

Pennsylvania Wild Turkey Management Accomplishments and Turkey Hunting Regulations - 1958-2008

By Don Heckman, PANWTF Vice President and Wild Turkey Management Committee Chairman

PGC Management Plan For Wild Turkeys In Pennsylvania was revised and adopted in February 2007. There is 1 goal, 6 objectives, and 47 strategies documenting management data collected from previous years, provide information and guidelines for recommending seasons and bag limit regulation, and outline criteria for decision making for future wild turkey management changes between 2006-2015.

As of February 2008 these are key wild turkey management accomplishments and turkey hunting regulations made since 1958. These PGC and PANWTF accomplishments, current regulation changes, and revised wild turkey management plan objectives and strategies will drive PA Chapter NWTF's wild turkey management and turkey hunting recommendations for future decades.

Late 1950's - 1960's:

- 1) PGC begins full scale wild turkey trap and transfer to expand and repopulate wild turkeys throughout Pennsylvania in suitable but unoccupied wild turkey habitat.**
- 2) PGC stopped winter-feeding of wildlife due to research results on lack of benefits.**
- 3) PGC wild turkey biologists Jerry Wunz and Arnie Hayden doing several wild turkey population, habitat, and regional research project.**
- 4) Spring gobbler season started in 1968 with one week season.**

1970's - 1980's:

- 5) Spring gobbler season start date moved to later in April from management data recommendations.**
- 6) Spring gobbler season is expanded to two weeks in 1972, three weeks in 1975, four weeks in 1984.**
- 7) Pennsylvania State Chapter NWTF formed in June 1975 in State College.**
- 8) Escalating and improving trap and transfer both in-state and out-of-state in the 1970's, 1980's, 1990's.**
- 9) Closing PGC game farm production of turkeys in 1980-1981.**
- 10) Established turkey management areas - TMA's - in 1985 to effectively manage wild turkey populations at more local levels.**
- 11) NWTF and PA Chapter begin state Super Fund in 1985 to support habitat management, safety and education, land acquisition, other wild turkey management requests, state and local chapter wild turkey projects.**
- 12) Continued use of wild turkey in-state trap and transfer in suitable but unoccupied habitat to expand wild turkey populations.**
- 13) Last regional wild turkey research project completed by Arnie Hayden in 1988, until 1999.**

1990's:

- 14) Expanded or reduced fall season lengths since 1990 to manage and improve wild turkey populations due to bad recruitment, bad spring hatch, bad winters.**
- 15) New mandatory PGC turkey hunting fluorescent orange regulation changes begin in 1992-1993, without PANWTF support.**
- 16) Reduced mandatory PGC fluorescent orange regulation changes to today's regulations in 1995, with PANWTF support.**

- 17) PGC Wild Turkey Biologists Bill Drake completes first 5 year Management Plan For Wild Turkeys In Pennsylvania and is adopted in April 1999.
- 18) TMA 7B Wild Turkey Task Force started in 1996-1997 to determine reasons for dramatic decline of wild turkey population on Michaux State Forest; PGC and DCNR Bureau of Forestry Staff along with PANWTF local chapters participated in first ever Wild Turkey Task Force coordinated and facilitated by Don Heckman, PANWTF Wild Turkey Management Committee Chairman.
- 19) TMA 7B wild turkey hen radio telemetry research study coordinated by PGC Wild Turkey Biologist Mary Jo Casalena in 1999-2001 on Michaux State Forest to determine causes of a suppressed wild turkey population, partially funded by \$82,000 contribution from PANWTF. Eight recommendations by PGC biologist were created and monitored for improving wild turkey population on Michaux State Forest.

2000's:

- 20) PGC signed MOU with NWTF to partially fund the NWTF Regional Biologist to assist the agency with all forms of wild turkey management and research.
- 21) PGC creates wild turkey web page on web site to provide accurate public information and education on wild turkey management and research in 2000.
- 22) Wild turkey in-state trap and transfer in southeast used to expand population into further suitable habitat in 2000-2003. This completed the agency's wild turkey restoration program with over 3,500 wild turkeys transferred within Pennsylvania and to 8 other states.
- 23) Closing fall turkey hunting seasons in TMA 9A [now WMU 5A] in 2001, TMA 9B [now WMU 5B] in 2003.
- 24) Record number of wild turkey in Pennsylvania in 2001, 410,000 estimated state-wide wild turkey population.
- 25) Prescribed burn policy approved for use as habitat management tool on State Game Lands in 2001.
- 26) PGC completes turkey hunter survey to determine hunter attitudes, characteristics, and satisfaction in 2001.
- 27) Improving turkey hunting safety portion of PGC HTE course, adding turkey hunting safety section and questions to course test in 2001.
- 28) Northeastern states commissioned development of regional wild turkey population model in 2001, partially funding by \$15,000 PANWTF contribution.
- 29) Use of manmade blinds to hunt turkeys is legal, legislation signed in 2002, and regulation completed for 2003 hunting season.
- 30) PANWTF, NWTF, and other state conservation organizations oppose PGC proposed regulation to increase mandatory fluorescent orange for fall hunting seasons, proposed regulation was not adopted.
- 31) PGC permit required prior to releasing farm-pen raised turkeys, to help eliminate release of game-farm turkeys.
- 32) Wild turkey management now accomplished using 22 Wildlife Management Units starting in 2003.
- 33) Closed WMU 5A [old TMA 7B] to fall turkey hunting in 2003, recommendation from TMA 7B Wild Turkey Task Force.
- 34) Research continued on Michaux State Forest [now WMU 5A] to determine turkey usage of herbaceous openings.
- 35) Established 6 Game Commission regional Wildlife Management Supervisors, to provide among other tasks, direct technical assistance to private landowners and agency staff.
- 36) Special Saturday youth spring gobbler hunting day established by regulation one week before regular spring gobbler season starts.

- 37) NWTF Wild Turkey Biologists Bob Eriksen and PGC Wild Turkey Biologist Mary Jo Casalena begin series of informational, educational articles for PGC Hunting and Trapping Digest, PGC Game News, and PA Turkey Talk.
- 38) PGC Wild Turkey Biologists Mary Jo Casalena presents TMA 7B wild turkey study project research paper as part of NWTF's 9th Wild Turkey Symposia and Status in North America in December 2005.
- 39) Fall turkey hunting WMU season lengths are reduced in several WMU's between 2004 and 2007 based on wild turkey biologist's management data and fall season length guidelines due to poor reproduction.
- 40) NWTF and PA Chapter Hunting Heritage Super Fund expenditures exceed \$4,000,000 in 2006 for wild turkey projects in Pennsylvania.
- 41) State-wide second spring gobbler tag issued in 2006, legislation signed in 2004, regulations added in 2005, first year 8,040 licenses sold.
- 42) State wide first ever PGC gobbler leg band study started in 2006, first year completed of 4 year research study, being partially funded by NWTF and PANWTF for Pennsylvania, study will determine "wild turkey harvest rates and annual survival rates", and is being coordinated with Ohio and New York state agency studies.
- 43) Mentored Youth Hunting Program initiated in 2006 for spring gobbler, squirrel, and groundhogs, turkey hunting starts in 2007 for spring gobbler season only.
- 44) PGC Wild Turkey Biologists Mary Jo Casalena completes revisions for updating 2006-2015 PGC Management Plan For Wild Turkeys In Pennsylvania, February 2007.
- 45) Spring gobbler season length expanded to include Memorial Day 2008 based on wild turkey biologists management data and PANWTF support, PANWTF will continue recommendation for season length to be lengthened to May 31.
- 46) Spring gobbler season regulation for mandatory use of orange changed by vote of PGC Board of Commissioner's to voluntary use of orange - hunter's choice, as supported and recommended by PA Chapter NWTF Board of Director's.