses, although three spring licenses are provided to the NWTF for auction. The 2023 Spring Wild Turkey Proclamation provided the Outdoor Adventure Foundation with three turkey licenses, valid in any open unit, for the 2021 spring season. In accordance with N.D.C.C. 20.1-04-07(1) (c)), these two licenses shall be issued to a qualifying youth who has cancer or a life-threatening illness. First time spring turkey hunters age 15 or younger can receive one spring license valid for the regular hunting season for any open unit. As in the fall season, we provide only one time period for hunting wild turkeys in the spring. You choose your weapon from shotguns, muzzle loading shotguns, handguns and bow/arrows.

During the 2023 spring gobbler hunting season, a total of 7,887 regular season licenses were available. Gratis and youth licenses were not included in the regular season license allocation. 5,932 hunters harvested 2,358 turkeys with a success rate of 40% in 2023. Additionally, feather samples from the 2023 season resulted in 398 adults compared to 164 juveniles.

2022 Fall Turkey Season The state is divided into twenty-two hunting units and these areas include all 53 counties of North Dakota's. During the fall of 2021, twenty-one of 22 counties were open for wild turkey hunting. Unit 21 in the southwest was closed. Licenses are issued by weighted lottery after gratis licenses are deducted from the total available. Only North Dakota residents are eligible to apply in the first lottery. If licenses remain after the first lottery, then nonresidents can apply. North Dakota has no specific youth hunting season for wild turkeys in the fall. We also do not have a specific bow season for turkeys. We provide one time period for hunting wild turkeys in the fall, and you can choose your weapon from shotguns, muzzle loading shotguns, handguns and bow/arrows. During the fall of 2022, there were 3,975 permits available and 4,031 were issued (285 gratis and 3,746 general permits). From the wild turkey questionnaire, it was determined that 2,512 license holders hunted during the fall. Hunters harvested 1,240 wild turkeys for a success of 50 percent.

RESEARCH EVALUATING SURVIVAL AND MOVEMENTS OF TRANSLOCATED WILD TURKEYS IN NORTH DAKOTA (RESEARCH) A. NEEDThe restoration of the wild turkey in North America represents one of the greatest success stories in the history of wildlife management. They are found in the wooded areas of southeastern United States and throughout much of the Great Plains and westward. The wild turkey has a current range that exceeds its original native range. Wild turkeys are not indigenous to North Dakota (Johnson and Knue 1989). Early attempts (1930's and 1940's) at stocking turkeys in the state were not successful. But in the early 1950's, three wild turkey subspecies were successfully introduced into North Dakota: Eastern wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo sylvestris*) released along the Heart River and Missouri River; Merriam's (*M. g. merriami*) released in the Pine Forest Region of Slope County; and the Rio Grande (*M. g. intermedia*) released along the Little Missouri River and the Missouri River (Johnson and Knue 1989). As these birds flourished in release areas, trapping and transplanting programs were initiated to move birds into other available habitat. Now wild turkeys occupy most available cover in the state. In fact, turkeys have been so successful in many parts of North Dakota that winter depredation problems can occur fairly frequently in both private farmsteads and adjacent to municipalities. Turkey complaints often require trapping nuisance birds and transplanting them to "hunt-able areas" which is time consuming and costly. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF) has been conducting a trap and transport program since 1996. On average,

NDGF relocates approximately 200 turkeys from 5 sites in a year. Turkeys were initially marked with an aluminum leg band that had no information on how to report it. Therefore, in 2020, NDGF started banding birds with a standard aluminum band that now includes contact info to report the band. However, there have been few returns so there is little information on what happens to the released turkeys. Understanding survival and movements of transplanted turkeys would help the department to evaluate the effectiveness of transporting turkeys and to determine if they move to new areas that could create future depredation issues or if it is providing hunters with additional opportunities.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on the wild turkey in North America, little work has been conducted in the Northern Great Plains region, and only one study have been done on this introduced species in North Dakota (Courlas 2014). Most recent studies on wild turkeys in the Northern Great Plains have occurred in South Dakota (Flake et al. 2006). Most of this work has involved movement of birds, feeding habits and general ecology of Eastern and Merriam turkeys in northeastern and the Black Hills of South Dakota (Day 1988, Knupp 1990, Lehman 2005, Thompson 2003, Rumble and Anderson 1996, Shields and Flake 2004, Wertz and Flake 1988). In North Dakota, minimal information is available on spring/fall populations, peak nesting season, seasonal movements and home range, annual productivity and survival by habitat types and value of supplemental transplants to overall population welfare. Acquiring this data in North Dakota would help the department better understand wild turkey behaviors in North Dakota and aid in determining the best possible management practices and hunting regulations for turkey populations in North Dakota.

At present, minimal population data is obtained on wild turkeys in North Dakota. Harvest decisions are primarily driven by harvest success rates. Most population information is collected by North Dakota Game and Fish personnel through roadside counts of pheasants during mid-July through August. Many of these pheasant routes do not occur in ideal turkey habitat in the state, raising concerns that turkey estimates from pheasant brood routes might be underestimating relative densities. Therefore, it is difficult to link these routes to information regarding the extend of perceived turkey problem by landowners and evaluate if populations may be changing in areas where released birds may be leading to changes in population numbers. As a result, there is a need for understanding impacts of the trap and transport program in North Dakota, the fate of the birds transported, and the perceptions of landowners with complaints and in areas where releases are occurring.

B.OBJECTIVES

1.Evaluate movements of transported turkeys

Specific questions:

- Do home ranges differ between trapped/translocated birds compared to those just trapped

and released at the depredation complaint site?

- How far do trap/translocated birds move from the release site, do they stay on the WMA where they were released, or do they return to original areas?

2. Evaluate survival and reproduction of turkeys transported

Specific questions:

- What are the average days survived after being transported?
- What is the cause of most mortalities?
- How do survival rates compare between transported birds and non-transported (control) birds?
- Do hens nest after being transported?
- What is the nesting phenology of transported females compared to non-transported (control) females?

3. Evaluate the wild turkey trap and transport program from a human dimensions perspective.

Specific questions:

- Are landowners satisfied with translocation results?
- How long does the depredation trapping results satisfy the landowner?
- Are additional depredation problems occurring near release sites?
- Are hunters using WMAs at release sites perceiving benefits?
- Is this the best management practice?

C. EXPECTED RESULTS OR BENEFITS

Findings of the study will result in recommendations that benefit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department with management of the wild turkey in North Dakota. This research will provide an in depth look at wild turkey movements, survival, and reproduction after transportation aimed at alleviating depredation concerns while provide additional hunting opportunities for sportsmen and women in North Dakota. With this data, state biologists will be better able to manage the wild turkey population across the state with regulated spring and fall hunting, harvest, and sustainable population management.

Findings will also provide insights into landowner and hunter perceived benefits, concerns, and questions regarding the trap and transport program. Information from evaluation of the current complaint database will help create maps of depredation concern areas and opportunities for where future turkey enhancement projects might be most successful. Combined with the demographic data, North Dakota Game and Fish will have information to assess the effectiveness of the program

D.APPROACH

Objective 1 and 2: Evaluate Demographics of Transported Turkeys

During winters of 2022 and 2023, ND Game and Fish personnel will capture turkeys using rocket/drop nets and fit 50 turkeys each year with backpack style GPS transmitters with VHS. Half of the turkeys will remain at trap sites while the other half will be transported to various 3 WMAs in North Dakota where enhancement efforts for turkey are occurring. We will put 26 transmitters on females split between transported and control birds, and 24 transmitters on males also split between transported and control birds (see sample sizes of Cohen et al. 2018). All birds captured will receive aluminum leg bands with NDGF reporting information on them. In addition to marking, birds will be aged, sexed, and blood samples taken for disease sampling (conducted in collaboration with Dr. Charlie Bahnson, NDGF Wildlife Veterinarian).

Movements and survival will be tracked by department personnel and hired technician in collaboration with a graduate student at UND. Due to reliability, the GPS transmitters selected will require personnel to get within 200 m of birds in order to download the data on a weekly basis. Duty cycles will be set to record every 2 hours during daylight hours and at midnight each night following Parker et al. (2021). Relocation of birds will require the use of 3-element yagi

antennas (already owned by NDGF), R-1000 Communication specialist receivers (already owned by NDGF), and remote downloads using a high-range yagi antenna for downloads. All downloaded data will be stored using OneDrive and Microsoft Teams so that sharing can occur between NDGF and UND.

Data from relocated birds will be used to conduct basic movement information related to distance from release site with a particular interest in locations during the spring and fall hunting seasons. In addition, we will calculate home ranges per recommendations of Cohen et al. (2018) that assess differences between dynamic Brownian bridge movement and kernel density estimators based upon available data collected.

Survival calculations will be based upon the “capture history” created from the locations. The transmitters are fitted with mortality signals. Given we are conducted weekly relocations, we will attempt to collect all dead birds for necropsy to determine cause of mortality, but understand the frequency of relocation may limit assessments as predators, scavengers, and decay may reduce ability for collection of whole carcasses. Assistance with necropsies will be provided by the ND Wildlife Health Lab.

GPS transmitters have enabled more precise timing of nest initiation dates for turkeys (See Byrne et al. 2014, Yeldell et al. 2017). We can use GPS locations to determine when incubation begins, nest initiation by backdating from start of incubation, number of nesting attempts, and success of the nest. To do this, we will place effort on confirming the presence of nests and review contents of nests for the presence of eggshells, membranes and/or feathers in nest bowls.

While this study could provide substantial information on turkey demographics of both transported and non-transported birds, there is a risk that all birds transported do not survive long enough for detailed movement, survival, or reproductive data. While that will limit the data analysis for the study, it does provide information about what happens to the birds once transported and is an important consideration to costs of the program and potential needs for incorporating other management techniques into handling turkey depredation cases.

Objective 3: Evaluation of Effectiveness of the Trap and Transport Program from a Human Dimensions Perspective

To evaluate the effectiveness of the program we will take a two-pronged approach. First, we will review the complaint history from landowners of nuisance turkeys and requests for depredation assistance that is available in the North Dakota Game and Fish Department system. We will mine the records to explore geographic areas of complaints to determine if complaints are associated with areas where trap and transported birds have been released, are in areas of active

management by the ND Game and Fish Department, or in areas that have surrounding complaints. Using location information from this effort, we should be able to construct heat maps of areas where targeted efforts to relocate birds may be necessary or if relocation efforts are causing complaints in new areas. Further, we will use this information to document if trapping occurred in a year and birds were trapped and transported, did this result in any subsequent complaints that year or in the following 3 years.

We will use interviews of landowners and hunters to understand the perceived benefits, drawbacks, and landowner questions of the trap and transport program. This will include landowners that have filed complaints in the past, landowners adjacent to those filing complaints, landowners in neighboring private lands next to where release sites are, and hunters using WMAs. This approach will allow researchers to ask questions to landowners in a conversational manner where we can qualitatively assess a thematic understanding of landowner perceptions. This may include concerns with disease transmission, crop, or property damage, explore tolerance levels, and definitions of successful management of turkey numbers in their area. Semi-structured interviews allow a deeper understanding of specific reasons for complaints, tolerance levels of turkeys, and definitions of success of a trap and transport method that require larger sample sizes. All interviews will be conducted by UND researchers

Oklahoma Wild Turkey Population Status Report – 2024
Western State Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting May 6-8
Croton Creek Ranch, Cheyenne, OK

50th Southeast Wild Turkey Working Group Meeting – June 18-19, 2024

Skelton Conference Center, Blacksburg, VA

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POPULATION STATUS

Winter surveys were changed a little to represent a standard protocol statewide. We put renewed emphasis on finding flocks and counting the number of birds within each flock. Due mostly to standardization of protocol, decreases in populations were seen in the central and northeast regions of the state. Both the central and northeast region saw the largest population change in the state with an estimated decrease of 57%. The northwest and southwest regions saw little change of 1.7%. The protocol used did not change in these regions and thus no adjustment to

population estimates was made like we had in the central and northeast. The southeast region noted an increase of 25%. Much of this increase is contributed to the renewed emphasis on winter flock survey data and may not reflect a population increase of 25%. Moving forward we hope that our standards and protocols allows all the regions to capture trends in turkey populations better than the older methods used in some of the various regions.

Throughout the state of Oklahoma, online check-in showed the spring harvest in 2024 increased 11.5 percent. Declines in 2021 to 2022 harvest data was a result of rule changes that went into effect. For the 2022 spring season ODWC reduced the bag limit statewide from 3 birds to 1 bird. ODWC expected the bag limit change to reduce our harvest and we did, by 37%. The increase shown in the online check-in data for 2024 had the same regulations as the 2022 and 2023 seasons and thus the harvest can be compared, and the increase is a welcome sight. Harvest in 2023 was the first year since 2016 that we have had an increase in harvest. We followed up the 2023 season with another increase in harvest in 2024. The regulation changes set in 2021 seem to be having a positive influence on our turkey populations.

Overall population estimates for the Rio Grande Turkey throughout the state indicate a stable to slightly increasing population. The Eastern Turkey population is stable, but they remain at low numbers. Weather has been a noted issue across this state Oklahoma. From severe drought and devastating wildfires to flooding, tornadoes and large hail events. In 2022 & 2023 a department wide emphasis was put in place on turkey surveys for better and more accurate data. Brood surveys were assigned department wide and winter flock survey protocols were made an emphasis. This resulted in some major county level fluctuations, but that was anticipated. The statewide genetic sampling of harvested birds is

ongoing and research projects in the southeast and southwest portions of the state to document vital rates are also ongoing.

REPRODUCTION

Eastern Wild Turkey

Winter Flock Survey

Figure 1 summarizes the winter flock survey data for the Southeast Region from 1978 through 2024 based on incidental sightings. The 2024 survey showed a 25.3% increase from 2023 with the 5-year mean decreasing by 3.25%. Some variation in data between years can be explained by difficulties inherent to the survey technique. Personnel and cooperator changes cause bias in data collection. Incidental sighting data are not precise but indicate population status and distribution. The increase in 2021 (+52.26%) is a result of 2020 being low on winter flock survey totals. This was due to very low participation as COVID-19 was affecting work and observations. Note: renewed emphasis on winter flock data may be responsible for some percentage increase. However, biologist opinion is that the Eastern population has seen a bump in population, at least in pockets.

Summer Brood Survey

The average number of poults per hen (2.73) percent of hens observed with poults (46%) and the total number of broods sighted (44) observed in the summer of 2023 indicated an average reproduction in the Southeast region (figure 9). The last documented year of 3 poults per hen or better was in 2013.

History

Long-term data from the winter flock surveys show that Eastern turkey populations were very healthy in the early 2000's up until 2009. The drought year of 2010 is often blamed for the start of the turkey decline that in some ways continues to exist. The past 5 years has shown a stabilization within the population but at a very low level. Current winter flock survey numbers are low only around one thousand birds being sighted during the sample period. It is important to note that survey effort will and or could bias the survey data. Oklahoma as used staff, county workers, mail carriers, and partners in the past but more recently, ODWC staff and partners (ngo and government) provide much of the data.

Summer Brood data collection in the southeast region of Oklahoma started in 1980. The standards have changed a little over time as we adopted the NWTF standard. The long-term data indicates that turkeys in the 1980s and 1990s were much more productive than they currently are. During the 1987 survey they documented a 6.4 poult per hen ratio which is the highest documented to date in Oklahoma. The lowest on record was in 2009 with only a .67 poult per hen ratio. More recently we are observing around 2 poults per hen which indicates a stable population. Dating back to the early 2000s we used to document around 200 sighting. Starting in 2021 to present we are documenting around 55 sightings annually.

Rio Grande Turkey

Winter Flock Survey

The 2024 range-wide Rio Grande Turkey minimum population estimate (41,717) showed a 37% decrease from 2023 (Figure 2). The highest population estimate recorded was in 2006 (118,891). Note that most of

this decline was due to protocol changes in the central and northeastern regions. Both regions seen a decrease by 57%. Where we used to estimate a population, we are now counting birds that make up the winter flocks to provide the state with a “minimum” population estimate. This is to guard against over estimating populations. We can also monitor individually known flocks and provide a percentage of increase or decrease over time.

The western portion of the state did show a stabilization the past 3 years (2022 to 2024). The southwest region experienced a -4.14% decrease and the northwest region a -2.54% decrease for the 3-year average. The western portion of the state experienced catastrophic wildfires and drought during all of 2022. Those conditions continued into yearly 2023 with wildfires like the smoke house fire that started on February 26 and claimed 1,058,482 acres the Texas panhandle and western Oklahoma.

Summer Brood Survey

Emphasis was put on expanding the NWTF standard protocol for summer brood surveillance statewide starting in the summer of 2022. Currently all 5 management regions conduct the survey. Figure 10 shows long-term trends. Poult production within the Rio Grande range indicates average reproductive. The NW and SW regions did indicate slightly better than average during the 2022 season with 3.5 poults/hen.

History

The Rio Grande turkey population estimate for 2006 (118,891) was recorded during the peak years for the sub-species. Population estimates had increased in most years prior to 2006, but then followed with nearly annual decreases until 2014. For several years prior to 2007, spring and early summer weather conditions were nearly ideal for nesting and brood rearing. In those years population increases were noted in all parts

of the bird's range. The seven successive population decreases noted in 2007 through 2013 were atypical of previous trends. During the five-year period starting in 2007, central and northeastern wild turkey populations decreased each year. Western populations increased in 2008 but then decreased each year prior to 2014. Dry conditions in 2010 and severe to exceptional drought in most of the state in 2011-2012, resulted in lowered recruitment in those years. With continued depressed populations in the west through 2018, compared to recent increases in central and northeast Oklahoma, it was apparent that the severe drought may have affected wild turkey habitat to an extent that populations soon may not recover above those observed pre-drought. Field observers report extensive mortality to cottonwood stands and other roost habitat in some areas.

Decreases in Rio Grande turkey population numbers prior to 2014 should have been anticipated. During restoration, turkeys expanded their range into unoccupied areas and population numbers increased as expected. Rio Grande turkey numbers increased substantially throughout all parts of the bird's range. The recent lower population estimates should be characterized as a normal function of population biology. The exceptionally high population levels observed in 2006 were not sustainable given the dynamic nature of weather and habitat conditions during reproductive season.

HARVEST

2024 Spring Turkey Season

Statewide spring harvest data for all regions is presented in Figure 3.

Regional spring harvest data is presented in Figures 4 through 8.

Eastern Wild Turkey

Harvest Analysis

The southeast region is the only region that we claim to have a population of the Eastern sub-species of wild turkey. Figure 4 illustrates the long-term trends for the region. During the 2024 spring season the region seen a decrease of -2.68% in harvest. The five-year average is an increase of .84%. In summery the harvest has been very stable dating back to 2012.

Results of the turkey Hunter Pressure Survey (Figure 11) revealed an decrease of -4.09% in hunter activity (hunter-days) for the Pushmataha, James Collins, and McGee Creek Wildlife Management Areas (Table 1). A total of 436 hunter-days were recorded for Pushmataha WMA, 503 for James Collins WMA, and 207 for McGee Creek WMA during the 33-day season. The ten-year average of all three management areas is 386 hunter-days. It is important to note the number of hunting days prior to 2022 season ranged from 16-22 in the Southeast Region depending on the calendar year. 2022 and beyond the number of days in the season is set at 33. Covid-19 created a big jump in hunter use on our wildlife management areas. The decrease seen in 2021 is not less hunters on the average but a lot less than the previous year due to the Covid spike.

2024 hunting pressure in review; it seems that Pushmataha and James Collins the past two years (2023 & 2024) have seen a slight increase in wma use compared to the 2 years prior (2021 & 2022). McGee Creek has noted a strong decrease in hunting pressure when comparing the same years. McGee Creek used to be a destination location to hunt

turkeys, however anecdotal and gobble surveys seem to suggest the population has declined and struggling to rebound. James Collins has become a destination location not only for turkey but also deer and it is noted in this years survey with an increase of nearly 100 hunters. Hunter success indicates that James Collin's is the better of the 3 years to currently hunt. James Collins reported 1 in 18 hunters were successful while Pushmataha reported 1 per 29 and McGee Creek reporting 1 in 25,

History

In 1989, 1,836 birds were recorded at check stations in the southeast. The harvest declined to only 683 birds checked in 1994. The changes were attributed to population declines and more restrictive hunting seasons and bag limits. However, from 1994 through 2001, the harvest increased each year without modifications. In 2002, spring turkey season was moved back to April 6. The season length was 23 days (8 days less than the statewide season). The bag limit of one tom was raised to a limit of two for the combined 8 southeast counties. The spring of 2002 harvest resulted in an 84% increase over 2001 with 3,244 birds checked in southeastern counties. From 2004 – 2006, the season length for the spring turkey season was increased an additional seven days to the same as statewide 31-day season (April 6 through May 6). Bag Limit remained unchanged. In 2007 an additional two days were added to the season for the Youth Spring Turkey Season to promote recruitment of young turkey hunters under the age of 18. From 2007 through 2011 the population of Eastern turkey declined to point the regulations were changed in 2012. From 2012 – 2021, the spring turkey season for the southeast region opened on the third Monday of April and closed on May 6, with a 2-day youth season the weekend before the 3rd Monday start date. The bag limit was reduced to a one tom limit. The 2012 spring harvest resulted in a 53.9% decrease from 2011 figures (due to a later start date, shortened season length and reduced bag limit) with 688 birds checked in the southeastern counties. 2022 seen a big regulation change as the population of Rio Grande turkeys declined in the Western half of

the state. The historic April 6th opening date for Rio Grande was needing to be changed. In doing so the agency moved to an opening date of April 16 statewide. This moved the SE opening date up a few days to have a single opening date that was statewide. Moving the SE opening date up was an attempt to prevent additional hunting pressure with 2 separate opening dates. The bag limit for Eastern birds changed from 1 tom for the 8 counties combined to 1 tom per hunter statewide (Figure 4).

For the 2022 spring turkey season to present, the harvest was basically unchanged compared to the other 4 regions. This is because the SE region basically had the season days, length, and bag limits in place. The 2022 season did lengthen from an average of 20 days to a fixed 33 days. The additional days were a few days on the front but mostly the 10 days on the end (May 6 ending date changed to May 16).

Rio Grande Turkey

Harvest Analysis

All 4 regions of the Rio Grande range (Southwest, Northwest, Central, and Northeast) reported increased harvest numbers for the second straight year.

Regional summaries showing Rio Grande populations year harvest totals can be found in Figures 5 through 8. The 2024 harvest exceeded the harvest of 2021 when we had an early season start date of April 6th and a 3-bird limit. This is an indication that we had more birds on the landscape and that hunter success rate was higher in 2024 than in 2021.

To illustrate the decline in Western Oklahoma, statewide in 2019 we had five counties (Beckham, Ellis, Major, Roger Mills, and Woodward) checked in over 200 birds. 2021 we had only 3 counties check in over 200 birds (Ellis, Roger Mills and Woodward). During the 2022 spring season one county (Roger Mills County) harvested over 200 birds.

To illustrate a slight rebound during the 2024 spring season we had 4 counties harvest over 200 birds. (Ellis, Major, Roger Mills, Woodward) Roger Mills County checked in 386 birds, the best since year 2019 when it checked in 406 birds. Major County checked in 244 birds, the best-known harvest post 2015.

Ellis County is a good example of our turkey decline and ODWC's approach for regulation changes for the 2022 spring season. In 2017 Ellis County harvested 302 birds. Then, due to population decline, harvest went to 212 birds by year 2021. For the 2022 season, due in large to the reduced bag limit Ellis County harvested 76 birds. So, the statewide big limit reduced to one bird might have saved as many as 136 birds in Ellis County alone. During the 2024 harvest season Ellis County harvest 206 birds, a nice rebound from the 2022 harvest numbers.

History

The turkey restoration project is one of the most successful wildlife projects in Oklahoma's history. Rio Grande populations quickly became established in western Oklahoma following early restoration efforts. Later, Rio Grande releases in central and some eastern counties also proved successful. In only 16 years, 1949 – 1965, ODWC went from the beginning of restoration to opening the state's first spring turkey hunting season.

Historically, there was no mandatory checking of harvested wild turkeys west of I35 (western half of the state). Statewide online turkey harvest data become mandatory in 2014. Because there was no check in process little to no historic data of harvest is known. We do know anecdotally, from stories and a liberal bag limit, that harvest was high and the turkey hunting was very good in the early 2000's.

2023 Fall Turkey Season

Rio Grande & Eastern Turkey Combined

Harvest Analysis

The fall harvest remains to be a low participated hunting season with most activity coming from incidental opportunities while deer hunting. 2023 Fall season had 256 birds reported statewide. Figure 12 will show you the region break down and season total. Central region has historically seen higher harvest than the other regions. Hen harvest in the fall as dramatically decreased after the 2021 regulation changes making it Tom only and removing the either sex regulation. Hen harvest in fall of 2023 was 7%.

HUNTING INCIDENTS

One hunting incidents occurred in Oklahoma during the 2024 season. A group of non-resident hunts was guided by a group of residents. The hunters set up on a corn feeder, illegal in Oklahoma within 100 yards of bait, and the residents went on the other side of the feeder about 50 yards away to watch. As the hunters took aim and shot at a bird the pellets traveled pass the target and hit one of the bystanders on the other side. The injuries were non-lethal but professional medical attention was needed.

REGULATIONS/LEGISLATION CHANGES

No changes

RESEARCH

Turkey research in Oklahoma has not lost its momentum from its start in 2022. Currently researchers from Oklahoma State University are conducting field work and tissue samples are being collected statewide by ODWC staff. See appendix 2 for research details.

Research Update

In the southeast portion of the state (McCurtain and Pushmataha counties) winter trapping was continued for a third field season. This winter 31 hens are equipped with tracking devices of various types. 19 of the hens have been identified that have initiated incubation. Preliminary data suggest that nest success is very low. Researchers collected and shipped 29 eggs (clutches of 12, 9, and 8) to the university of Tennessee for viability testing. These eggs were obtained after the known hen was predated or abended. Researchers have also conducted 39 vegetation surveys for the year's failed nest locations (one survey taken at the nest and two random locations within the same stand). Game cameras are also going to be deployed for the predator density estimate of the project. At the time of this report second and third nest attempts for 2024 breeding season is ongoing.

In the southwest portion of the study (Harmon and Greer Counties) we have entered into the second season for winter trapping. Transmitters

were deployed on hens captured via walk in traps. Game cameras will also be deployed this spring for the predator density estimate of the project this spring.

For the genetic portion of this study, tissue samples are currently being collected statewide for analysis. Preliminary data is indicating that genetic flow and hybridization is accruing along the Red River. Early results are also indicating that the northeast turkey population is very hybridized.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

SW counties Harmon, Jackson, Tillman, and Greer within the SW Region are showing the worst population decline among Oklahoma. Decline is being reported among Winter Flock Surveys, Hunter Harvest Reporting, and public comments of concern.

As populations decline, thoughts of how to manage harvest and hunter pressure on Wildlife Management Areas is being discussed and growing in concern.

Live feed or cellular trail cameras and thermal imaging devices are gaining notice as being used in the pursuit of turkeys.

Fanning and repping hunting strategies are a topic that has been discussed with the SEWTWG, currently no issue or discussion is being discussed within Oklahoma.

A “No-Jake” rule was reviewed by the turkey project leaders. We noted that in 2022, jake harvest made up 24.5% of the total harvest. Project leaders do not believe this is significant to warrant a No-Jake Rule.

Aflatoxins and baiting/feeding in the state are evolving to possible research for future regulation implications.

Public releasing turkeys to “help” with population declines. Need to strengthen regulations to make it illegal for release of pen raised turkeys.

Out of state hunting guides are noted as the source of a lot of harvest and regulation violations in the western portion of the state. As states around the country limit opportunities those hunters are looking for over the counter tags like Oklahoma and thus could put additional hunting pressure on the research from nonresident hunters.

RELEVANT LINKS

www.wildlifedepartment.com

MISCELLANEOUS

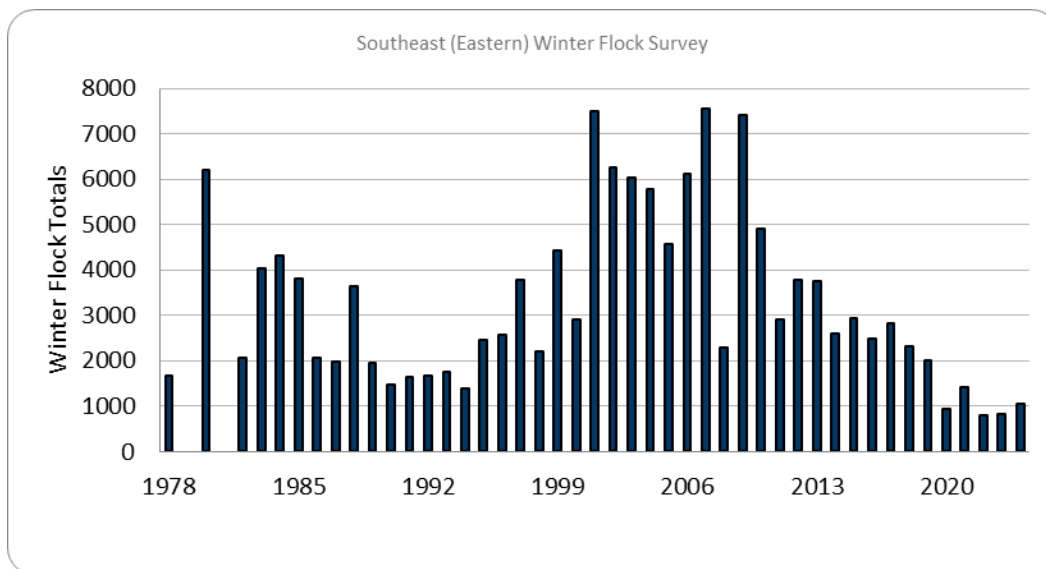


Figure 2 SE Winter Flock Survey 1975-2023

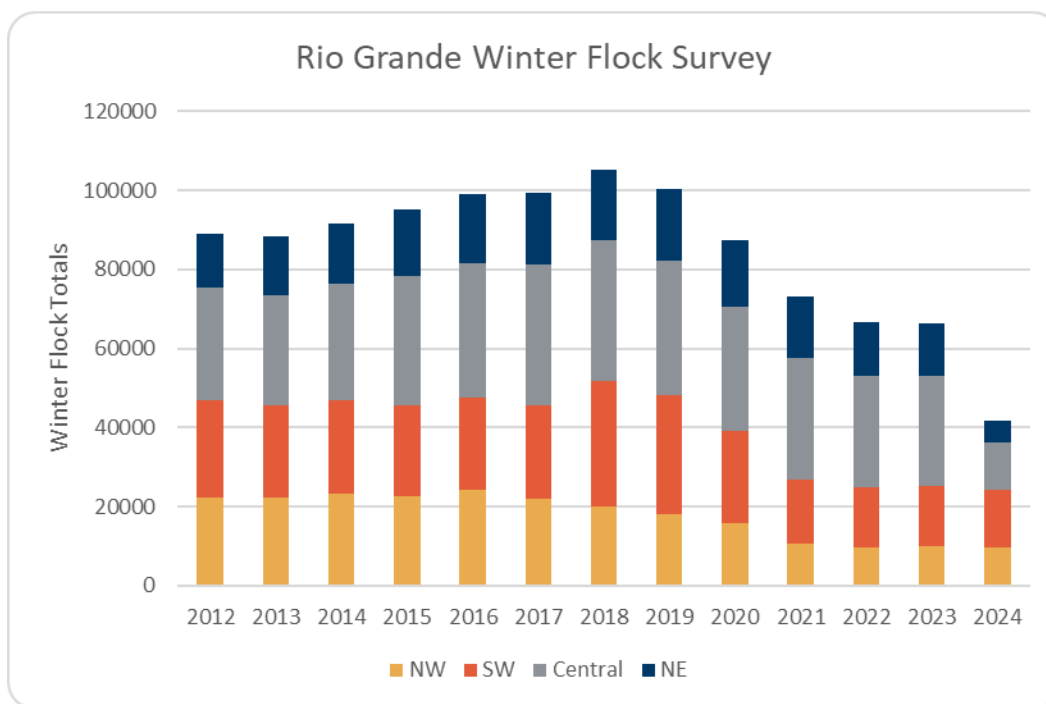


Figure 2 Rio Grande population estimates by region 2012-2023

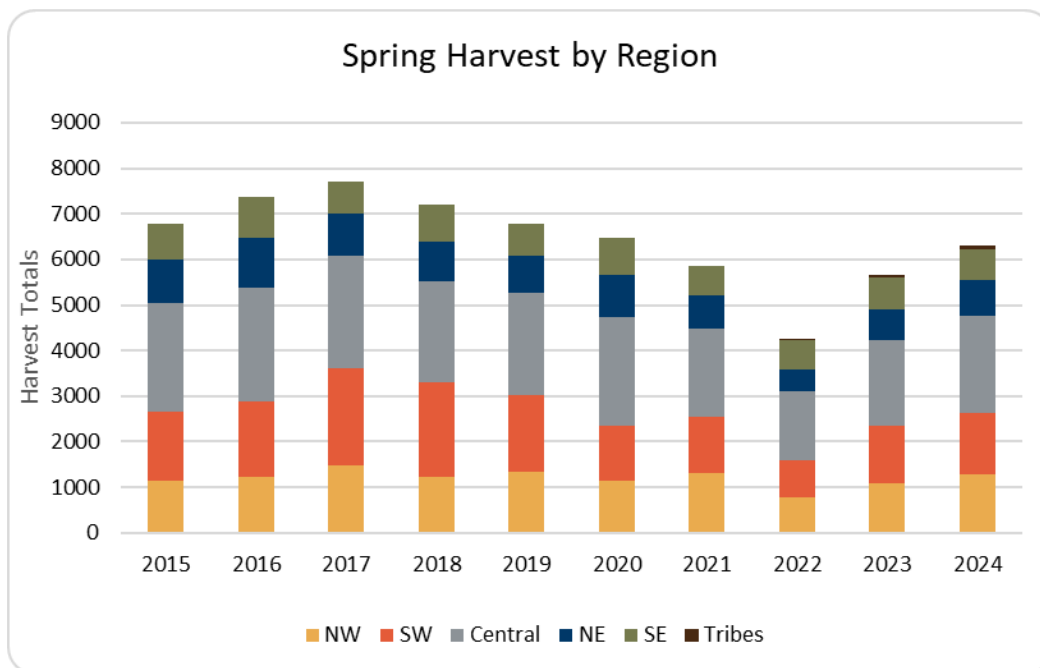


Figure 3 All regions plus tribal spring turkey harvest

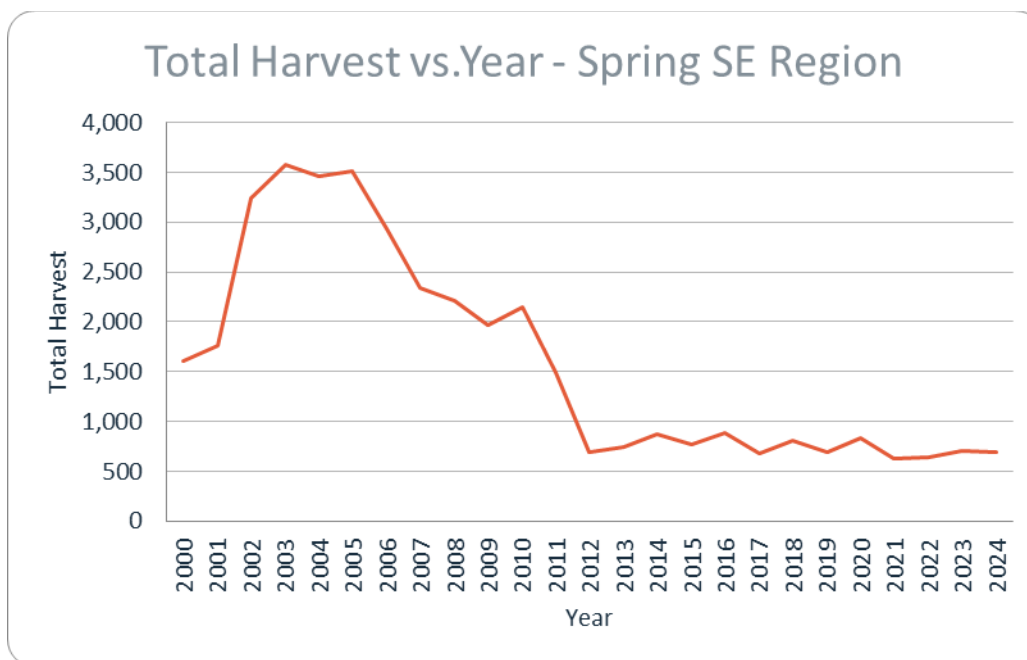


Figure 4 SE region spring turkey harvest

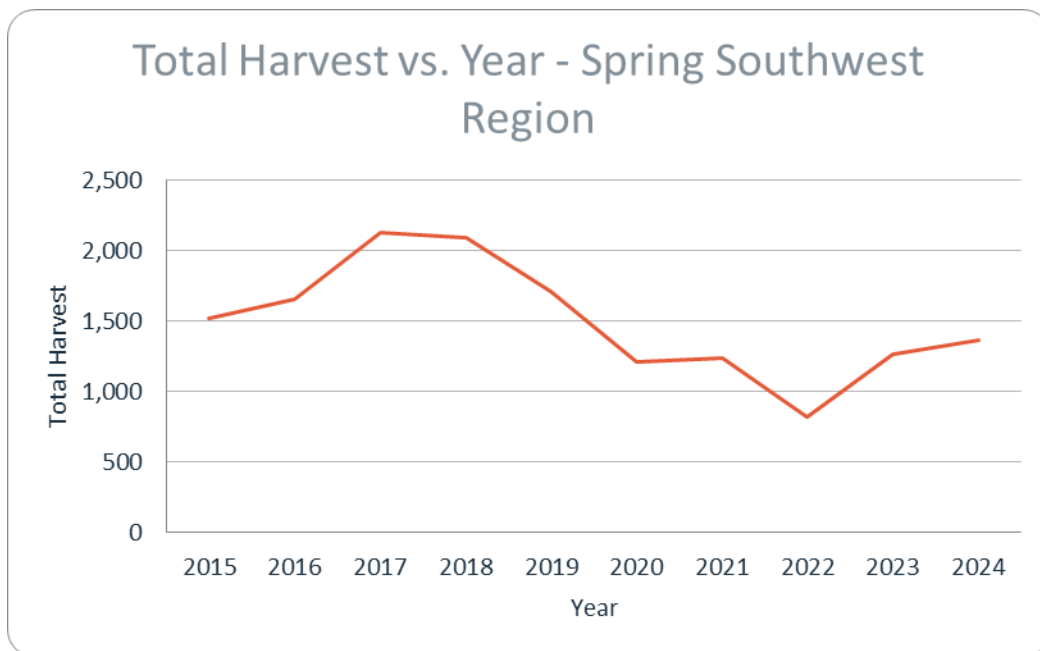


Figure 5 SW region spring turkey harvest

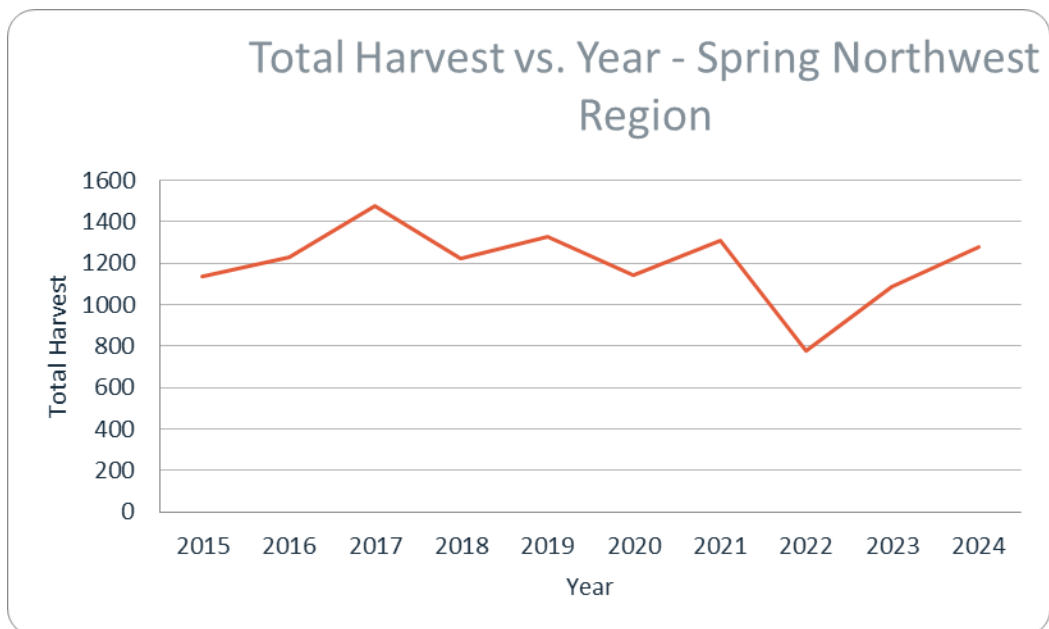


Figure 6 NW region spring turkey harvest

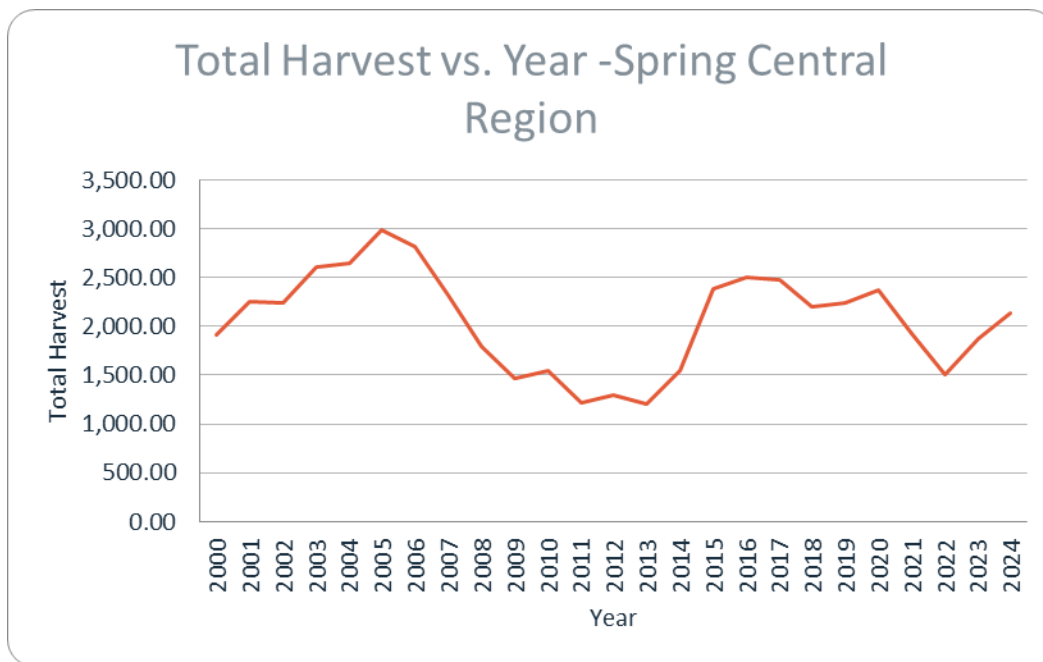


Figure 7 central region spring turkey harvest

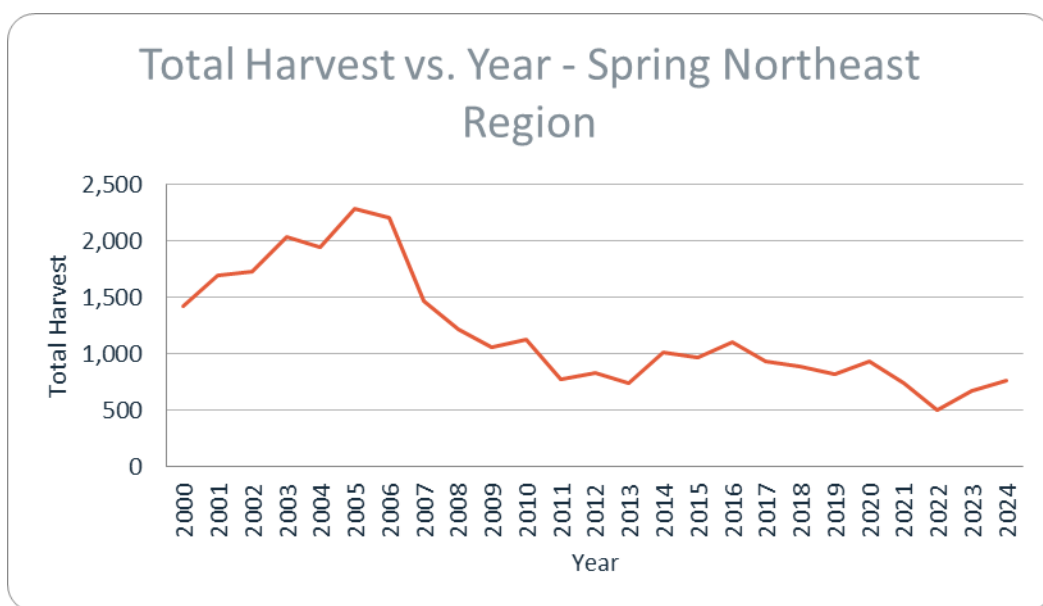


Figure 8 NE region spring turkey harvest

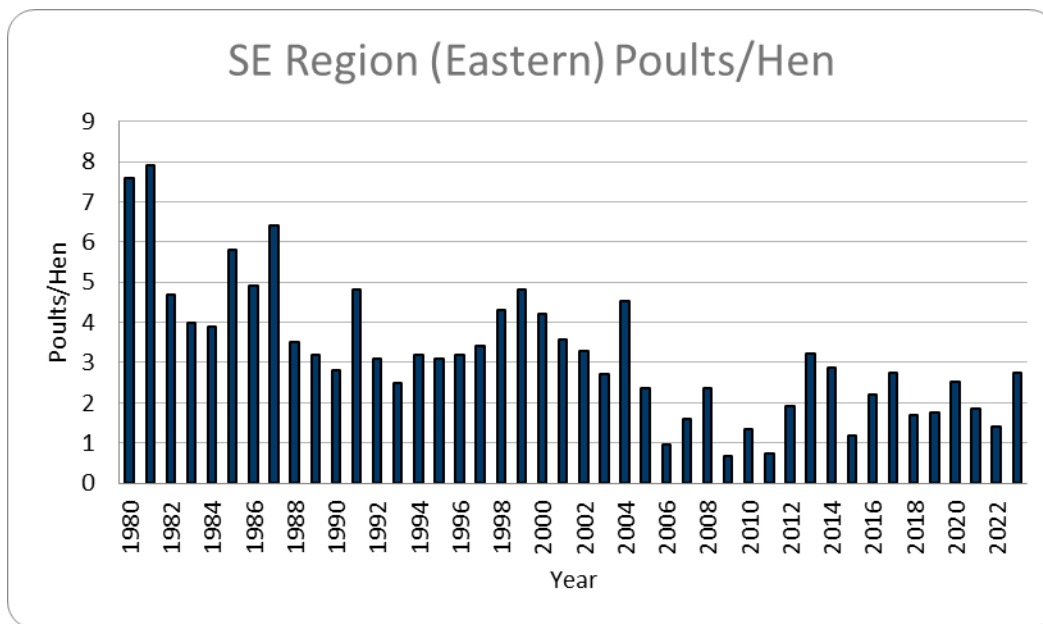


Figure 9 SE region summer brood poult/hen 1980-2023

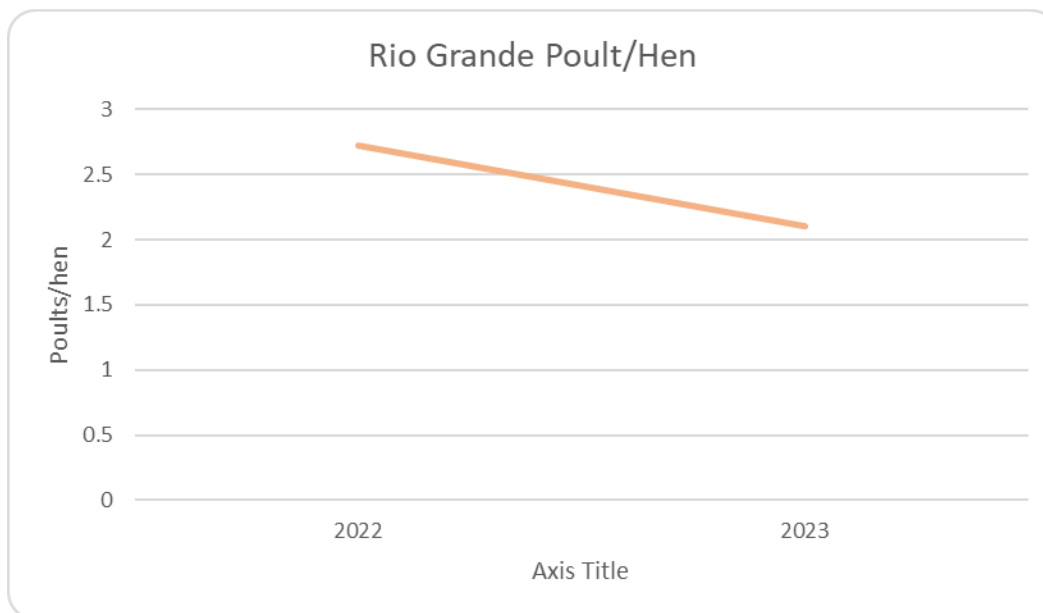


Figure 10 Rio Grande region summer brood poult/hen 2022-2023

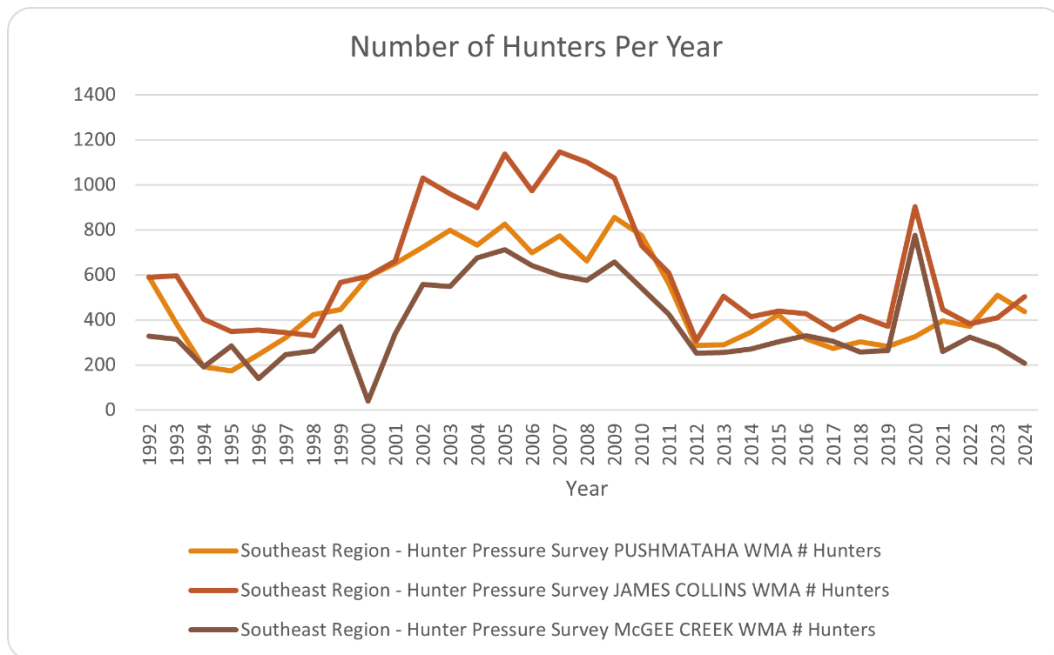


Figure 11 Hunter Pressure Survey

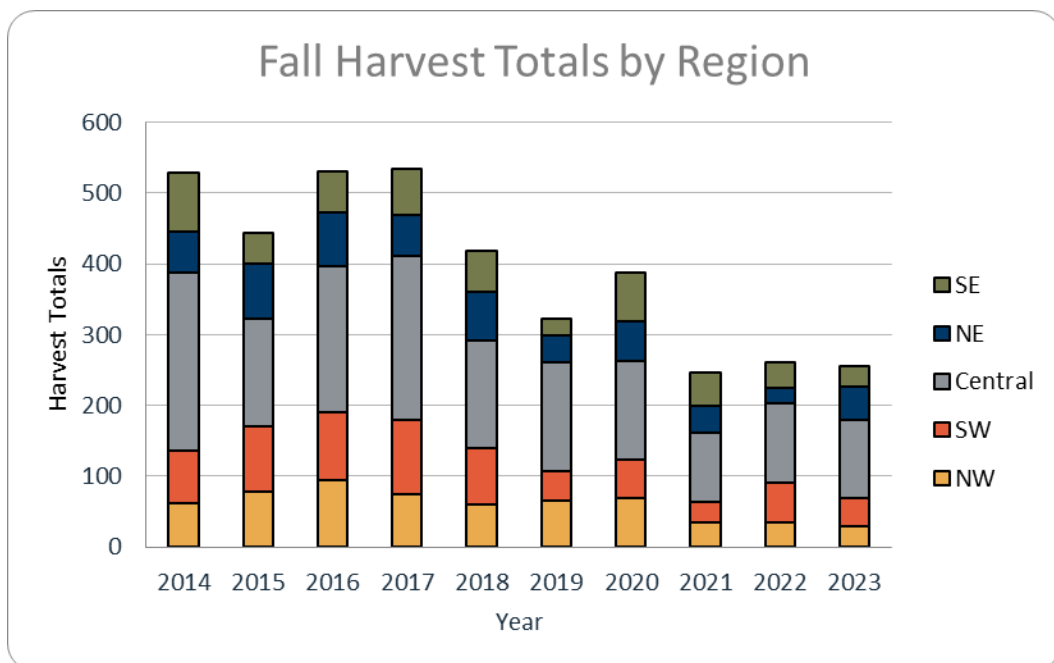
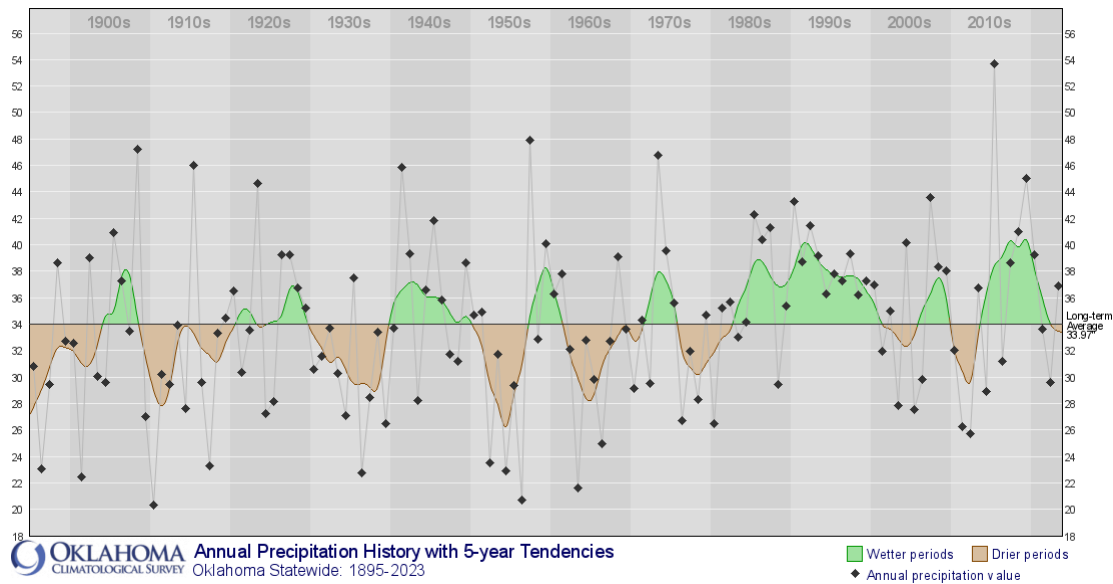


Figure 12 Fall Harvest Totals

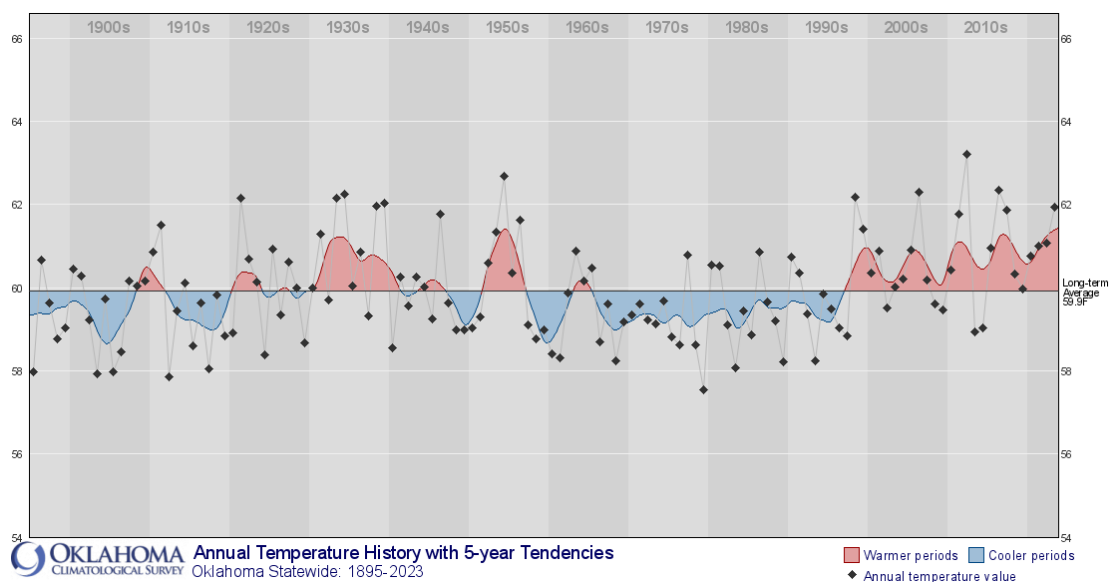
	PUSHMATAHA WMA		JAMES COLLINS WMA		McGEE CREEK WMA					
Year	# Vehicles	# Hunters	# Vehicles	# Hunters	# Vehicles	# Hunters	TOTAL HUNTERS	Average	% Change + or - from Previous	Season Length in Days
1992		591		588		327	1506			31
1993		382		595		313	1290		-14.34%	31
1994		191		403		191	785		-39.14%	16
1995		174		347		284	805		2.54%	16
1996		245		355		138	738		-8.32%	16
1997		321		344		245	910		23.30%	16
1998	234	423		329		262	1014		11.42%	16
1999	240	446		566		371	1383		36.39%	21
2000	329	592	336	594		40	1226		-11.35%	21
2001	350	650	356	662	217	340	1652	551	34.74%	21
2002	393	723	578	1030	319	557	2310	770	39.83%	23
2003	442	798	551	959	319	549	2306	769	-0.17%	23
2004	374	731	505	898	395	675	2304	768	-0.08%	31
2005	428	826	643	1136	572	712	2674	891	16.05%	31
2006	347	698	529	974	386	642	2314	771	-13.46%	31
2007	406	774	635	1145	365	599	2518	839	8.81%	33
2008	331	662	548	1100	345	575	2337	779	-7.18%	33
2009	443	855	557	1029	399	656	2540	847	8.68%	33
2010	407	775	419	730	302	542	2047	682	-19.40%	33
2011	294	562	364	610	268	425	1597	532	-21.98%	33
2012	159	286	183	308	164	252	846	282	-47.02%	16
2013	151	289	277	505	151	254	1048	349	23.87%	17
2014	197	345	244	415	156	271	1031	344	-1.62%	18
2015	232	422	232	439	207	302	1163	388	12.80%	19
2016	194	316	252	428	214	329	1073	358	-7.73%	21
2017	174	274	228	354	192	304	932	311	13.14%	22
2018	183	303	244	417	163	257	977	326	4.82%	16
2019	178	282	236	371	172	263	916	305	-6.24%	17
2020	203	325	564	903	485	776	2004	668	118.77%	18
2021	261	395	278	446	190	260	1101	367	-45.05%	18
2022	209	371	216	382	220	324	1077	359	-2.17%	33
2023	305	509	237	409	202	280	1198	399	11.14%	33
2024	247	436	315	503	158	207	1146	382	-4.09%	33

Table 1 SE area hunter pressure



Image

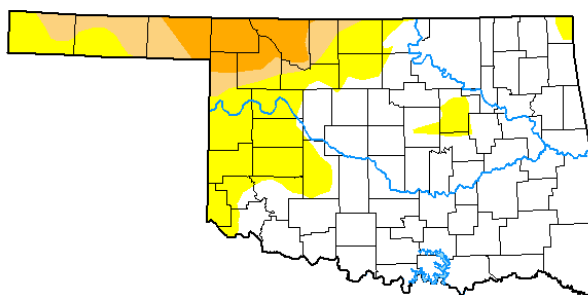
1 Annual Precipitation History of Oklahoma – 1895-2023



Annual Temperature History of Oklahoma – 1895-2023

U.S. Drought Monitor Oklahoma

May 14, 2024
(Released Thursday, May 16, 2024)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	67.36	32.64	12.13	5.91	0.00	0.00
Last Week 05-07-2024	51.62	48.38	20.41	5.91	0.00	0.00
3 Months Ago 02-13-2024	83.39	16.61	3.23	0.19	0.00	0.00
Start of Calendar Year 01-02-2024	55.32	44.68	21.64	3.08	0.00	0.00
Start of Water Year 09-26-2023	34.29	65.71	46.76	30.93	12.91	0.00
One Year Ago 05-16-2023	44.21	55.79	50.19	43.81	30.67	8.88

Intensity

None	D2 Severe Drought
D0 Abnormally Dry	D3 Extreme Drought
D1 Moderate Drought	D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author

Lindsay Johnson
National Drought Mitigation Center



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

Image 1b Current Drought conditions of Oklahoma

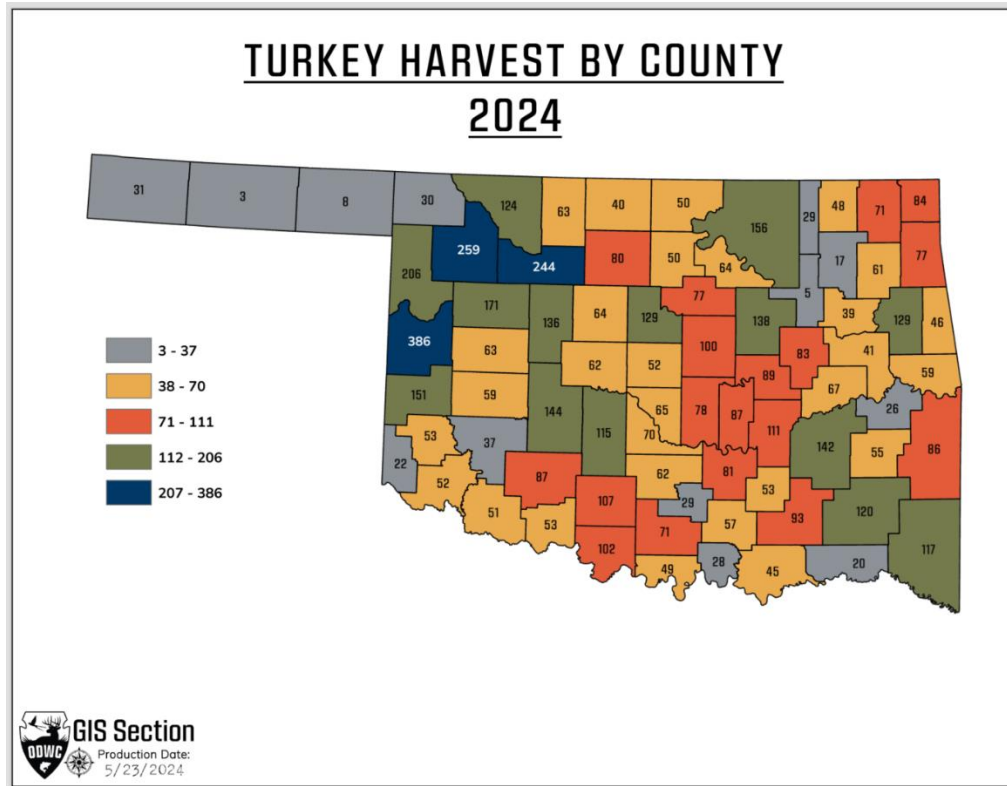


Image 2 Turkey harvest count per county – Spring 2024

Appendix A – Signed turkey regulation changes for Oklahoma 2021



Turkey Resolution
6-21-21 - Signed.pdf

Appendix B – Turkey Research Objectives for Oklahoma



Turkey Research Objectives.pdf

Oregon Wild Turkey Status Report 2023

POPULATION STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION

No significant change in Oregon's current wild turkey population estimate of 40,000 – 50,000 birds. All 36 Oregon counties have the potential of turkeys. 2024 Outlook: Production continues to be strong in most areas with little indication of environmental limitations. Nesting and early brood-rearing conditions are primarily responsible for reproductive success. The winter of 2023-24 was average to above-average in terms of precipitation, continuing into spring. Winter temperatures were not particularly severe.

HUNTING

2023 Spring Season

April 15- May 31. Season length unchanged since 1993 (except for addition of youth turkey hunt) Season Bag limit- 3 bearded birds statewide, but not more than one turkey per day. In 2023, 14,571 turkey tag holders went hunting and harvested 5,619 spring turkeys, down -4% from 2022 (Table 1). Spring tag sales have decreased since allowing choice of spring/fall tags with the SportsPac. Southwest Oregon remains the core area for wild turkey harvest, but 48% of the total harvest occurred east of Cascade Mountains, primarily in the Blue Mountains.

- A. 2023 Wild Turkeys Harvested per Hunter Day B. 2023 Total Harvest per Wildlife Management Unit

2023 Spring Youth Hunt

Oregon held its 18th youth turkey hunt April 8-9, 2023. The hunt takes place the first full weekend prior to general spring season opener on April 15. The season is open statewide for youth age 17 and under. Oregon offers a reduced-price youth turkey tag valid for resident and nonresident youth during youth turkey hunt and/or general season. Youth harvested 242 turkeys during the 2-day youth season and an addition 563 turkeys during the remainder of the spring season. Youth accounted for about 14% of total spring harvest of turkeys in Oregon in 2023.

2022-23 Fall Season

Oregon simplified fall season regulations in 2020 by eliminating the last controlled hunts, removing limits on total tags available, resulting in 2 general season fall hunts: Eastern and Western. Hunters are allowed to harvest up to 2 fall turkeys, of which only one can be from eastern Oregon. The length of the hunting season was extended to January 31st in 2020 to allow hunters more opportunity to address chronic nuisance and damage issues. 2

In 2021, the Grant County emphasis area was established including the Murderer's Creek, Desolation, and Northside WMU, and southern portion of the Heppner WMU. The eastern Oregon fall general season opened on September 1 in this area in 2021. Another change in 2021 allowed western Oregon hunters to harvest both fall turkeys on the same day. Only one fall turkey may be taken in eastern Oregon under current regulations. In 2022, western Oregon regulations changed to initiate fall turkey hunting on September 1.

In 2022, 11,363 fall turkey tags were sold, up 97% from the previous year. This change was related to the change in SportsPac turkey tag selection options, with more hunters selecting fall tags. Hunter participation increased 30% and hunting effort was up 27%. Total fall turkeys harvested was estimated at 1,546 birds, up 28% from the previous year. Harvest was fairly evenly divided between east and west with 52% of harvest coming from western Oregon.

Beardless Turkey Permit

In an effort to utilize turkey hunters to deal with private land turkey nuisance and damage, the Beardless Turkey Permit was piloted in 2023-24. This product allowed the harvest of 3 beardless or hen turkeys per permit, for the same cost as a turkey tag, within a select area around Grant County. Final harvest number are not yet available, but the district did see good landowner participation and some hazing effects. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission approved the expansion of the product to select units in the Willamette Valley.

Tag & License Fees

Since 2010 youth turkey tags for residents and non-residents cost \$10.50. In 2018, an adult resident turkey tag cost \$25.50 and adult non-resident turkey tags cost \$87.50, up \$1.00 and \$3.50, respectively, from the previous year. Turkey hunters also must have a general hunting license. Annual hunting licenses for adults are \$33.50 for residents and \$167.00 for non-residents, up \$1.50 and \$7.50, respectively, from the previous year. Non-residents have the option of purchasing 3-day license(s) at \$31.50 for each 3-days (up \$1.00 from 2017). Beginning in December 2021, the Department began offering the option for SportsPac purchasers to select either a fall or spring turkey tag.

Turkey Management:

Nuisance and Damage

As in past years, addressing turkey nuisance and damage continues to be the primary management concern among our wildlife districts. The issue is acute on the west side of the state in suburban areas where turkey flocks are increasing, and the growth of the human population expands into rural lands. The suburban/urban areas make it difficult to use the preferred management tool, hunting, to control turkey numbers. Trapping and transplant is not a viable option in many of the circumstances because effective methods like the use of rocket nets are not available or due to staff capacity limitations. In almost every case, the problem is created by landowners providing supplemental feed for the turkeys, either knowingly or inadvertently. A number of cities have attempted to craft municipal ordinances that prohibit the feeding of turkeys without restricting residents from feeding other wildlife, such as songbirds.

ODFW tracks all wildlife complaints through an internal database. In 2023, turkeys were attributed to 212 of the 2,501 nuisance and damage complaints statewide. The majority of turkey complaints were categorized as "nuisance" (68%). Agricultural damage complaints accounted for 12% of the reports.

Trap/Transplant

The Upland Game Bird Program invested in additional seasonal capacity in eastern and western Oregon for the third year in row to assist with trapping, emergency hunts, and landowner complaints. ODFW trapped and relocated approximately 457 turkeys during statewide during the winter of 2023-24. All

turkeys were trapped in response to nuisance and damage complaints. Captures occurred in Douglas, Grant, and Union counties. Birds were relocated to 3

pre-approved areas where the turkeys are less likely to become a nuisance and will offer public hunting opportunities.

Hunting Access

In 2023, the Upland Game Bird Program continued efforts to develop a Hunt By Reservation program. Brandon Dyches, the full-time coordinator in cooperation with Pheasants Forever, has now moved on to a different position. Brandon has successfully recruited numerous landowners, developed reservation software, a website, and initiated hunts since 2019. The properties were moved to a lottery system in 2022 due to high demand, a change resulting in positive feedback. The program now has wild turkey, upland game bird, waterfowl, deer, and elk properties in the program. We are working to internalize the coordinator position at ODFW, which will require legislative approval.

Habitat

ODFW utilized game bird stamp and turkey tag funds to purchase 2 skid steers with mulching heads for habitat projects in southwestern Oregon. This machinery will have a direct benefit to wild turkey habitat.

SOUTH DAKOTA

WILD TURKEY POPULATION STATUS REPORT – 2024

2024 Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting – May 7-8, 2024

Meeting Location Venue – Oklahoma-Virtual Meeting

Chad Lehman – Senior Wildlife Biologist

South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks

Custer State Park, 13329 US HWY 16A

Custer, SD, 57730

605-255-4515 / Chad.Lehman@state.sd.us

POPULATION STATUS

Two primary subspecies (eastern and Merriam's turkeys) occur in the state. Eastern turkeys are most common east of the Missouri River in eastern riparian/cropland habitats. Merriam's turkeys primarily occur west of the Missouri River in prairie riparian and ponderosa pine habitats.

REPRODUCTION

We collected turkey brood data from July 1 to August 31, 2023. We record all hens observed with or without broods and the number of poults in each brood during their routine field assignments during the allotted time period. In the Black Hills we counted 324 hens with 1131 poults for a poult:hen ratio of 3.49. Of the 324 hens, 257 of them were in broods.

HARVEST

In 2022, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks sold a total of 20,640 turkey hunting licenses (Fig. 1). Wild turkey harvest appears to be stable or increasing (Fig. 2, 3, 4). Figures 1 and 2 include both spring and fall for licenses sold and harvest. It is important to note that the Black Hills unit jumped in spring harvest success from 30% in 2022 to 39% in 2023 with a shorter season length date (14 days shorter). However, the dates are structured to better align with the start of peak hen incubation and the second gobbling peak which may partially explain the increase in harvest success.

Fig. 1. Number of turkey licenses sold for the state of South Dakota from 1995-2022.

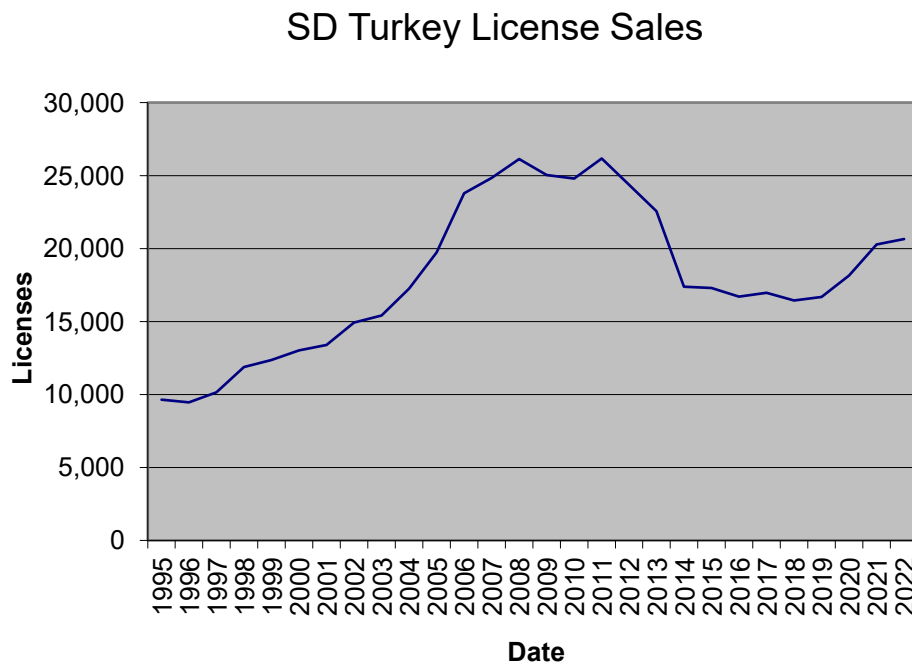


Fig. 2. State turkey harvest projections for South Dakota from 1995-2022.

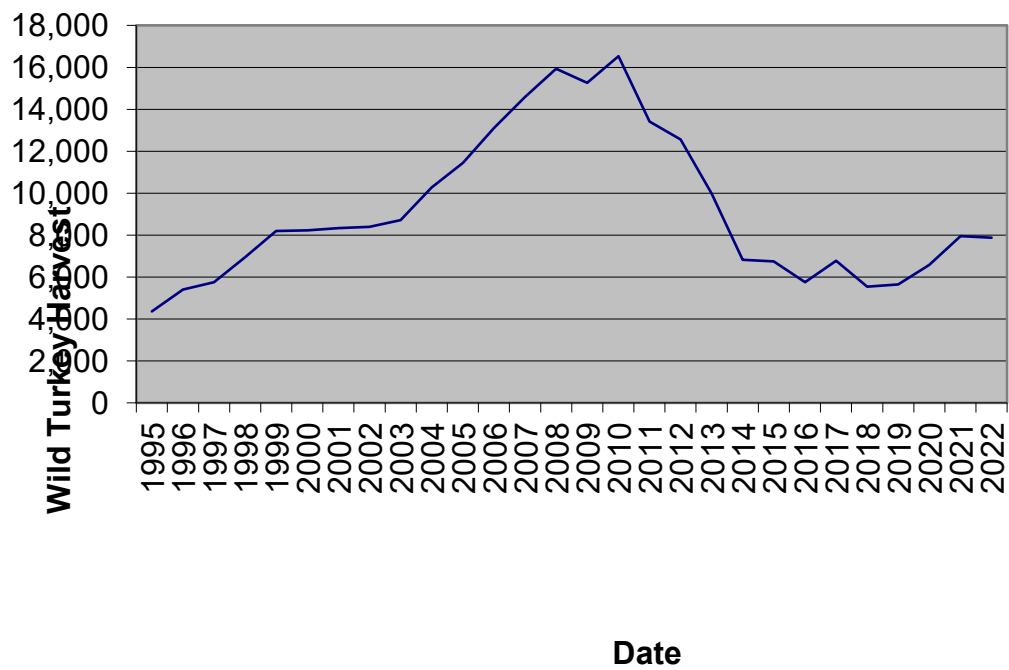


Fig. 3. Black Hills spring harvest projections from 1995-2023.

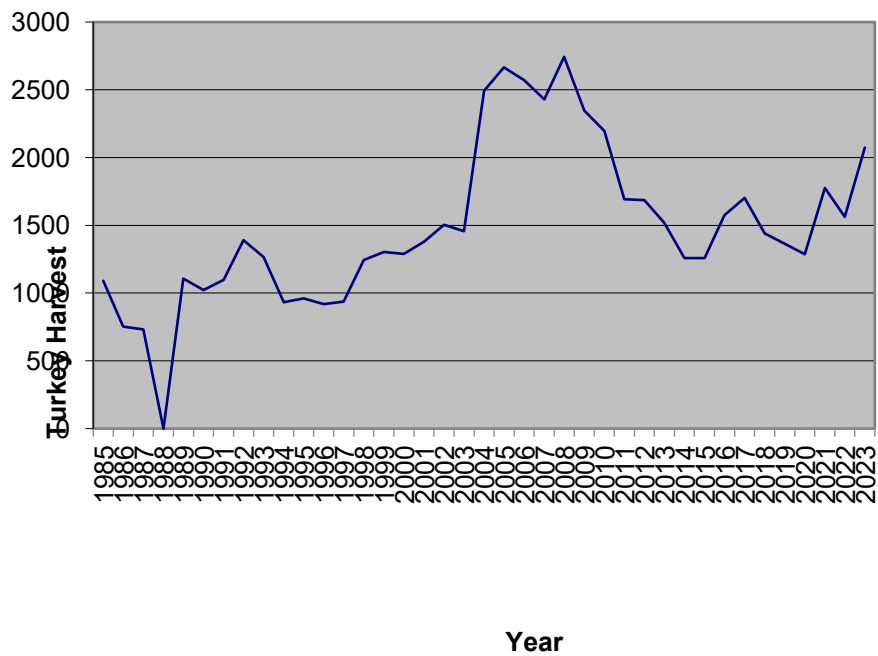
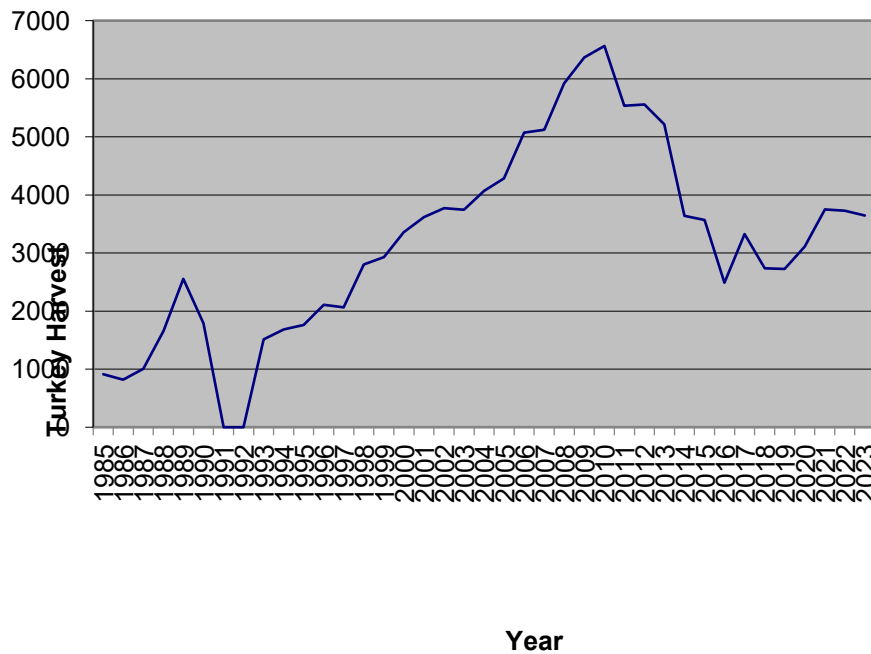


Fig. 4. Prairie spring harvest projections from 1995-2023.



HUNTING INCIDENTS

There were no turkey hunting incidents that occurred in 2023.

RESEARCH

A project has started in Gregory County in 2023 evaluating survival and reproduction of Merriam's turkeys. A total of 80 female wild turkeys (40 adult hens, 40 yearling hens) were radiomarked in winter of 2023. Luke McCray is the M.S. student with West Virginia University and he planning to start his second field season in 2024 and doing a great job. Dr. Chris Rota is the academic advisor on the study. This study is being funded by South Dakota NWTF, SDGFP, and National NWTF.

Recent Wild Turkey Research Publications

Tyl, R. M., C. T. Rota., and C. P. Lehman. 2023. Factors influencing survival of female eastern wild turkeys in northeastern South Dakota. Wildlife Society Bulletin: <http://doi.org/10.1002/wsb.1429>.

Lehman, C. P., Yarnall, M. J., A. R. Litt, C. T. Rota, and J. J. Rotella. 2022. Factors influencing rate of decline in a Merriam's wild turkey population. *Journal of Wildlife Management*: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.22240>.

Tyl, R. M., C. T. Rota., and C. P. Lehman. 2020. Factors influencing productivity of eastern wild turkeys in northeastern South Dakota. *Ecology and Evolution* 10(16): DOI: 10.1002/ece3.6583

Yarnall, M. J., A. R. Litt, C. P. Lehman, and J. J. Rotella. 2020. Precipitation and reproduction are negatively associated with female turkey survival. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 84:1-11.

REGULATION/LEGISLATION CHANGES

In spring of 2023 we changed our season dates for the Black Hills unit. Instead of opening the 2nd Saturday in April it is now opening on the 4th Saturday in April. This is a management change that could potentially protect some gobblers for early season breeding and enhance reproduction of Merriam's turkeys in the Black Hills unit. Further, all bow hunting must now occur at the same start date as the general shotgun seasons. Previous to this year bow hunters had a one week earlier start date. Some units changed in boundary and every 2 years number of licenses may change and are updated in our application.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

Licensing System

The *Go Outdoors South Dakota* system continues to be updated and available for both spring and fall turkey seasons.

<https://license.gooutdoorssouthdakota.com/Licensing/CustomerLookup.aspx>

RELEVANT LINKS

WILD TURKEY MANAGEMENT PLAN IN SOUTH DAKOTA

A revised wild turkey plan has been completed and available for use. Please review our South Dakota Wild Turkey Management Plan for updates and management direction at:

https://gfp.sd.gov/UserDocs/docs/wild_turkey_action_plan_2021-2026_final.pdf

https://gfp.sd.gov/UserDocs/docs/turkey_management_plan2021-2030.pdf

MISCELLANEOUS

In 2021-22, 54 wild turkeys were trapped and relocated in South Dakota. In 2022-23, 50 wild turkeys were trapped and relocated in South Dakota.

TEXAS WILD TURKEY POPULATION STATUS REPORT

WAFWA Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting – May 6 - 8, 2024

Cheyenne, Oklahoma

Jason Hardin – Turkey Program Leader

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

P.O. Box 279

Buffalo, Texas 75831

512-934-8306 / Jason.hardin@tpwd.texas.gov

POPULATION STATUS

The Rio Grande wild turkeys is the most numerous subspecies in Texas with a population estimate of 450,947 birds. The Rio Grande wild turkey population is found in the western 2/3 of Texas, primarily along and west of the Interstate 35 corridor and east of the Pecos River. Texas also hosts a small population of eastern wild turkeys in localized populations in the eastern third of Texas. Eastern wild turkeys number around 10,000 birds. A small population of approximately 500 Merriam's wild turkeys is in the Davis Mountains and Guadalupe Mountains of West Texas. The wild turkey distribution in Texas is illustrated in Figure 1.

In 2021, TPWD staff reengaged in a summer production survey using the recommended standardized approach set forth by the Southeast Wild Turkey Working Group and the National Wild Turkey Technical Committee. In 2023, TPWD staff observed 1,653 wild turkey, 2.71 Poults per Hen, and 3.96 poults per brood.

Texas' Small Game Harvest Survey provides a weak measure of the Rio Grande wild turkey population status in Texas. This survey historically goes out to 20,000 hunters at the end of February each year, but due to low reporting rates the survey effort was increased to 35,000 mail surveys and another 35,000 email surveys. Due to the timing of the survey, hunter and harvest data is not available for the 2023 spring turkey season until summer 2024. TPWD is currently evaluating our Small Game Harvest Survey and plan to readdress the wild turkey specific survey once all analyses are complete.

Texas also required mandatory turkey harvest reporting in all counties with a spring only, 1-gobbler bag limit. Mandatory harvest was again expanded during the 2022-23 hunting season with the option for digital tags for hunters purchasing a Super Combo license online and for Lifetime License Holders. Hunters who opted-in to digital tags were required to reporting their harvested wild turkey immediately upon collection of their harvested bird. Mandatory harvest reporting provides a more accurate and timely assessment of harvest and hunter effort. The TPWD Commission recently approved statewide mandatory harvest reporting of wild turkeys in all seasons. This new regulation will go into effect during the 2024-25 hunting season, which begins September 1, 2024.

There are 198 Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) routes in Texas. Breeding bird survey data shows a significant increasing trend in the Texas wild turkey population from 1966 to 2017 followed by a significant decline from 2018-2022 (Figure 2). Based on a strong reproductive season in 2023 and TPWD's summer turkey survey numbers, the BBS observations are predicted to continue to increase when 2023 numbers become available.

REPRODUCTION

Texas Parks and Wildlife staff reengaged in a statewide brood survey in 2021. Staff did not reach our minimum goal of 200 unique observations. Staff have expanded the survey to include TPWD-Law Enforcement and will investigate addition expansion into a public survey option.

Table 1: 2023 total number of hens, poults, males, and unknown turkeys observed during the survey in each region and at the statewide scale:

Wildlife Region	Turkey Observations	Poult Per Hen	Poult Per Brood	Hens with Broods	Male to Female Ratio
Region 1	256	3.27	4.32	0.73	1.00
Region 2	771	2.36	3.72	0.64	0.27
Region 3	175	2.59	3.35	0.69	0.12
Region 4	42	4.34	4.35	1.00	0.00
Region 5	409	2.96	4.48	0.58	0.93
Total	1,653	2.71	3.96	0.65	0.46

HARVEST

2022 Spring Turkey Season

In 2022, Texas' Small Game Harvest Survey numbers were increased from 20,000 surveys mailed to 35,000 surveys mailed to address declining response rates. Of the 35,000 surveys mailed, 5,287 surveys were returned. In a parallel survey, another 35,000 random hunters received the Small Game Harvest Survey via email concurrently with the paper mail survey. A total of 2,952 email surveys were returned. The survey is mailed just prior to the spring turkey season. Therefore, results of the survey are only for the previous spring season (2022). Survey results are typically published mid-summer. During the 2022 spring turkey season 65,752 hunters reported harvesting 17,246 wild turkeys. Hunters experienced a 29.20% success rate, which is below the long-term mean of 42.43%. Figure 3 identifies long-term spring hunter and harvest trends.

2022-2023 Fall Turkey Season

During the 2022-23 fall turkey season 65,992 hunters harvested 7,699 wild turkeys. This is above the long-term average of 61,341 fall hunters, but below the long-term mean of 21,160 fall birds harvested. There is a general trend away from fall hunting and a growing trend in spring turkey hunting.

2023 Eastern Turkey Season

TPWD requires mandatory reporting for all harvested Eastern wild turkeys. Reporting is completely through TPWD's My Texas Hunter Harvest App or online (www.tpwd.texas/turkey). The season begins annually on April 22 and continues through May 14th. During the 2023 eastern turkey season hunters reported harvesting 196 wild turkeys. This is down -3% from 2022 and down -1% above the 3-years average. The 2024 season is currently ongoing.

2023 TEXAS HUNTING ACCIDENT REPORT

Texas sold 1,236,677 hunting licenses during 2022-23 hunting season. The 2023 Texas Hunting Accident Report identified 11 hunting related accidents. Of those 11 accidents 1 was fatal. Nine (09) of the hunting accidents involved shotguns, 1 involved a rifle, and 1 involved bow/air guns. Of the 11 accidents, 07 were associated with dove hunting, 02 were associated with deer hunting, and 02 were associated with duck/goose hunting. There were no wild turkey hunting accidents reported during the 2022-23 hunting season.

RESEARCH

UAV-FLIR Survey Methodology

The graduate student at University of Missouri recently completed her thesis defense on applications of UAV-FLIR technology for surveying roosted wild turkeys in Texas. Results from this research should be available soon.

Wild Turkey Survival and Habitat Use in the Pineywoods of Texas

Texas Parks and Wildlife staff conducted a pilot study in the Pineywoods along the Louisiana border in 2021. TPWD partnered with Louisiana State University (LSU) in 2022 to expand the project to look at demographics of a native wild turkey population contiguous with Louisiana, a native population that is genetically isolated from other populations in east Texas, and a recently restocked population. A third extant population was included during the 2023 trapping season. LSU is also monitoring wild turkeys in Louisiana to compare demographics across varying ranges and levels of isolation and genetic relatedness to wild turkeys in Louisiana.

Landscape Assessment of Wild Turkey Roosting Habitat in the Texas Rolling Plains

Texas Parks and Wildlife contracted with Texas A&M University to assess landscape changes in the Rolling Plains over the past 20 years. The focus is on changes in historic roosting cover identified by Texas Tech researchers in the early 2000s. In addition, Texas A&M University will look at changes in vegetative cover over the same time (2000-2022). This research is in response to an apparent Rolling Plains Turkey Decline.

Disease Surveillance in the South Texas Wild Turkey Populations

During the 2024 wild turkey trapping season TPWD staff collected 211 serum samples and 213 blood smears for disease testing. Serum samples tested for Avian Influenza, Pullorum-Typhoid, and Mycoplasma through the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL). Of the 211 samples, only one tested positive for Mycoplasma gallisepticum & synoviae.

Blood Smear samples were provided to the Biological Science Lab at Tarleton State University to test for Reticuloendotheliosis Virus (REV) and Lymphoproliferative Disease Virus (LPDV). This is the first large sample effort to test for LPDV in Texas. Of the 213 samples, 4 were positive for REV (1.91%) and 63 or 29% were positive for LPDV. Two of the 4 REV positive birds were coinfecting with LPDV.

REGULATION CHANGES

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission recently approved a suite of new wild turkey regulations. This included closing the season in portions of several counties to support ongoing restocking efforts, reducing the season and bag limit in counties in areas with low wild turkey densities (east of Interstate Highway 35 and west of the Pecos River), removed references to subspecies in the Texas Administrative Code, and added statewide mandatory harvest reporting for all wild turkeys harvested in all counties for all seasons. These new regulations will go into effect September 1, 2024. All hunters opting-in to the digital tagging option must report their harvested animal immediately upon collection.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

Rolling Plains Turkey Decline

There is an apparent declining wild turkey population in the Rolling Plains in Texas. Staff conducted disease and parasite surveillance in 2021 but found no significant issues. Rates of infection were low and were presented to the working group in 2021. TPWD funded a GIS assessment of landscape features in the Rolling Plains that began in fall 2022 to look for wild turkey habitat changes on the landscape that may be influence wild turkey declines. Staff have not yet discussed changing seasons or bag limits in response to the apparent decline.

HABITAT DELIVERY

Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has contacted with NWTF to deliver state hunting stamp dollars and Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration dollars to focal landscapes in east Texas. There has been an emphasis on creating open forest understory conditions using prescribed fire and midstory herbicide treatments. To date, the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture's Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network has delivered over 10,339 acres in management practices in focal landscapes totaling close to \$1,00,000 in habitat management practices.

RESTORATION

TPWD reengaged in Eastern wild turkey restoration efforts in 2014. Over the past 10 years TPWD, with the assistance of 11 states wildlife agencies and NWTF, has released 1,126 eastern wild turkeys at 13 sites in east Texas. Another 320 birds were released at 4 sites in 2007-08 during the super stocking research. In addition, TPWD released 1,214 Rio Grande wild turkeys at 12 sites along the Trinity River from just south of Dallas County to Leon County. Texas utilizes a super stocking approach to these restoration efforts releasing 80-100 birds per site at a ratio of 1 male per 3 females. Restoration efforts are focused on three priority landscapes (PA): The Neches River PA following the Neches River from Lake Palestine south to the Angelina National Forest; the Trinity River PA from just south of Dallas County south to Walker and Grimes Counties; and the Sulphur River PA following the Sulphur River, White Oak Creek and Cypress Creek watersheds across all or portions of Bowie, Camp, Cass, Delta, Franklin, Hopkins, Morris, Red River and Titus Counties.

During the winter of 2023 TPWD staff released 174 Rio Grande wild turkeys in Ellis, Freestone, Leon, Milam, and Williamson Counties. Rio Grande wild turkeys were trapped in Atascosa, Duval, Frio, Williamson, and Zavalla Counties. Staff released another 09 eastern wild turkeys from South Dakota at a release site in Hopkins Counties.

EVOLVING ISSUES

Digital Tags and Statewide Mandatory Harvest Reporting

RELEVANT LINKS

[Texas Hunting Accident Report \(2002-2022\)](#)

[Texas Hunting Regulations](#)

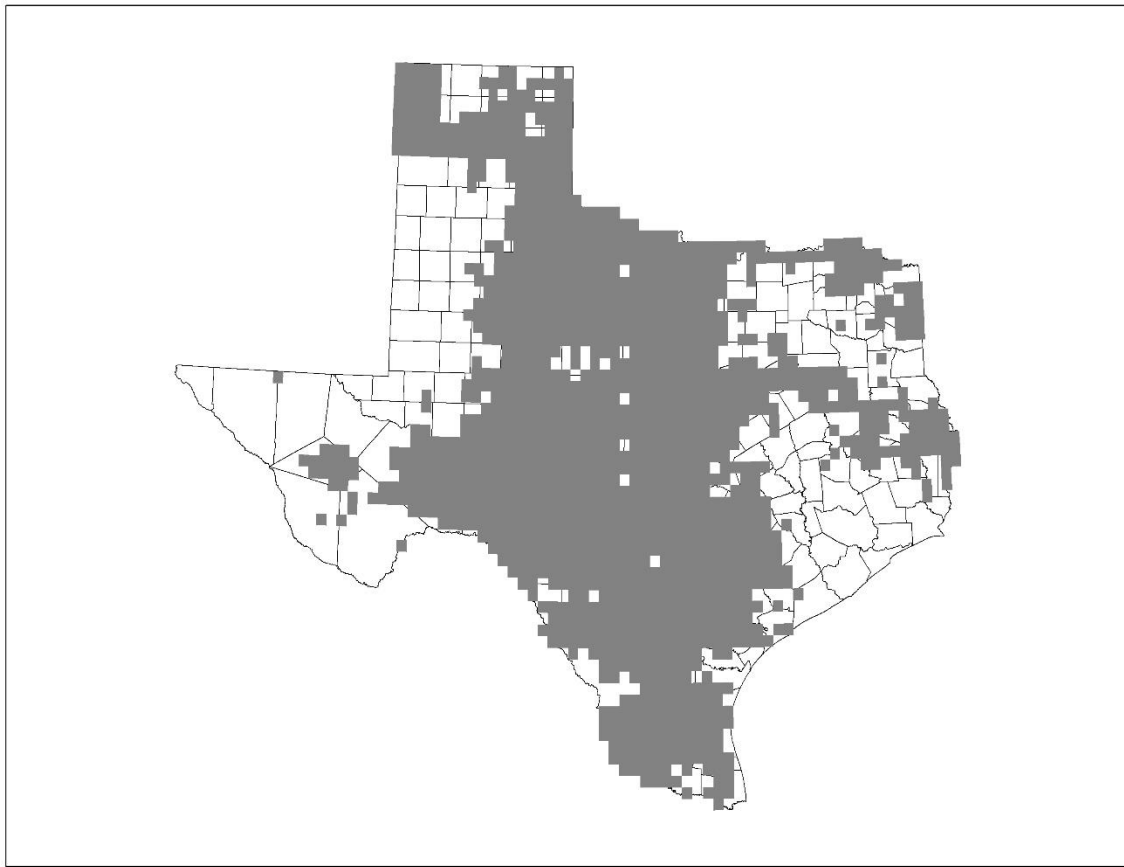


Figure 1. Texas wild turkey distribution.

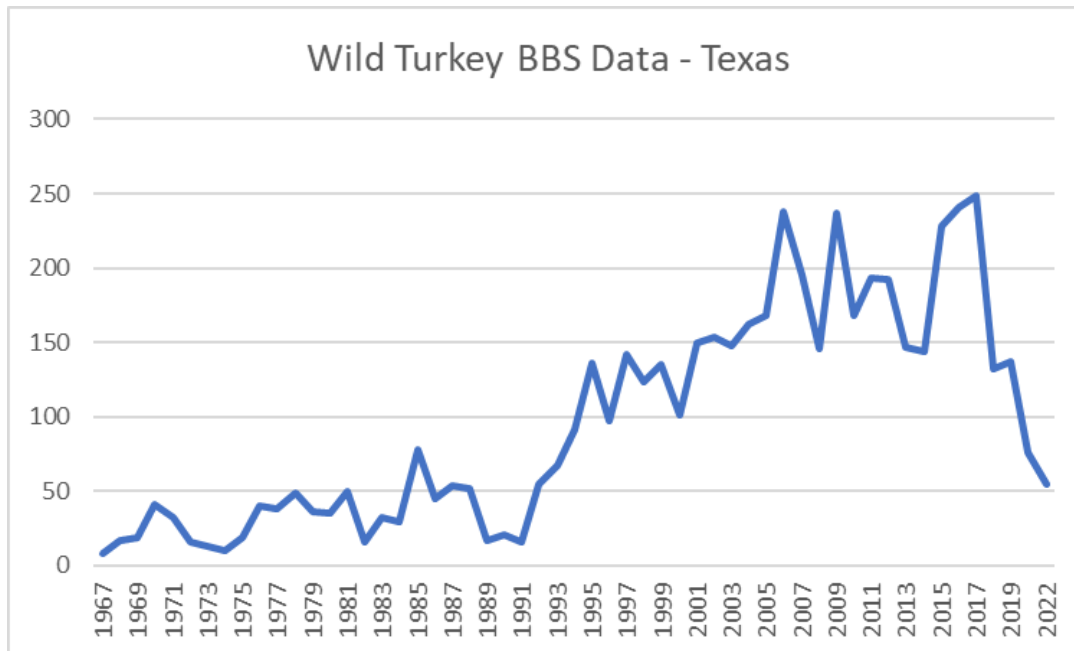


Figure 2. Breed bird survey trends for wild turkeys in Texas (1966-2021).

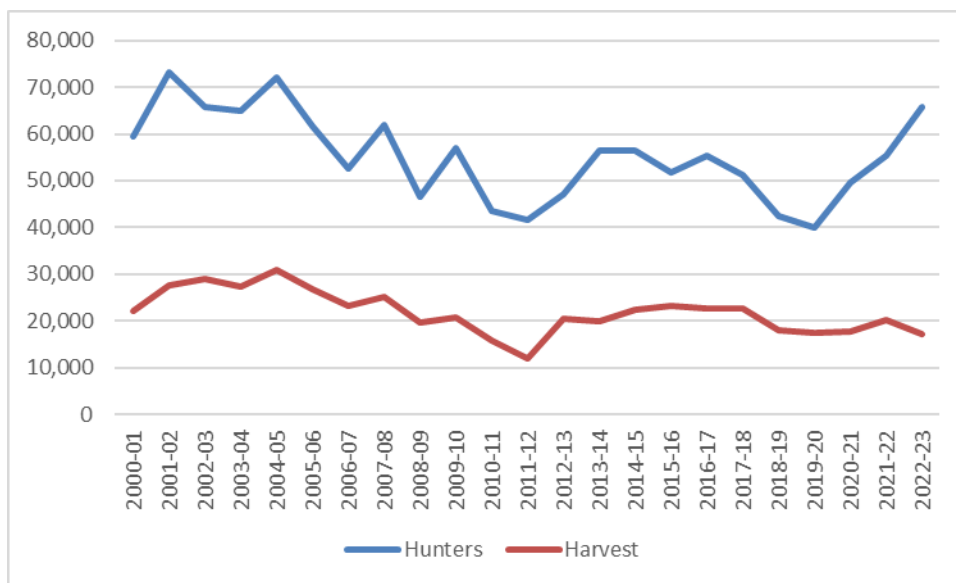


Figure 3. Spring turkey hunters and harvest as determined by TPWD's Small Game Harvest Survey.

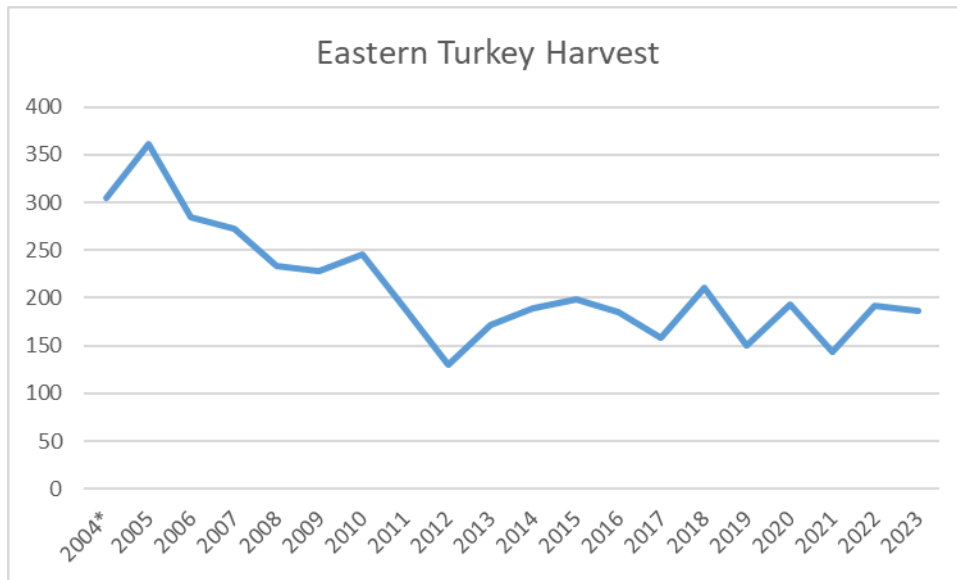


Figure 4. Eastern wild turkey harvest.

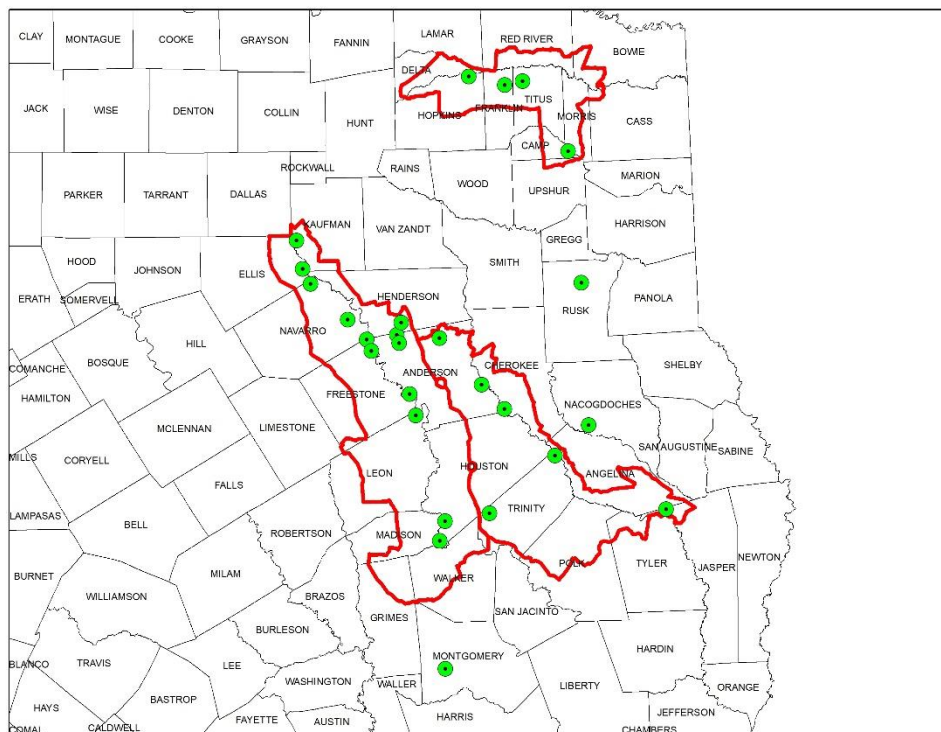


Figure 6. Super Stocking from 2007 to 2024.

Western States Wild Turkey Workshop
2023 UTAH WILD TURKEY STATUS REPORT
Heather Talley, Upland Game Coordinator

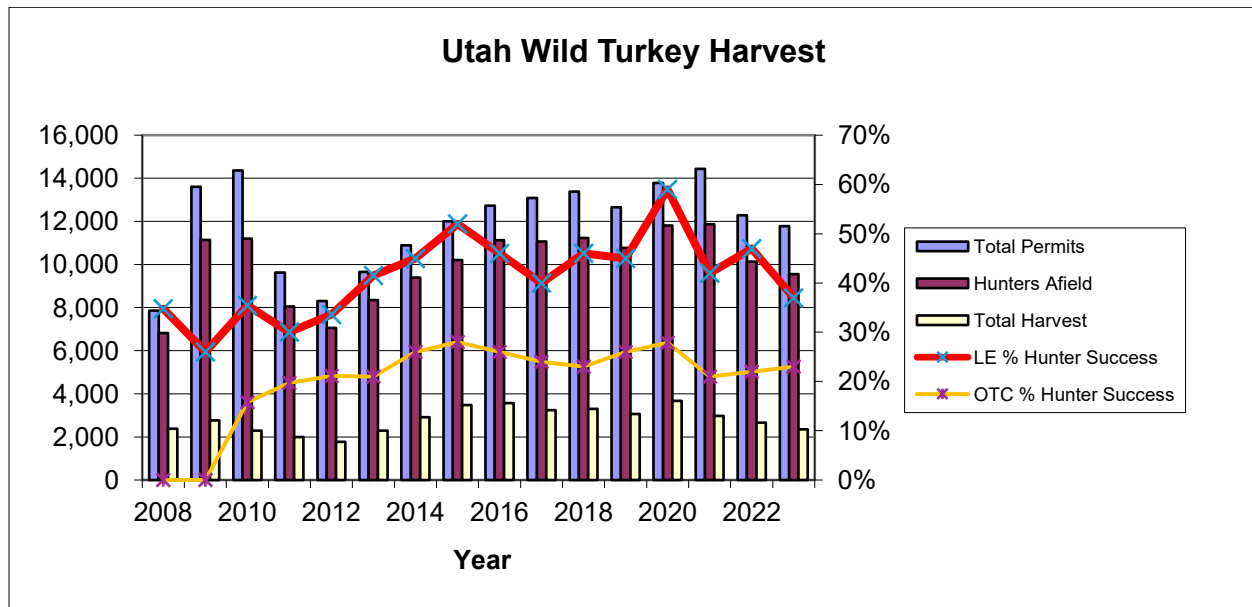


Population Status:

Utah is host to both Rio Grande and Merriam's turkeys — most of the population

resembles Rios, but substantial hybridization between subspecies exists. Population estimates are not formally calculated, but assuming ~10% of the population is harvested during the spring hunts there are approximately 23,450 wild turkeys in Utah.

Harvest trends have been steadily increasing with expanding populations until recently. Statewide turkey populations have declined likely due to drought impacts — less water, vegetation, and insects may have impacted recruitment in the last few years, until the winter of 2022/2023, which produced more snowfall than previous year; dating back to the 80s. This likely resulted in some winter loss in some areas, though supplemental feeding was provided in appropriate locations. Since the following spring and summer provided more mesic areas than usual, production increased though the number of adults had declined. Contrastingly, the winter of 2023/2024 was mild and still provided moisture, creating another spring conducive to high production. We anticipate a population increase this year.



Hunt History

Fall: A fall either-sex hunt was opened in the fall of 2014 (293 permits), permits were expanded to 700 in 2015, 1178 in 2016, 885 in 2017, and 3455 in 2018. In 2019 unlimited permits were available in limited areas in the state for private lands only resulting in 6,167 permits sold, 7,710 in 2020, 4,619 in 2021, and 3,610 in 2022 (this is the only year individuals were limited to one permit per person in the fall). In 2023, permits were reduced and a total of 2,625 permits were purchased.

Spring: The first spring hunt opened in 1967, closed in 1970, then resumed in 1971. Populations remained at a relatively low level until the mid-1980's when populations begin to consistently increase. Through 2007 Rios and Merriam's were managed separately, but as populations increased and subspecies hybridized management was combined.

Season Framework

Hunter requirements:

Required to have passes hunter education if born after Dec 31, 1965. There is no minimum age.

Fall season structure:

Permit numbers are determined by region (five regions exist; though the Northeastern Region does not implement a fall hunt). Within four of the regions,

there are hunt areas designed to reduce populations where there are significant human-turkey conflicts. Permits can be purchased over the counter until the permit quota for an area is reached. The hunt is either-sex (though permits are now restricted to two beardless and one either-sex permit per individual — implemented for the first time this fall), and legal weapon include shotgun, rimfire, or airgun (implemented for the first time this fall). Season dates can be set annually within an Oct 1 to Feb 28 time frame. In 2023-2024, season dates were set at Oct 2 – Feb 28 (since Oct. 1 is a Sunday and Utah has a state law that prohibits opening a hunt on a Sunday). The fall season dates are chosen by June 1 each year.

Spring season structure:

Limited Entry: Permit numbers are determined individually for each of the five UDWR regions, and hunt areas include the entire region. Permit numbers aim to harvest 10% of the overall population in the spring with 30% of the spring harvest occurring during the LE hunt. Permit numbers are set annually and take winter conditions, hunter crowding, habitat accessibility, and other factors into account. The spring LE hunt is bearded-only, shotgun or bow. Season dates are April 12-24, 2025. Fifteen percent of LE permits are reserved for youth. If the youth does not harvest during the LE hunt, they may continue to hunt through the youth and general season hunts.

Youth Hunt: The youth hunt is statewide, excluding closed areas and Native American trust lands. The season dates are April 25-April 27, 2025, but if a youth does not harvest during this hunt, they may continue to hunt through the general season.

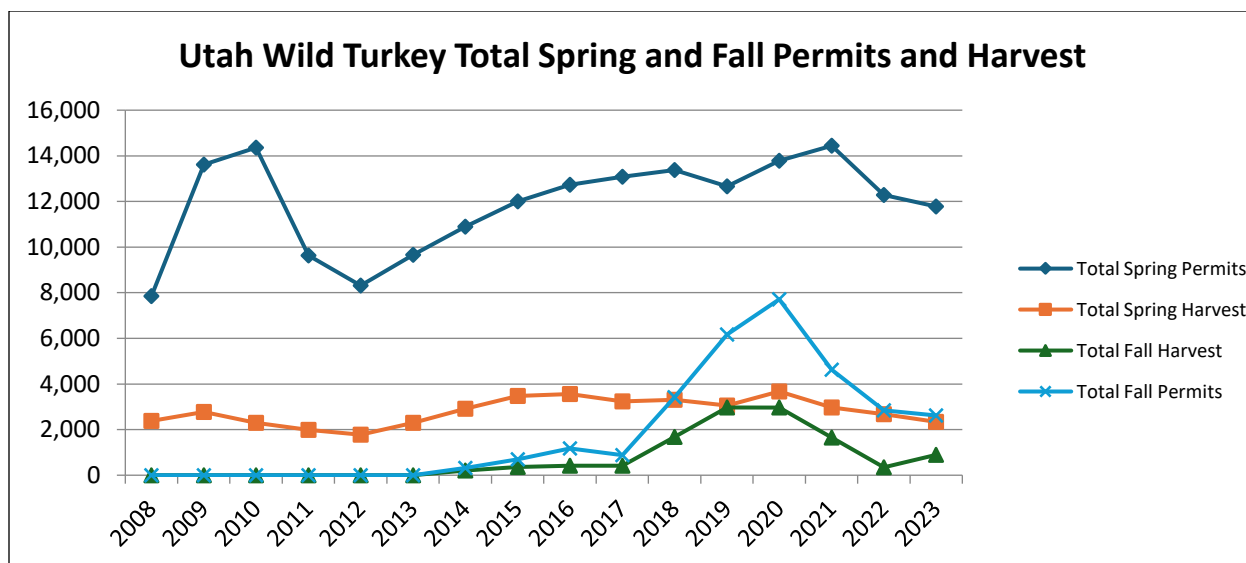
General Season: This is a statewide hunt, excluding closed areas and Native American trust lands. The spring general season is unlimited over the counter. The spring GS hunt is bearded-only, shotgun or bow. Season dates are April 28 – May 31, 2025.

Bag limits: 1 turkey per permit. A hunter is limited to three permits for fall (starting in 2023: one either-sex and two beardless) and one bearded turkey for the spring.

Shooting hours: 30 minutes before official sunrise to 30 minutes after official sunset.

Harvest Data

Harvest data is collected annually via an online and phone harvest survey. The harvest survey provides estimates of total hunters, total harvest, days afield, and success. There has been a long term upward trend in turkey numbers, hunters and harvest.



Nuisance or Depredation

In 2013 legislation was passed that guides management of turkeys causing damage. Utah developed depredation/nuisance guidelines to help facilitate the appropriate response to resolving turkey problems that may arise. Utah has a Turkey Depredation Rule that spells out how depredating (causing visible, persistent, and detrimental impacts to private property) turkeys will be handled. Educational brochures have also been developed to assist landowners that experience turkey-related issues. Nuisance complaints are dealt with by removing and relocating, targeted for fall hunts, awarding landowner permits to target problem turkeys, education, habitat projects and other means.

Translocations

Utah traps and translocates nuisance turkeys to areas of unoccupied habitat or to supplement existing populations. Over the 2017-2018 2,154 turkeys were moved within the state and 85 were given to Nevada. In 2018-2019, 2,154 turkeys were translocated within Utah; in 2019-2020, 1,143 turkeys were moved, in 2020-2021, 1,443 turkeys were relocated, in 2021-2022 season, 722 turkeys were moved within the state, in 2022-2023, 1,258 turkeys were translocated, and in 2023-2024, 908 turkeys were translocated.

Research Activities

The research project entitled "The effect of riparian habitat restoration on Rio Grande Turkey habitat use and recruitment in the Central Utah Forests habitat zone" has concluded. The study was implemented to study Rio Grande wild turkeys in the Escalante River watershed to acquire information on nesting habitat, recruitment, and winter habitat use, particularly in response to Russian olive removal. The information is updated here:

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5mq4673m>

In 2020 and 2021, GPS transmitters that upload to Argos satellites were deployed. Two of those radios are still functioning on live birds and 7 were redeployed this year after being recovered. Currently deployed Argos enabled GPS transmitters include (need manual updating):

Turkey ID	Date Deployed	Age	Sex	Weight	Capture Location	Last Signal
NR - Pilot Mts 3	2/4/2021	A	F	6.2	Paradise	3/23/2021
NR - Pilot Mts 1	2/4/2021	A	F	6.2	Paradise	8/18/2021
NR - Pilot Mts 7	2/2/2021	A	F	6.8	Paradise	8/18/0201
NR - Pilot Mts 4	2/4/2021	A	F	6	Avon	4/8/2021
NR - Pilot Mts 2	2/4/2021	J	F	6	Avon	5/18/2021
NR - Pilot Mts 5	2/4/2021	F	F	5.3	Avon	3/31/2021
NR- Pilot Mts 6	2/4/2021	A	F	6	Avon	8/18/2021
CR - Davenport 4	1/6/2020	J	F	7.2	Mendon	1/16/2022
CR - Davenport 1	1/3/2020	J	F	6.2	Paradise	11/2/2021

In the winter of 2020-2021 turkey captures and translocations focused on areas in which wild turkeys caused nuisance/depredation complaints. Regional staff had questions on the behavior of individual flocks and radios employed, both to understand movements of the populations generating complaints in the winter, and survival and movements in release areas. To answer these questions GPS logging backpacks were deployed. These store-on-board GPS transmitters have a VHF (very high frequency) signal to locate them in the field and then can be downloaded to a laptop via a UHF (ultra high frequency) antenna.

Specifically, transmitters attached to turkeys released in the Corinne areas appear to have low survival, with one bird having moved to Promontory point. Birds released on Promontory have had relatively high survival and have remained in the vicinity of the release site. Birds in the Provo Bench area move substantial distances along the Wasatch front — up to 15 miles north of their winter urban home range. Transmitters attached to turkeys in the Mona bench area also showed substantial movement, and have left the monitored area. A new release site was being investigated on the Tintic Mountains, however, the data indicates that survival is low and it may not be a viable release site. Birds translocated to the Abajo Mountains showed excellent survival and have demonstrated fidelity to the release site. Birds translocated to Monroe Mountain have had mixed success but have found suitable habitat.

Release Location	Type	Number	Apparent Survival (%)
Tintic Mountains	Translocation	2	0
Mona Bench	Nuisance Population	2	No Data
Provo	Nuisance Population	2	50
Abajo Mountains	Translocation	4	100
Corinne	Translocation	4	33
Promontory	Translocation	3	66
Monroe Mountain	Translocation	3	33

The information received from these transmitters will allow us to better gauge the efficacy of translocations, via the movements of turkeys post-translocation, and their survival. This will increase the success of our translocations and ultimately the turkey population in the state.

Utah may be accepting some Rios from Texas this winter. If that's the case, we plan to deploy transmitters and will have a pilot study design, and start collecting data this year, so a research project can be implemented in 2025.

Regulation Changes (no changes occurring this year)

- In 2023, the Utah legislature has enacted H.B. 469, stating that rabbit, hare, and turkeys (in the fall season only) can be legally harvested with a pre-charged pneumatic air rifle that fires a single projectile with compressed air released from a chamber that is built into the rifle, pressurized at a minimum of 2,000 pounds per square inch from a high compression device or source, such as a hand pump, compressor, or scuba tank. The DWR recommended that the air rifle must be at least a .25 caliber, and shoot a projectile weighing 18 grains or more and produce at least 30-foot-pounds of energy at the muzzle. These recommendations were approved at the Wildlife Board meeting on June 8, 2023.
- -The DWR recommended that fall permits will be issued as two beardless permits and one hunter's choice permit, to target hen harvest, which was also approved.
- The statewide turkey management plan was open in 2022-2023 for revision, and all changes were approved.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Wild Turkey Status and Trend Report 2023

Wild Turkey Status and Trend Report STATEWIDE

SARAH GARRISON, Statewide Small Game Specialist

Introduction

Wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) were first successfully introduced in Washington in the

1960's. Attempts to establish wild turkey populations by releasing pen-raised birds from 1913 to

1959 were largely unsuccessful. The success of later releases is attributed to the ability to capture

wild turkeys for translocation to Washington. Population augmentation from 1984 through 2003

expanded turkey distribution and increased hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities (WDFW,

2005). Wild turkey populations had reached a low point in the US around the 1930s, and restoration efforts took decades of dedicated work (Healy & Powell, 1999). Establishing populations in Washington was seen as an achievement for this iconic North American species.

Three subspecies of wild turkeys occur in Washington. These occur in varied habitats across their native ranges, but commonalities include mature trees for roosting and mast production near open understory for grass and herbaceous forage (Porter, 1992). Turkeys will use open fields and cropland when roost trees are available nearby, while shrubby habitat can also provide important

brood cover and forage (Porter, 1992). The Eastern subspecies (*M. g. silvestris*) persists in low

densities in southwestern Washington. This subspecies was sourced from Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Missouri, where oak-hickory and other hardwood forests with abundant hard mast are dominant.

The Rio Grande subspecies (*M. g. intermedia*) in Washington was sourced from Texas and now

occurs throughout southeastern Washington. In its native range, the Rio Grande turkey occupies

plains grasslands, shinnery, prairie, oak-hickory, oak-pine, pinon-juniper, Texas savannah, and

shrubsteppe forest from Mexico to Kansas (Beason & Wilson, 1992). The Merriam's subspecies

(*M. g. merriami*) is the most abundant in Washington and occurs in the northeastern and central

part of the state. Merriam's turkeys are native to mountainous areas of Colorado, New Mexico,

and Arizona, where they are closely associated with Ponderosa Pine but will also use mixed conifer forests (Shaw & Mollohan, 1992). Some hybridization likely occurs between the Rio Grande and Merriam's subspecies where their ranges overlap.

Management Guidelines and Objectives

In January 2006, the Department adopted a statewide [Turkey Management Plan](#) (WDFW, 2005)

to supplement the Game Management Plan in response to increasing turkey populations and

management topics. Population management strategies from this plan were included and updated

in the 2015-2021 [Game Management Plan](#) (WDFW, 2014). The statewide management goals for

wild turkeys are to:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage wild turkeys and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.

2. Manage wild turkeys for various recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes,

including hunting, scientific study, wildlife viewing, cultural and ceremonial uses by

Native Americans, and photography.

3. Manage statewide wild turkey populations for a sustained harvest.

Wild Turkey Status and Trend Report 2023

Hunting Seasons and Recreational Harvest

Hunter effort and harvest of wild turkeys are estimated based on the analysis of mandatory hunter

reports. Hunters owe reports on all turkey tags, including tags they did not use.

Successful hunters

are required to submit the date, location, and sex of harvested birds. This

mandatory reporting

system has allowed for better estimates of harvest and hunter participation than estimates made

prior to the reporting requirement.

Within Washington State, Game Management Units (GMUs) have been grouped to define seven

turkey Population Management Units (PMUs, Table 1, Figure 1). Changes in harvest have been

tracked at the statewide and PMU level as indicators of population trends.

Improvements were

made to the turkey harvest data analysis routine in 2011 and 2016, which could account for some

variations in estimates and should be considered when comparing data across years.

Table 1. Game Management Units (GMUs) included in each Population Management Unit (PMU).

PMU	PMU Name	GMUs Included
10	Northeast	101-136
15	Southeast	139-186
20	North Central	All 200 GMUs
30	South Central	All 300 GMUs EXCEPT GMU 382 & 388
35	Klickitat	GMUs 382, 388, 568-578
40	Northwest	All 400 GMUs PLUS GMUs 601-627
50	Southwest	All 500 GMUs EXCEPT 568-578 PLUS GMUs 633-699

The statewide spring general season from April 15 to May 31 has been in place since 2008.

Beginning in 2022, the youth season that precedes the general season was lengthened from 2 to 7

days. The spring season is for male turkeys and turkeys with visible beards only. The spring season limit is three birds, with some area restrictions.

Fall opportunities have varied and were generally expanded over the years. In 2018, the fall general season in GMUs 101-154 and 162-186 expanded to run continuously from September 1 to December 31. Also, that year, the permit hunt in Klickitat County changed to a fall general season opportunity. In 2021, the Klickitat hunt lengthened to match the September 1 to December 31 general season, along with the entire North Central unit (PMU20). This eliminated the Methow fall permit hunt since the area became open to general season hunting.

The fall seasons allow harvest of either sex with a bag limit of four birds with some area restrictions as outlined in the WDFW hunting regulations pamphlets.

One permit hunt, the Teanaway, was available in fall 2022. This hunt offered 50 permits in Kittitas County, GMU 335, and allowed harvest of either sex with a bag limit of one bird.

Turkey hunting is open to shotgun, archery, and crossbow hunting during the spring and fall

seasons. Beginning in 2022, handguns that meet specific requirements may be used for turkey

hunting. Handguns must be legal modern handguns designed for hunting, shooting #4 or smaller

Wild Turkey Status and Trend Report 2023

shot, and not capable of holding more than three shells. Handgun barrel length must be a minimum

of 10 inches, inclusive of choke tube. Modern handguns must shoot a minimum three-inch shotshell of .410 caliber or larger. Similarly, legal muzzleloading handguns may be used if they are designed for hunting and shooting #4 or smaller shot. Muzzleloading handgun barrel length must be a minimum of 10 inches. Muzzleloading handguns must be .45 caliber or larger. Dogs, baiting, electronic decoys, and electronic calls are not legal in Washington; non-electronic decoys are permitted. In 2006, the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a regulation permitting falconers to hunt turkeys during the fall and winter. Current regulations are considered relatively conservative. The spring season timing results in the harvest of gobblers after peak breeding. The season ends before most nests hatch, so disturbance is minimized. Fall seasons have been expanded in certain areas to increase hunting pressure in response to increased complaints regarding turkey damage and human-wildlife conflict.

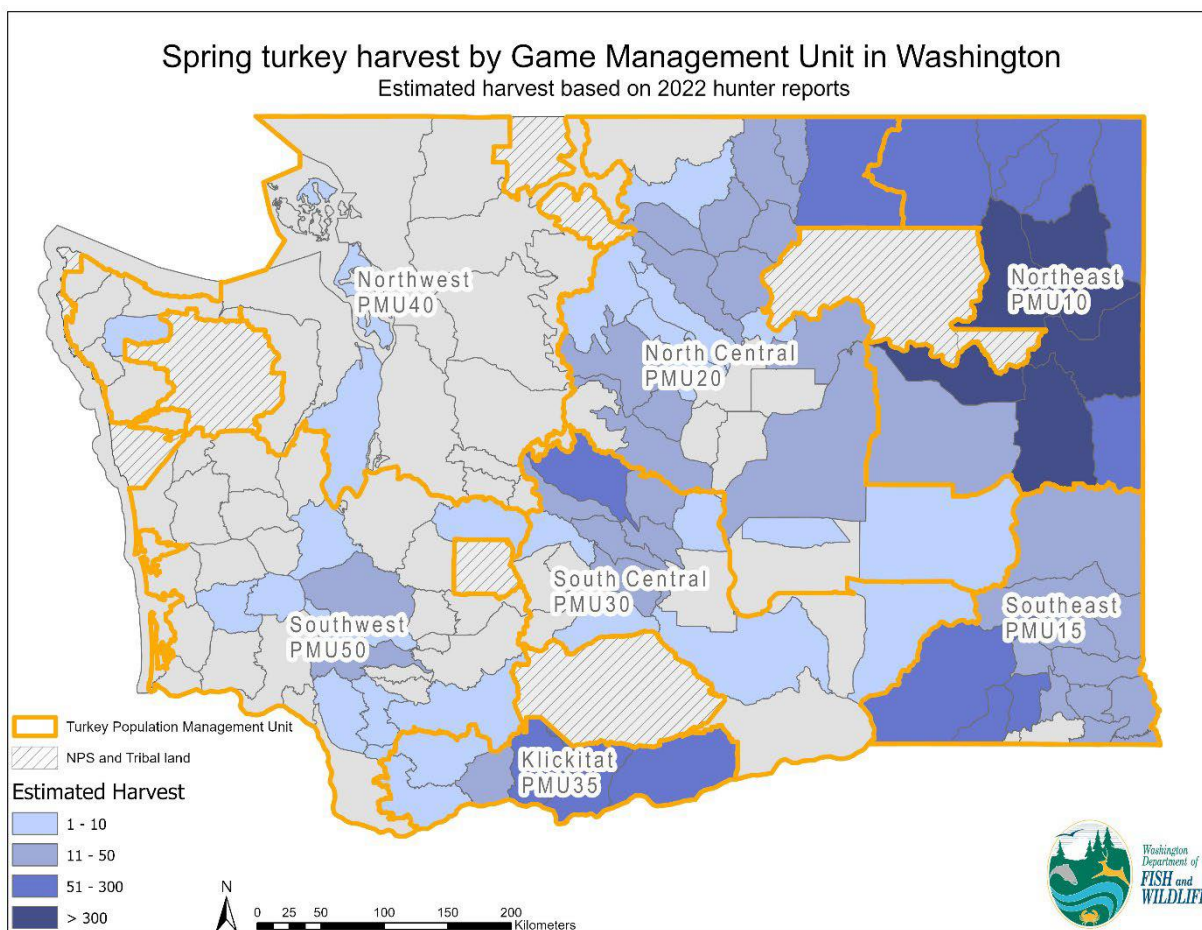


Figure 1. Estimated spring turkey harvest in each Game Management Unit based on 2022 hunter reports.

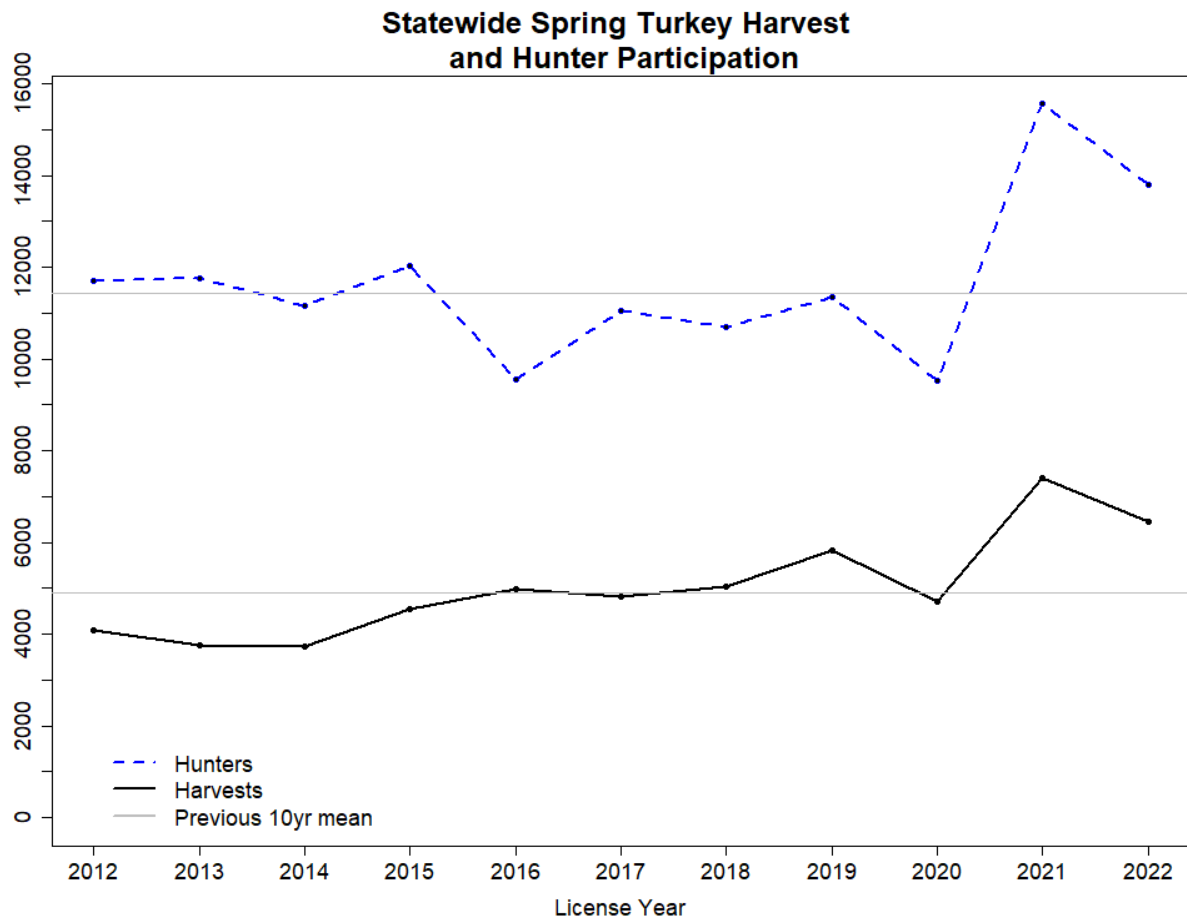


Figure 2. Estimated statewide spring turkey harvest and hunter participation, 2012-2022, with means from the 10 preceding years (2012-2021).

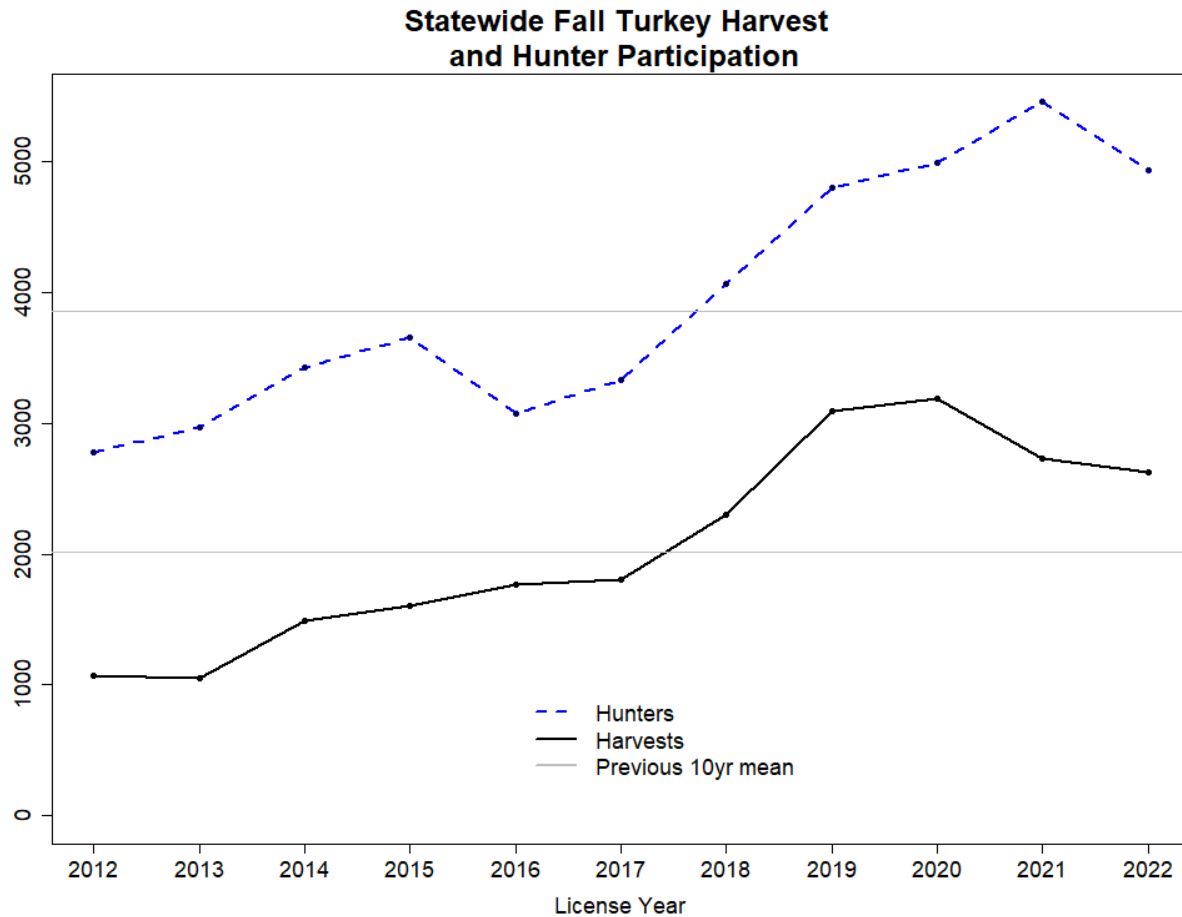


Figure 3. Estimated fall turkey harvest and hunter participation, 2012-2022, with means from the 10 preceding years (2012-2021).

Population Monitoring

Harvest and hunter-effort data are used as an index to population trends.

Standardizing harvest

estimates by the amount of hunter effort expended to achieve that level of harvest can provide

some indication of whether populations are increasing, decreasing, or stable.

Over the past decade (2012-2021), hunter success averaged 43% during the spring season (Figure

5). In 2022, spring hunter success remained well above this average, despite continuing a slight

decrease since 2019 to 47%. The fall season averaged 51% over the same 10-year period. In 2022, fall success was 53%.

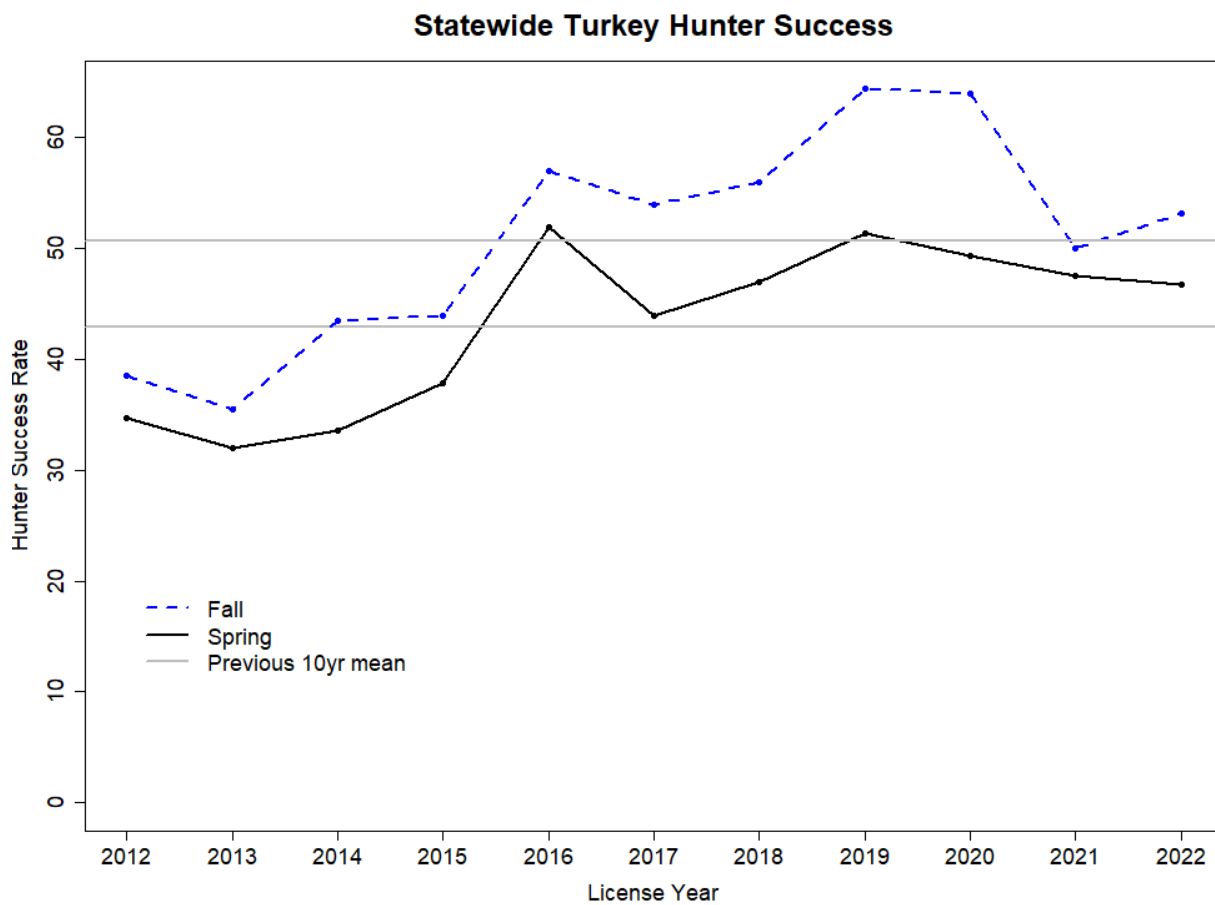


Figure 5. Hunter success rate (harvests per 100 hunters) for the spring and fall seasons, 2012 – 2022, with means from the 10 preceding years (2012-2021).

Within each PMU, the number of days hunted per harvest is variable, but all units show a stable or decreasing trend, indicating that populations at the PMU level are stable to increasing, with the exception of northwestern Washington (PMU 40; Figure 6). Very little hunting activity occurs in this unit, so small sample sizes make any assessment of trends difficult.

In 2022, WDFW initiated public brood surveys for wild turkey (wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/game-bird-survey) following a protocol developed by the National Wild Turkey Federation Technical Committee (2019)^[1]. These data provide an index to turkey population productivity that is independent of harvest data. Technical committee members

Reina Tyl and Zak Danks conducted data analysis for each participating state. Of 373 turkey observations submitted during July and August of 2022 in Washington, 269 observations met the criteria for analysis, representing 2,312 turkeys. The majority of observations came from the northeast PMU 10. The statewide male:female ratio was 0.27. Estimates of poults per hen (2.77), poults per brood (3.61), and the proportion of hens observed with a brood (77%) indicate a stable population. Maintaining participation in the brood survey will be important to continue this monitoring in future years and to assess population trends. Increased participation will be necessary to assess population trends for each PMU.

Spring of 2021 was unusually warm and dry, leading to a record-breaking heat wave in June that may have impacted brood survival. This was followed by an extended drought season that likely limited forage throughout the summer. Conversely, the spring of 2022 was unusually wet and cool, which may have been detrimental to hatching poults but led to improved forage production throughout the season. Despite these extreme weather conditions, turkey populations in Washington appear robust and largely unimpacted at the population level. WDFW is seeking additional cost-effective methods for monitoring turkey and other upland

species. In 2023, WDFW funded a research project with the University of Idaho Drone Lab to assess the use of drones for detecting and identifying pheasants and turkeys. Both thermal imagery and regular (Red Green Blue) imagery are being assessed. Research is ongoing and results should be available in 2024.

Habitat

Turkeys are generalist species that can occupy diverse habitats (see Introduction) and utilize a wide variety of food sources. Grasses, including cultivated varieties, and mast such as acorns, pine seeds, and berries are especially important (Evans-Peters, 2013). Habitat enhancement priorities are identified in the 2015-2021 Game Management Plan (WDFW, 2014). Projects that increase habitat values for multiple wildlife species, in addition to turkeys, are of special interest. In 2021, WDFW began offering annual habitat funding for turkey habitat enhancement projects in addition to funding already provided through other programs like the Private Lands Access Program (see the Private Lands Access Program chapter in this report for more information). During the 2022-2023 funding cycle, WDFW invested \$50,000 in these supplemental habitat projects, including collaborating with the National Wild Turkey Federation to continue support for the Middle Wind Habitat Improvement Project on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. This project will aid in the

thinning of approximately 120 acres of overstocked Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) stands

and assist in funding of seed spreading within disturbed sites in the project area.

Improving habitat

for Merriam's turkey in this area is intended to help draw turkeys onto public land and decrease

their use of private lands. Other projects included seeding forbs and planting trees in an area of

Whitman County impacted by the Babb Road fire and seeding forbs and planting cottonwood trees

in a riparian area of Walla Walla County.

Population Augmentation

There were no new releases of turkeys in any PMU across the state, and none are planned in the

future. Turkeys are present in most of the areas that would be considered suitable habitat.

Concerns related to human-wildlife conflict have precluded introductions in the recent past.

WDFW management plans identify trapping and translocation as a potential response to damage

and complaints, but in these cases, turkeys are only being moved to areas where turkey populations

of the same subspecies already exist. Few translocation activities have occurred in recent years.

Management Conclusions

Turkey populations across the state appear stable to increasing, with the largest concentrations in

eastern Washington. After several years of increasing hunter success, the recent decline may

indicate that populations are stabilizing. It will be important to continue close monitoring to ensure increased fall seasons are not adversely impacting spring hunting opportunity. Turkey damage and complaints are being reported from eastern Washington, especially Spokane County. Additional hunting opportunities have been created in these areas to help address these complaints. WDFW will continue reviewing ways to focus hunter effort and other management tools in areas with private lands experiencing damage. Management decisions will seek to maintain high hunter success rates in the spring while also addressing human conflict issues. The Wildlife Conflict chapter in this report is provided for more information. Determining population trends for wild turkey in western Washington is limited by available data. Wild turkeys are likely reproducing at low levels but maintaining a viable population in PMU 50. Low harvest in this area may be further limited by restricted access opportunities.

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WYOMING WILD TURKEY POPULATION STATUS REPORT, 2024

Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee Meeting: May 7-8, 2024

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POPULATION STATUS

Wyoming does not directly measure, estimate or model wild turkey numbers. Instead, spring gobbler harvest is used to index wild turkey populations (Figure 1). Following a population peak in 2009, wild turkey numbers declined dramatically, especially in the Black Hills, and bottomed out in 2014. In 2016 & 2017 overwinter and spring weather conditions favored productivity and survival, and wild turkey numbers responded and increased substantially in most parts of the State. The 2018/19 winter was moderately severe and resulted in reduced survival and reproductive success. This was followed by generally mild winters and dry, warm spring weather in 2020 and 2021, which lead to excellent poult production and annual survival. As a result, populations again increased. In 2022 and 2023 poult production returned to near average values and the winter of 2022-23 was severe in parts of Wyoming. However, most areas inhabited by wild turkeys saw normal to moderately severe winter conditions. Consequently, the response in wild turkey numbers across the state has been a bit of a mixed bag, with some areas witnessing substantial increases over the past three to four-years, while in other locations wild turkey numbers have been more stable or dropped slightly.

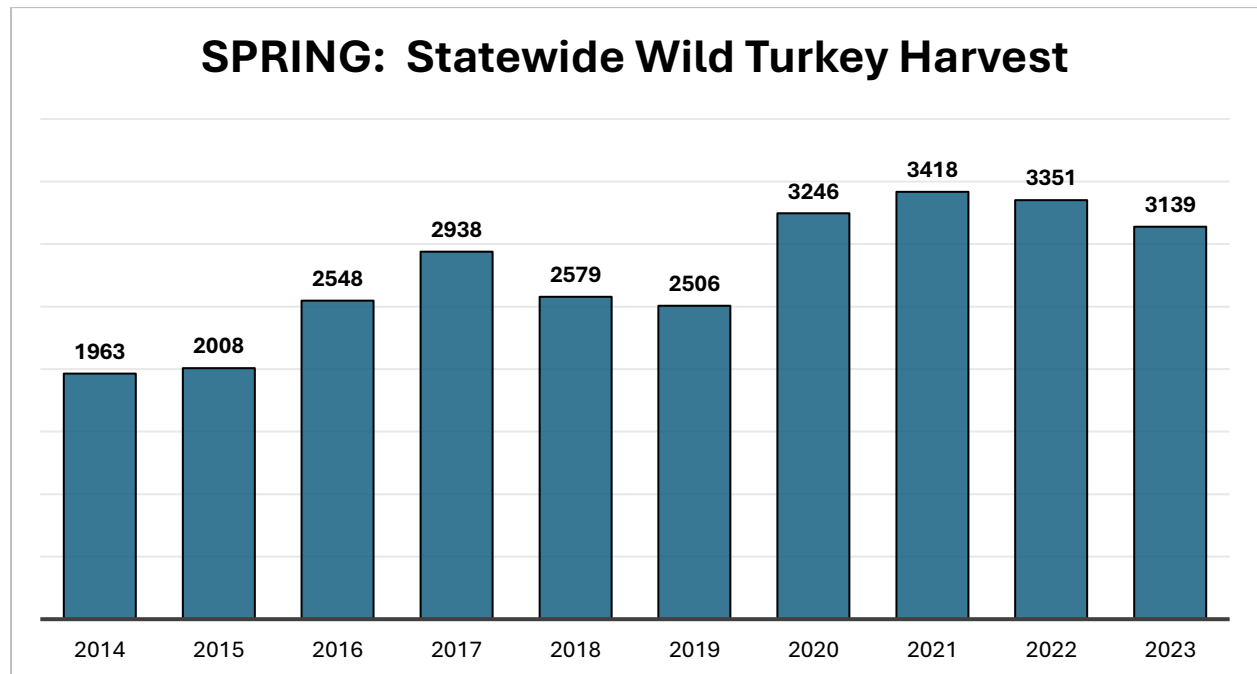


Figure 1. Wyoming Statewide Spring Gobbler Harvest.
REPRODUCTION

The Black Hills are the only area in Wyoming where regular, systematic poult surveys are conducted. Wyoming Game and Fish Dept. personnel and personnel from other State and Federal agencies count and classify by age and sex wild turkeys during the month of August. In 2020 and 2021, poult production and survival in the Black Hills were some of the highest recorded (Figure 2). In 2022 and 2023, observed poult:hen and poult:brood ratios were closer to long-term averages. The 2022 values are likely biased low due to barren hens, because yearling Merriam's hens are generally less than 30% successful at producing a brood in the Black Hills. Consequently, we have found the poult per brood ratio to be a better indicator of relative reproductive success and future harvest potential.

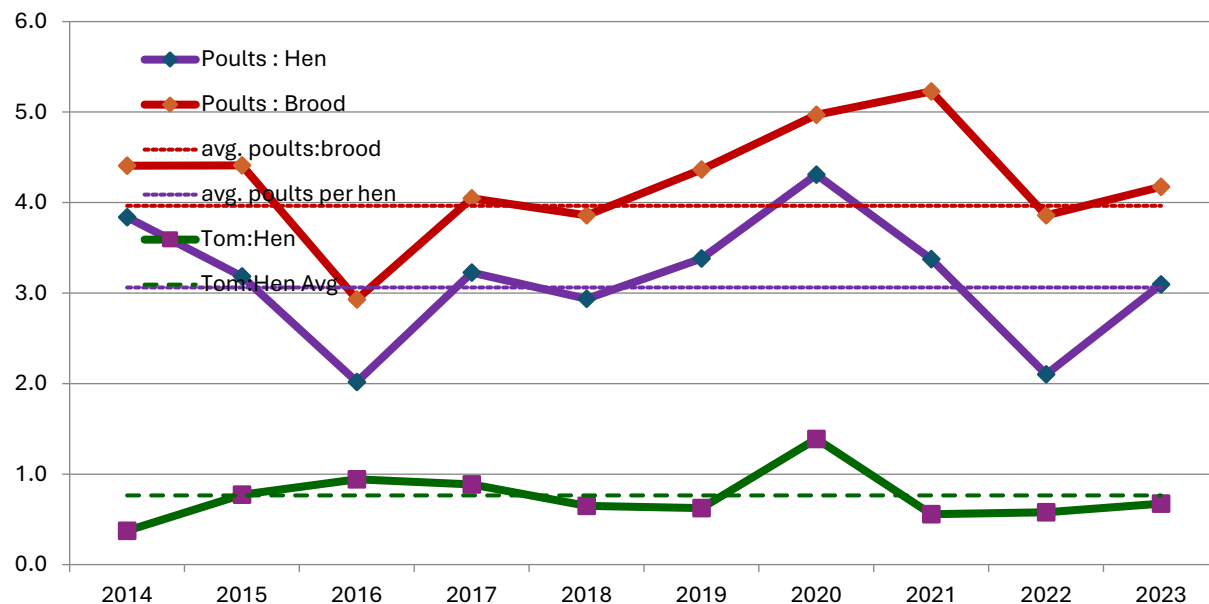


Figure 2. Wild turkey productivity and August tom:hen ratios in the Black Hills of Wyoming (2014-2023). Dashed lines represent long-term (1998 – 2023) mean values.

HARVEST

2023 Spring Turkey Season

Wild turkey numbers began to rebound in 2020 and COVID mitigation measures that year resulted in increased resident hunter participation. Spring of 2020 saw a 33% increase in resident hunter numbers from the previous 8-year average, a period during which overall resident participation did not vary widely. However, non-resident participation dropped significantly in 2020 with COVID travel restrictions, but increased to historically high numbers in 2021 (Figure 3). The combination of hunter participation responses to COVID restrictions in 2020 and 2021, along with an increasing wild turkey population, led to a peak harvest in 2021. The 2021 harvest exceed that of 2010 when wild turkey populations were in all likelihood higher. In 2022, even with robust wild turkey populations, resident hunter participation fell back to about the mean level experienced since 2010, while non-resident hunter numbers remained high (Figure 3). This may account for the slight drop in total harvest at a time when wild turkey numbers were on the rise. It is also notable that in the Black Hills, which provide Wyoming's primary public land hunting opportunity

and are responsible for over half of the State's spring harvest, non-resident hunter participation is now over 50% greater than that of residents (Figure 3a).

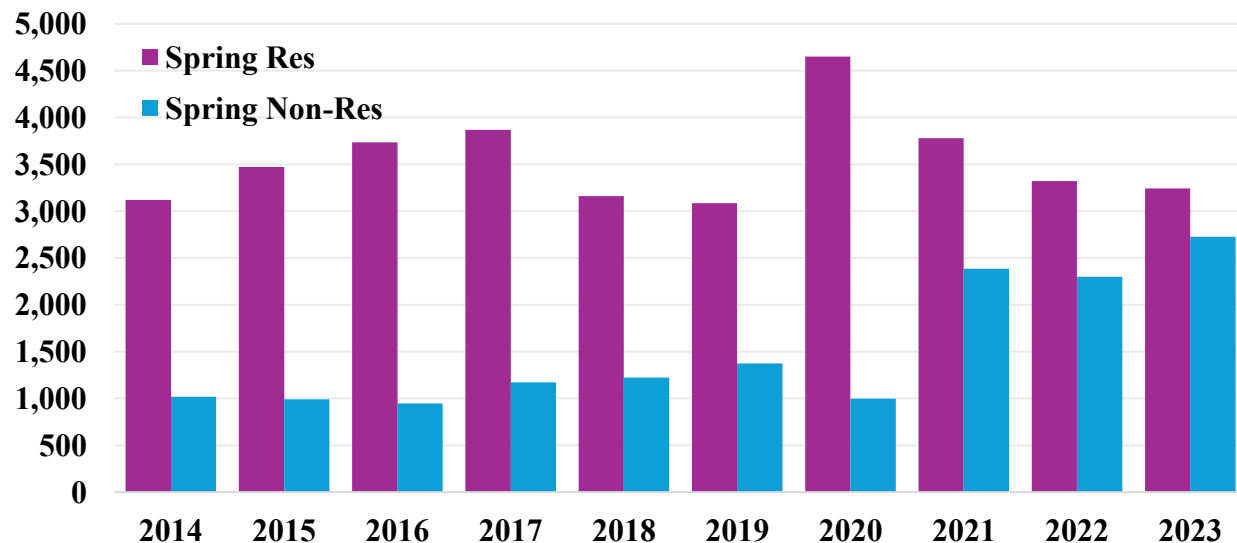


Figure 3. Wyoming Statewide Spring Wild Turkey Hunter Number by Residency

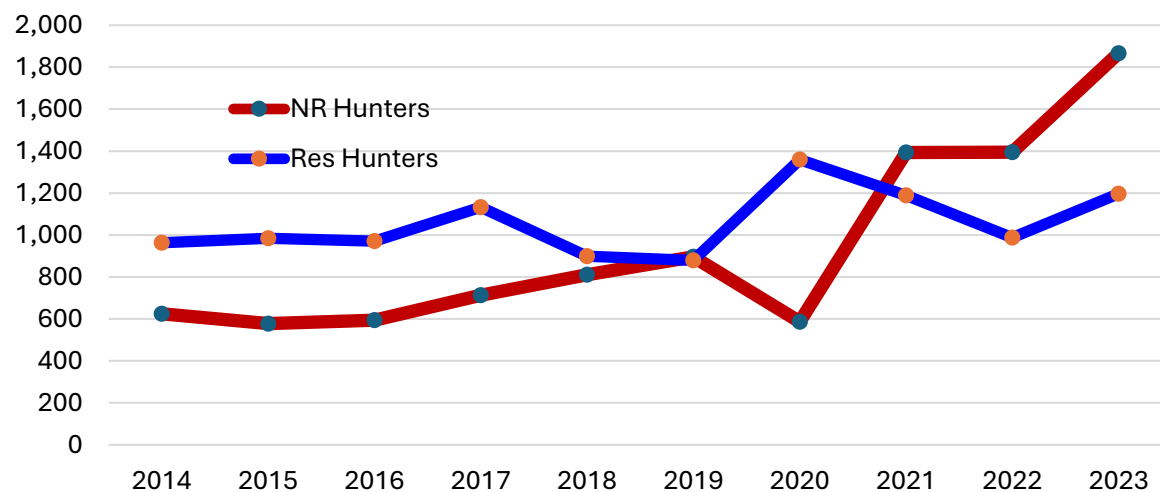


Figure 3a. Wyoming Black Hills Spring Wild Turkey Hunter Number by Residency

Total hunter success generally increased as populations of wild turkeys increased between 2014 and 2017 before dropping slightly in 2018 and again in 2019 as populations declined (Figure 4). As populations began to rebound in 2020, hunter success climbed. In 2021, nonresident success continued to increase, while success for residents declined even though by all appearances turkey numbers had increased and total harvest was up. Success continued to decline into 2023 along with total take. But again, this is in contrast the general perception that wild turkey numbers have generally held steady or increased statewide over the past two years.

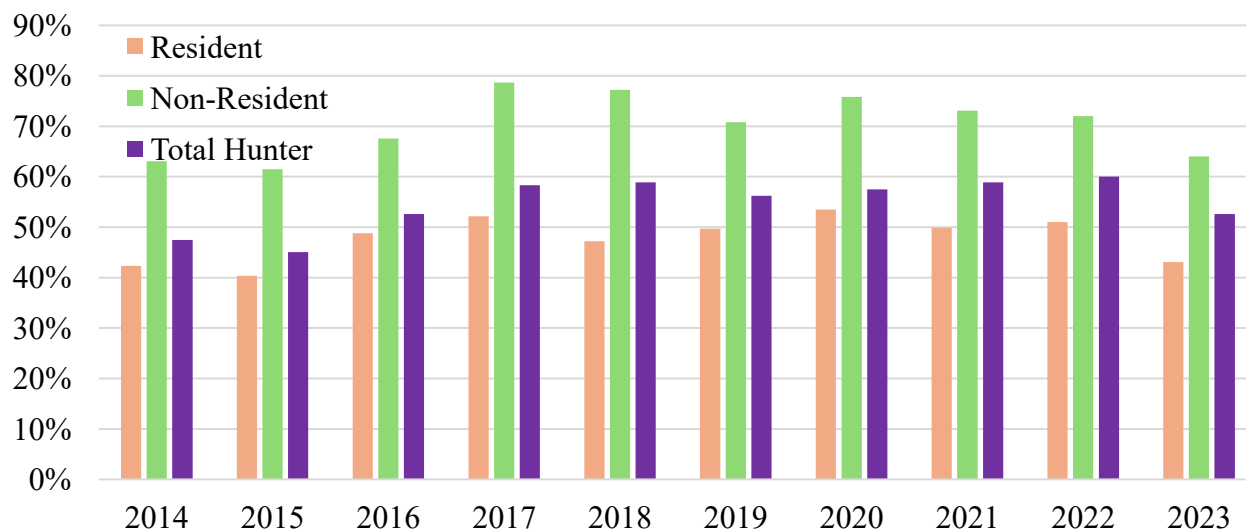


Figure 4. Wyoming, Statewide Spring Wild Turkey Hunter Success.

Spring hunter effort, as measured by days hunted per harvest (Figure 5), normally follows an inverse pattern to hunter success. Total hunter success (resident and non-resident combined) increased from 2020 through 2022 as effort declined, while in contrast total harvest dropped slightly. This suggests that while total harvest declined a bit, wild turkey numbers continued to increase between 2020 and 2022. The 2023 drop in spring harvest dovetails with the decline in success and increase in effort, and may in fact reflect an overall reduction in the statewide population of wild turkeys. However, as noted below, fall harvest steadily increased between 2021 and 2023 (Figure 7), suggesting an increasing population.

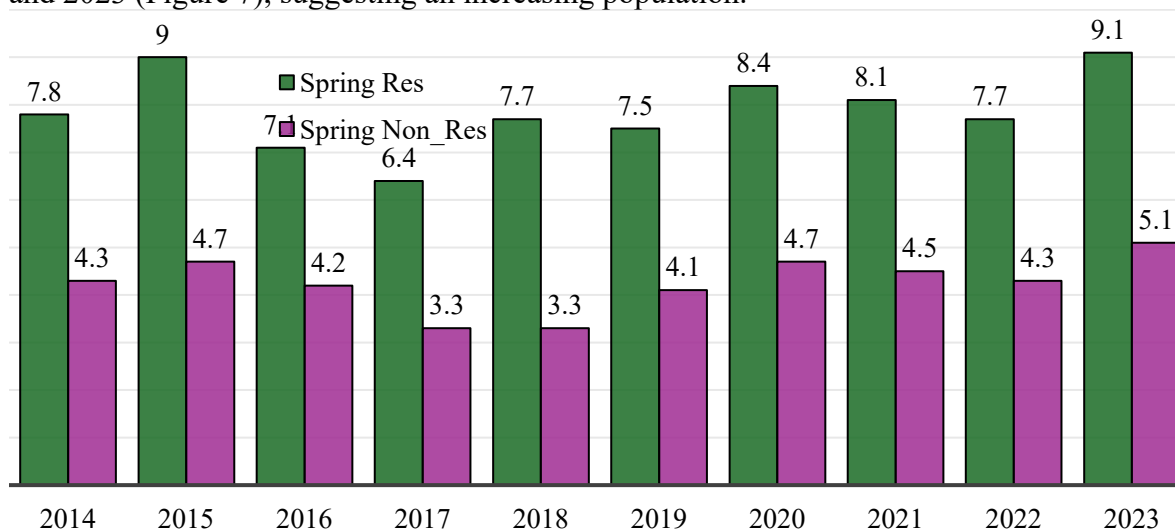


Figure 5. Wyoming, Spring Wild Turkey Hunter Effort (days per harvest) by residency.

2023 Fall Turkey Season

Between 1990 and 2010 participation in fall wild turkey hunting declined 25%, while participation in spring hunting doubled. In recent years, resident fall participation has fluctuated, but generally remained stable, while nonresident hunter numbers have increased slightly (Figure 6). However, 2023 preliminary harvest data suggests there was about a 30% - 40% increase above what has been about the average fall, resident participation. This may be an extrapolation issue, as the fall survey was not conducted until this spring, or may just reflect hunter numbers tracking a general increase in wild turkey populations around the State.

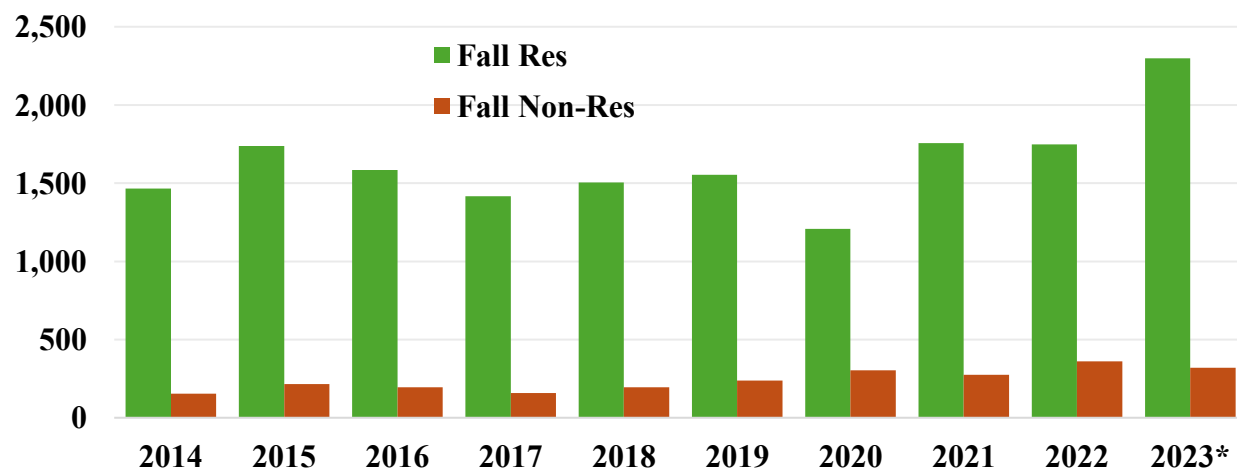


Figure 6. Fall wild turkey hunter numbers by residency (*preliminary, not final harvest data)

Over the past decade and a half, trends in fall harvest of wild turkeys have generally mirrored those of the spring (Figure 7). However, since 2020 this has not been the case. Rather, total fall harvest follow a trend opposite that of the spring. Hunter number do tend to track bird numbers, and it may be more prudent to infer population trends taking into consideration both fall and spring harvest data since 2021. For when taken together, spring and fall harvest statistics generally paint a picture of an increasing statewide population.

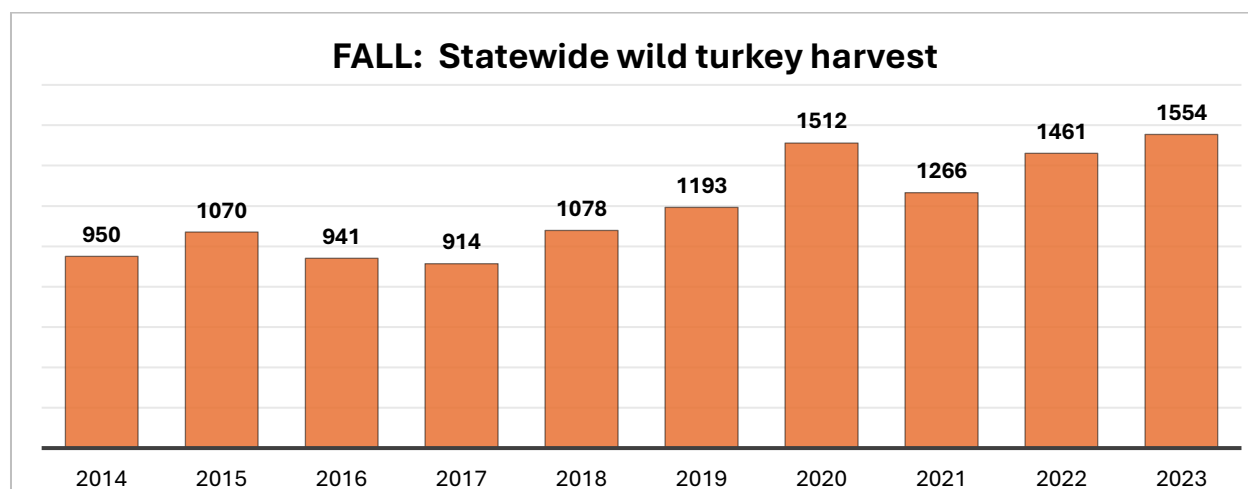


Figure 7. Total, statewide fall wild turkey harvest.

REGULATION / LEGISLATION CHANGES

To simplify wild turkey hunting regulations and group hunt areas by management strategy, the number of wild turkey hunt areas was reduced from fourteen to five in 2014. In 2021, the General License spring season opening date was standardized to April 20 in four of the five hunt areas. With this change, spring closing dates for all hunt areas were standardized to May 31. Standardization of fall hunting season dates was made in 2023, with an archery season running the month of September in four of five hunt areas, followed by the regular hunting seasons being open from Oct. 1- Dec. 31. In 2024, the decision was made to move to a single, statewide hunt area for wild turkey. With this change, fall hunting season dates were standardized to Sept. 1 – 30 for archery hunting, and Oct. 1 – Dec. 31 for the regular hunting season on all license types. Further, the spring 2025 hunting season opening date for General licenses was standardized to April 20, while the Type 3 license season was opened in some counties April 1, with the remaining counties where valid opening April 20. The spring closing date for all license types remained May 31.

With the move to a single, statewide hunt area for wild turkey, the management strategy for General License hunting now emphasizes spring gobbler hunting with limited, either sex fall hunting. With regard to managing for limited either sex fall hunting under the General License framework, there has been a significant shift in hunter participation from predominately fall to predominately spring hunting over the past forty years. Consequently, fall take of hens on General Licenses is now thought to be below the 10% level at which wild turkey populations can be negatively affected. However, to address damage and depredation complaints in some counties, a Type 3 license is issued in both the fall and spring to promote maximum combined harvest to reduce wild turkey populations in those areas.

Occupied wild turkey habitat in counties where the Type 3 license is valid consist primarily of private land, and damage complaints are common when wild turkey populations are high. Further, in most of these same counties, the spring season opens early for Type 3 licenses. The April 1 opening date being intended to negatively impact breeding when compared to the later, statewide opening date for General Licenses (April 20). The latter date being designed to allow some mating by dominate toms and provide dominate hens the opportunity to begin nest initiation before hunting begins.

In addition to the move to a single, statewide hunt area for wild turkeys along with standardization of season dates, several other changes were made to the wild turkey hunting regulation. These included: bringing the requirement for retention of evidence of sex during the spring season in line with that of big game; and the requirement of a Department issued permit to hunt wild turkeys during the spring on the Department's Yellowtail Wildlife Management to control hunter pressure and harvest on this popular WMA.

EMERGING OR EVOLVING ISSUES

- The Department may again be looking into going to shotgun / archery, or limited range weapon only for the spring hunt.

RELEVANT LINKS

Wyoming Game and Fish Dept. main website: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/>

Harvest Data: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/hunting-trapping/harvest-reports-surveys>

Geospatial Data: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/geospatial-data>

Hunt Planner: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Hunting/Hunt-Planner>
 Regulations: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/regulations>

MISCELLANEOUS

- **Trap and Translocations:** This winter a total of 137 wild turkeys were trapped and translocated. All of the trapped birds came from urban or suburban areas in and around Casper, were banded with rivet leg bands, and released in a variety of occupied habitats. Several of the translocated toms have been harvested by hunters this spring.
- **Lethal Removal:** In 2023, three “Chapter 56” lethal removal permits were issued to take nuisance and depredating wild turkeys. Two of the permits were issued to Department personnel and one to a municipality. A total of 113 birds were harvested, and 6 wounded with no known fate. Thus far in 2024, 20 wild turkeys have been taken on renewed permits.

Appendix 1

Wyoming, Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 adopted wild turkey hunting seasons with changes 2024 Fall Season

Hunt Areas, Season Dates and Limitations.

Hunt Area	Type	Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
Opens	Closes				
1	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30		Any wild turkey, archery only
1	Gen	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey
1	3	Sept. 1	Sep. 30	750	Any wild turkey valid within Converse, Natrona, Campbell, Johnson and Sheridan Counties, archery only
1	3	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey valid within Converse, Natrona, Campbell, Johnson and Sheridan Counties
2	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30		Any wild turkey, archery only
2	Gen	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey
2	3	Sep. 1	Sep. 30	400	Any wild turkey valid within Converse and Natrona counties, archery only
2	3	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey valid within Converse and Natrona counties
3	Gen	Sep. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey
3	3	Sep. 1	Dec. 31	350	Any wild turkey
4	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30		Any wild turkey, archery only
4	Gen	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey
5	Gen	Sep. 1	Sep. 30		Any wild turkey, archery only
5	Gen	Oct. 1	Dec. 31		Any wild turkey

2025 Spring Season

Hunt Areas, Season Dates and Limitations.

Hunt Area	Type	Season Dates		Quota	Limitations
Opens	Closes				
1	Gen	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard (Hunter Management Area permission slip required to hunt on the Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area)
1	3	Apr. 1	May 31 Apr. 19	100 700	Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard valid on private land in Natrona, Campbell, Johnson, and Sheridan Counties
1	3	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard valid in Converse, Natrona, Campbell, Johnson, and Sheridan Counties
2	Gen	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard
2	3	Apr. 1	Apr. 19	250	Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard valid in Natrona County
2	3	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard valid in Converse and Natrona counties
3	Gen	Apr. 1	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard
3	3	Apr. 1	May 31	400	Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard
4	Gen	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard, except the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission's Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area shall be closed
4	1	Apr. 20	May 31	50	Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard
5	Gen	Apr. 20	May 31		Any male wild turkey or any wild turkey with a visible beard

Appendix 2

OTHER CHANGES TO WILD TURKEY HUNTING REGULATIONS

Evidence of Sex. During the spring season in those hunt areas limited to the taking of male wild turkeys or any wild turkey with a visible beard, ~~a visible beard shall remain naturally attached to the carcass as a means of identification in the field and while the wild turkey is being transported.~~ proof of sex shall accompany the turkey carcass, attached or unattached while the wild turkey is in transportation from the site of the kill to the residence of the person taking the wild turkey, or delivered to a processor for processing. Proof of sex for male wild turkeys shall include either one leg including the spur, or a patch of skin with the breast feathers and beard attached; and for female wild turkey (bearded hen) a patch of skin with the breast feathers and beard attached.

Yellowtail WHMA Permission Slip Required. During the spring season, no person shall attempt to take a wild turkey on the lands of the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission's Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area without possessing a valid Hunter Management Area permission slip issued to them by the Department for said management area and the date(s) of any attempt to take.

Meeting Notes

Hands on Training – Turkey Trapping Techniques

Presenters: Jason Hardin, Kyle Hand, Rick Langley, Rana Murphey

Jason Hardin and Kyle Hand presented a power point on the history of turkey traps and trapping efforts. This presentation also included information on the adaptations they have made to walk in traps for turkeys. This was followed by a field demonstration where those present assisted in setting up the different types of walk in traps discussed.

Rick Langley and Rana Murphey discussed with the group their experiences with pneumatic net cannons. This was followed by a field demonstration where those present assisted in setting up and deploying the pneumatic net cannons.

Managing Conflict with Wild Turkeys Manuscript Update

Presenter: Brian Wakeling

Brian Wakeling discussed the current progress of the manuscript with the group.

GPS Transmitter Discussion

Presenters: Rick Langley

Rick Langley showed current GPS transmitters he is using, and the group discussed experiences with other GPS transmitters from current or past projects. Casey Cardinal recommended starting a working document for the group on what GPS transmitters states are currently utilizing to serve as a resource for other state biologists. This idea was unanimously supported and will be compiled.