

NWTF Technical Committee Representatives' Report - PA

Chapter NWTF

Board of Directors Meeting, Oct. 7, 2012

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Wild Turkey Hen Harvest Rates and Annual Survival Rates Study

Study Area 1 is comprised of WMUs 2C, 2E, 4A, 4B and 4D; Study Area 2 is comprised of WMUs 2F and 2G. Late summer turkey trapping began in mid-August to leg band an additional 150 hens (75 per Study Area), focusing on brood flocks to obtain a sample of leg banded juvenile hens to estimate fall harvest rates by age. Transmitters recovered from mortalities are being re-deployed with a goal of 60 transmitters on hens. Males incidentally trapped receive non-reward leg bands. Trapping success has been low due to the early drop of acorns and weather; we have leg-banded only 55 females (37% of goal). Consequently trapping continues through October 26 on private land with no fall turkey hunting where baiting turkeys for hunting is not an issue. Total leg banded turkeys to date are 1,172 females and 256 males.

We are continuing to coordinate with the PCFWRU to monitor survival and movements of transmittered hens. Similar to previous years, mortality rates during the summer brood-rearing period decreased from the higher levels observed during nest incubation in the spring. There are currently 42 transmitters active as of 3 October (24 in SA1, 18 in SA2). From mid-August through 3 October we recovered 1 transmitter in Study Area 1 (mammalian predation) and 1 transmitter in Study Area 2 (equipment failure); also, contact was lost with 2 transmitters in Study Area 2, and two juvenile females transmittered in Study Area 1 died within 2 weeks of capture. A few of the transmittered hens have begun moving toward wintering grounds away from summer nesting/brooding areas. One hen in particular has returned to her winter ground where she was trapped last winter; a 12 mile trip.

I recently hired a three-year biologist aide, Rex Everett, to assist with hen study field work and general wild turkey data analyses. Although his hours will be part-time during periods we are not turkey trapping I look forward to the assistance.

Harvest Management

This year, 2012, was our second season of an all-day spring wild turkey hunting during the second half of the season (began third Monday of the season). During the ½ day portion, 71% of the harvest occurred before 9am; the same as last year. During the all-day season 20% of the harvests occurred after noon, similar to the 22% last year (Figure 1). For the afternoon segment, the majority of the harvest occurred between 6-8pm, similar to last year. The latest reported harvest was 8:40pm (8:35pm in 2011). Hunting hours closed from 8:38-8:58pm during the first week of all-day hunting (ended 4 minutes later for each meridian west), up to 8:50-9:10pm during the last week of hunting. All-day spring hunting for the second half of the season also is offered in Virginia, Ohio and Maryland. New Jersey will offer this in 2014, Vermont's administration will strongly consider it, and Maine is to consider it. Connecticut's youth season closes at 5pm, but they are not considering it for the regular season. The 5pm closure is to avoid impacting the behavior of birds going to roost.

Data collection ended for the two annual turkey summer sighting surveys (statewide daily WCO and WMU 5A weekly surveys) which provide information on trends in recruitment and populations.

The Gamebird Section, PGC attended the annual meeting of the Northeast Upland Game Bird Technical Committee held this year in Pennsylvania at Lake Raystown Resort. I presented a PowerPoint update on the hen turkey study. New York is developing a similar study. All state biologists provided oral and written reports regarding their state's upland gamebird management and research. The Southeast states and Midwest states both created Wild Turkey Consortiums to address variations in state methodologies for tracking wild turkey population trends and possible solutions to determine regional population trends. Funding comes from each state agency, NWTF and state NWTF chapters. Our group

agreed to investigate the need for us to also develop a consortium to examine large-scale trends in turkey populations (via examining each state's brood data), and causative factors. The group also determined the top research priority is to evaluate the impacts of all-day spring wild turkey hunting on turkey populations, particularly if disturbance to hens is an issue given that all-day hunting begins well into nest incubation and after hunter participation has significantly decreased.

The wild turkey program, along with our biometrician and Dr. Duane Diefenbach will meet with the NYDEC and the NY Co-operative Fisheries and Wildlife Research Unit this week to discuss our development of a structured decision making criteria for fall turkey season regulations and we can possibly work cooperatively with NY.

WMU 5A Wild Turkey Task Force

The annual cooperative meeting among the PGC, Bureau of Forestry, NWTF and local chapters NWTF was held last week to investigate wild turkey population trends and harvests in WMU 5A. Wild turkey poult recruitment increased from 1996 to the peak in 2004 and has been lower since 2005. This suggests the population is reaching biological carrying capacity with density dependent factors attributing to productivity. Population monitoring will continue to help determine if this theory holds true. The task force agreed with the Bureau of Wildlife Management to not make any season change recommendation for the fall 2013 season in WMU 5A, but to recommend maintaining the existing 3-day fall turkey hunting season through 2013. The task force agreed to acquire a third year of productivity data in 2013 with this season structure, and then make a season recommendation for 2014 based on 3 years of population trends with the 3-day fall season.

Information and Education

In cooperation with the PGC Bureau of Information and Education, MJ Casalena recorded radio programs regarding the upcoming fall turkey hunting season for Radio PA, to be aired the entire week prior to turkey season. We continue to provide interesting tid-bits of turkey research information and photos to the PGC Facebook page.