

**NWTF Technical Committee Representatives' Report - PA Chapter NWTF  
Board of Directors Meeting, Pleasant Gap, PA  
June 7, 2008**

**Harvest Management**

Harvest report cards received the first half of the spring turkey season are 56% above the previous 3-year average for the same time period. Reasons for this harvest increase include good weather for hunting and hearing turkeys, a slightly earlier start to the season due to the annual calendar, and a healthy turkey population in most areas; all of which differ from the previous 3 years. We continue to receive report cards until the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday after the close of the season (June 18<sup>th</sup> this year), at which time we make our final count.

Final count of special turkey licenses sold for 2008 is 8,795, an increase of 16% from 2007, and a 9% increase from 2006, the first year they were offered. Of these, we have received reports of 688 harvests (as of 5/20/08), a 97% increase from the same time last year. Most of this increase, however, likely is due to hunters now becoming familiar with the reporting procedure of this license rather than a substantial increase in harvest.

Preliminary calculated fall 2007 turkey harvest was 21,900 (Table 1). This was 2% higher than the preliminary fall 2006 turkey harvest (21,500), but 9% below the previous 3-year preliminary average (24,180). Final fall 2007 harvest figures will be available in July after completion of the annual Game-Take Survey, which will provide hunter participation and harvest estimates. Fall turkey harvests fluctuate annually according to fall season length, summer reproduction, hunter participation, fall mast crop and weather. We lengthened the season in 1 WMU in 2007 (4D) but shortened the season in 2 WMUs (2A & 2F). Additionally we shortened the season in 3 WMUs in 2005 (1A, 5C & 5D) and 5 WMUs in 2004 (2C, 2E, 4A, 4B & 4D). Numbers of fall turkey hunters and days fall turkey hunting have been decreasing since the mid 1990s. Fall turkey harvest in neighboring New York also was higher than last year due to good summer reproduction.

The PGC turkey biologist responded to over one dozen inquiries from the public, newspapers and magazines regarding an array of turkey harvest, management and turkey hunting questions and provided telephone interviews to several outdoor and newspaper writers.

**Wild Turkey Management Plan**

The annual review of the wild turkey management plan strategies is underway in preparation for the annual PGC/PANWTF Cooperative meeting (June 9, 2008). Each PGC Bureau is reviewing management plan strategies they are responsible for to show outputs and outcomes, if the timeframe for accomplishments is being maintained, and identifying potential problems with implementation.. The management plan implementation schedule (Appendix 1 in the plan document) is attached with an initial review of strategies. A complete review will be provided at the PGC/PANWTF meeting.

The regional wild turkey population model requires an annual recruitment variable, ratio of poults per hen, which we do not directly measure. We revised the statewide turkey summer sighting survey and Michaux summer sighting survey to calculate this directly. Previously we calculated an index of production, but not a direct measure. The statewide survey was simply used to give an index of the entire summer turkey population to track overall population changes from year to year.

The 2008 Pennsylvania Turkey Hunter Survey is being reviewed internally and, in late July, will be mailed to approximately 9,000-10,000 turkey hunters to determine their knowledge and attitudes to help the PGC direct future wild turkey management efforts.

**Wild Turkey Spring Harvest Rates and Annual Survival Rates Study**

Turkey trapping and leg banding concluded at the end of March, with 932 gobblers banded across the 3 states (NY-350, PA-332, OH-250). PA regional banding totals were: NW: 79, SW: 51, NC: 54, SC: 55, NE: 39, SE: 54, which included 152 adult gobblers and 180 juvenile males. There is one more winter of leg banding. The Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Penn State maintains the toll-free number for

reporting leg band returns. We thank the National Wild Turkey Federation for their total financial support of \$203,893, and the Pennsylvania Chapter NWTf for their financial support of \$33,500 to date as well as volunteer assistance with turkey trapping.

Reports of harvested gobblers are coming into the toll-free phone number at the Pennsylvania Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. As of 20 May 2008, 121 leg-banded gobblers have been reported harvested in Pennsylvania, including 4 from the youth season and one harvested with a bow. Additionally, 5 have been found dead, or legbands found and reported. This compares to 100 leg-banded gobblers reported harvested by the same time last year. One harvest is an Ohio turkey that was harvested in Beaver County, and one was a New York banded turkey harvested in Erie County. Additionally, one was banded in Greene Co. in 2007 and harvested in West Virginia, about 500-600 yds. from Mt. Morris, Pennsylvania. Fifty-eight of the 121 harvested were reward band birds (63 were nonreward). See Table 2 for comparison of state results to date.

Additionally, possible methodologies of the future turkey hen harvest rate study were investigated with the assistance of Dr. Duane Diefenbach (PSU).

As part of the NE Wild Turkey Technical Committee the turkey biologist reviewed and provided comments on 18 NWTf Grant-in-aid research proposals for wild turkey research. Our tri-state gobbler study is funded through this as well.

### **Wild Turkey Trap and Transfer**

Personnel from the Southwest Region transferred 44 wild turkeys (4 juvenile males, 4 adult males, 36 females) from Pittsburgh area urban and suburban nuisance flocks to South Dakota in exchange for wild ring-neck pheasants as part of the pheasant restoration program in the Southwest Region. Additionally, 23 nuisance turkeys were leg-banded and released to SGL 432 (6 adult females), SGL 297 (8 adult males, 7 adult females), and Allegheny Land Trust Property (2 adult males), a Safety Zone property as part of our 'Nuisance wild turkey transfer pilot program in Southwestern Pennsylvania, 2007-2010' to monitor (via leg-banding) whether birds return to their nuisance location and/or, if relocated turkeys become nuisances in the relocated area. Leg bands are stamped with the Southwest Region telephone number, and contain a unique alpha-numeric number.

### **Hunter- Related Shooting Incidents**

Preliminary results show eight (8) nonfatal spring 2008 gobbler season hunter related shooting incidents, compared to 5 in 2007 and 8.6 for the previous 10-year average (Table 3, containing reports of 5 of the 8 incidents). Incidents occurred in these counties: Allegheny, Cambria (2), Clinton, Cumberland, Luzerne, Lycoming and Northumberland.

### **Michaux State Forest Summer Sighting Surveys**

Thanks to a well-established cooperative effort among the PGC, DCNR Bureau of Forestry (BOF), and volunteers from the National Wild Turkey Federation, the eleventh year of weekly Summer Sighting Surveys on the Michaux State Forest will be conducted to provide an additional index to turkey population trends besides our harvest and hunting success trend data for WMU 5A. This is the area of the turkey radio-telemetry study where we investigated the causes of the suppressed wild turkey population, and closed the fall season in 2003 to aid in population recovery. Additionally, since 2002, BOF staff record on a daily basis, all turkeys they see and miles driven, to get an index of turkeys seen per mile driven and productivity (poults/hen), as additional indices of the turkey population. Also, each summer since 2003 volunteers from local chapters have been conducting surveys of turkey usage of wildlife openings on the Michaux State Forest to determine the best mowing schedule for turkeys. This is the last summer of surveys and their assistance has been appreciated.

Submitted by:

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Table 1. PRELIMINARY Pennsylvania 2007 fall wild turkey harvests.

WMU	Calculated Harvest	Harvest per Square Mile	Percent (%) State Harvest
1A	795	0.35	3.6
1B	1,360	0.52	6.2
2A	615	0.28	2.8
2B	565	0.34	2.6
2C	1,441	0.38	6.6
2D	1,549	0.51	7.1
2E	692	0.45	3.2
2F	830	0.28	3.8
2G	1,987	0.39	9.1
3A	1,260	0.68	5.8
3B	1,549	0.56	7.1
3C	1,568	0.59	7.2
3D	834	0.31	3.8
4A	1,211	0.57	5.5
4B	965	0.49	4.4
4C	1,199	0.54	5.5
4D	1,856	0.55	8.5
4E	1,330	0.62	6.1
5A	-	0.00	0.0
5B	4	0.00	0.0
5C	246	0.09	1.1
5D	8	0.01	0.0
Unknown	54	--	0.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,916</b>	<b>0.39</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2. Comparison of leg-band returns from Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio, spring 2008 (to May 20, 2008).

	PA	NY	OH
Reported harvested	121	123	105
Reward bands	58	58	55
Youth season	4	9	9
Other reported (during hunting season)	5	1 roadkill	0
2008 banded	69	58	42
2007 banded	44	55	58
2006 banded	8	10	5

Note: 8 Ohio turkeys were wearing transmitters from 2007