

**NWTF Technical Committee Representatives' Report - PA Chapter NWTF
Board of Directors Meeting, January 11, 2009**

**Submitted by: Mary Jo Casalena, Wildlife Biologist II, and Robert C. Boyd, Assistant
Director, Bureau of Wildlife Management, PA Game Commission**

Harvest Management

Preliminary fall 2008 harvest was approximately 22,850 as calculated from report cards and expanded by reporting rate. This represents an increase of 4% from the fall 2007 and 2006 harvests and is similar the 2005 fall harvest. Final harvest estimates will be available this summer after completion of our annual game-take survey.

Wild Turkey Season Recommendations

Fall season recommendations are based on trends in 2 independent population indices; spring harvest densities (harvest per square mile), and summer WCO turkey sightings (number of turkeys seen per 1,000 mi driven). We recommend maintaining season length changes for at least 3 consecutive years to track any changes in population trends. With this in mind, PGC staff will recommend to the Board of Commissioners season length changes to 3 WMUs for the fall 2009 turkey seasons. These are: decrease the fall season in WMU 2D from 3 weeks to 2 weeks and decrease the fall season in WMUs 5C and 5D from 6 days to 4 days. Summer sighting indices and spring harvest densities in WMU 2D have consistently been below the average values from 1995-2003 and the spring harvest density remains below the value prior to the season extension. The surrounding WMUs (except for WMU 2B) have 2-week seasons. Wild turkey spring harvest densities in WMU 5C continue to show a declining trend even after decreasing the season by 1 day in 2005. Although the dataset is limited for WMU 5D, the spring harvest density has decreased approximately 78% since the fall season has been open. Turkey populations are particularly vulnerable to overharvest in these WMUs due to highly fragmented forested habitats.

Regarding the spring 2010 season, we do not recommend adding days to the youth day as this season occurs prior to the average peak of turkey nest incubation. Beginning 2008, the spring turkey season now closes on Memorial Day. We have recommended in years past to extend the season to May 31 (in accordance with Strategy 4.5 in the turkey management plan to extend spring season length); this is easily accommodated in 2010 since Memorial Day falls on May 31. We do not recommend an earlier start date. As stated in the turkey management plan, the spring season is timed to begin during the approximate peak of nest incubation to decrease the probability of illegal and accidental hen mortality, as well as nest abandonment by the hens that are in the process of laying their clutch. Hens in the egg-laying stage are more susceptible to nest abandonment than hens that have begun incubating (incubation begins after a full clutch is laid). Research has shown that incubating hens are much less susceptible to being harvested because they are not easily disturbed off their nest. If the season would open earlier, fewer hens would be incubating, and accidental/incidental hen mortality likely would increase.

Recommended 2009/2010 turkey seasons:

WMU	Sporting Arm	Dates	Length	Daily & Season
1A, 1B & 2A	Shotgun/archery	Oct. 31 – Nov. 14	2 weeks	Limit = 1
2B	Shotgun/archery	Oct. 31 – Nov. 21	3 weeks	
2C, 2D, 2E, 2F, 4A & 4B	Rifle/ Shotgun/archery	Oct. 31 – Nov. 14	2 weeks	
2G, 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 4C, 4D & 4E	Rifle/ Shotgun/archery	Oct. 31 – Nov. 21	3 weeks	
5A & 5B	Closed		0	

5C & 5D	Shotgun/archery	Oct. 31 – Nov. 4	4 days	
Spring – Youth (statewide;bearded)	Shotgun/archery	April 24, 2010	½ day, noon closure	
Spring – Statewide (bearded birds)	Shotgun/archery	May 1- May 31, 2010	26 days, noon closure	Daily Limit 1, Season Limit 2 with appropriate license

Summer Turkey Sighting Surveys

The statewide summer turkey sighting surveys were completed by all Wildlife Conservation Officers, as well as the WMU 5A weekly turkey sighting surveys in the Michaux State Forest. These data, along with spring harvest data, are used in determining turkey hunting season recommendations. This year's statewide sighting index was 5% below 2007, but 12% above the previous two years, indicating average recruitment this year. The WMU 5A surveys produced positive results with 2008 being the highest index since we began the survey in 1998, more than twice the previous average. Since we closed the fall season in 2003, the summer sighting index has shown an increasing trend.

PANWTF Turkey Hunting Success and Safety Brochure

Thanks to PANWTF and NWTF for creating this brochure and providing it to the PGC as another example of our conservation partnership. As suggested, we will include the brochure in the mailings of the special spring turkey licenses for all purchasers of the license. The agency will absorb this cost.

PRELIMINARY 2008 Turkey Hunting-Related Shooting Incidents

Final results for spring 2008 turkey HRSIs show 8 non fatal incidents, up from 5 during spring 2007. One was self-inflicted (unintentional discharge), in one the victim was in the line of fire, and the other 6 victims were mistaken for game. All victims were hunting; 2 victims were standing, one was walking/running, 4 were sitting and the other was other/unknown. One offender had less than 2 years experience, the others had over 10 years.

Preliminary results for the fall 2008 turkey season show 2 non fatal incidents, up from 1 during fall 2007 which was the lowest number of incidents ever recorded. The previous record was 2 incidents in both 2003 and 2005 (4 incidents in 2006). Both incidents involved shotguns and victims were mistaken for game. One victim was sitting and wearing fluorescent orange and other was standing and wearing camouflage clothing. Summaries for spring and fall seasons are provided at the end of this report.

Wild Turkey Spring Harvest Rates and Annual Survival Rates Study

The fourth and final field season of this study began in January. Thanks to the continued support of the PANWTF, most equipment has been purchased and distributed, including bait and hay. At the end of November, all three states had closed their hunting seasons. Ohio reported one turkey found dead and one harvested by a hunter (non-reward). New York reported 6 reward and 5 non-reward bands, one of which was found dead and one road-killed. Pennsylvanians reported 6 reward and 5 non-reward bands. Additionally, one hunter harvested a banded bird during the spring 2008 season and saw a second banded bird at the time he harvested his fall gobbler.

Preliminary analyses from the first 3 years show that harvest rates are higher for adult gobblers than for jakes in all 3 states and harvest rates differ among years. On average, harvest rates were 38% for adults in all 3 states, but varied for jakes: 15% in NY, 17% in OH and 22% in PA. Again, these are just preliminary analyses.

One additional benefit of the research study was to test retention rates of different types of leg bands. Our manuscript on leg-band retention rates was accepted and finalized for publication in the scientific, peer-reviewed Journal of Wildlife Management.

Update on Implementation Schedule of Turkey Management Plan for Pennsylvania, 2006-2015

The second year's implementation of the revised 10-year wild turkey management plan was very successful with one of the 47 strategies completed (Appendix 1). Of the remaining 46 strategies, 34 strategies are in progress, 29 of which are ongoing and one began ahead of schedule. Four strategies are to begin in the future, 3 were postponed due to delay in Point-of-Sale licensing and 5 are behind schedule (beyond personnel time commitments and low priorities). Only 4 of the 34 strategies that are in progress are behind schedule (due to being beyond personnel time commitments). Partnerships (monetary and personnel) become more important each year to assist with accomplishing the plan on schedule and we appreciate the support from PANWTF and NWTF.

Annual NWTF Convention and Sport Show, Atlanta, GA

Thanks to the generous support from the Pennsylvania State Chapter, the Game Commission is able to send the Joe Kurz award recipient (Scott Bills, Land Management Officer in Dauphin & Lebanon Counties, SE Region) and the Wildlife Conservation Officer of the Year award recipient (Rodney Burns, Greene County, SW Region) to the National Convention. Due to out-of-state travel restrictions we are unable to send other representatives (Commissioners, Executive Office, or a Technical Committee Representative). We request the State Chapter consider assisting with sending one Technical Committee Representative, Bob Boyd. PGC representation at the National Technical Committee meetings is important to advocate for our hen harvest rate research study. We submitted the proposal for possible NWTF national research funding. The agency cannot presently afford this study without NWTF support.

Tidbit

The report of a PA wild turkey hen incubating a clutch of eggs on October 9, 2008, in an alfalfa field, on a farm in New Hope, Bucks County, was the latest known incubation of a wild turkey in Pennsylvania. The hen abandoned the nest several days later.