

NWTF Technical Committee Representatives' Report - PA Chapter NWTF

Board of Directors Meeting, Oct. 6, 2013

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Harvest Management

- Preliminary 2013 spring season results (from annual spring turkey hunter survey):
 - Harvest: 34,158 (1,153 youth season + 31,449 regular season + 1,556 2nd tag)
 - 4% lower than 2012 harvest (35,392) & 11% lower than average since 2nd tag has been available (38,384)
 - Hunters: 214,222 (10,302 youth season + 203,920 regular season)
 - Similar to 2012 (216,511), but 6% lower than previous 7-yr average (227,645)
 - Success, for first bird: 15%
 - Similar to 2012, 8% lower than previous 7-year average (16%)
- 2nd tags sold, 2013: 16,505
 - Increased 26% from 13,142 in 2012
 - Increased 50% from previous average (2006-2012): 11,006
- Gamebird Section sent 2014-15 season/bag limit recommendations (below) to Bureau of Wildlife Management, which will discuss recommendations with Senior Staff later this month, who then will provide Staff recommendations to Commissioners in January. Final Staff recommendations **could differ** from Gamebird Section recommendations.
 - Statewide, 2013 index of summer wild turkey populations increased 23% from previous 10-yr average, probably due primarily to favorable weather conditions during early June.
 - Previous 4 consecutive years saw below-average summer reproduction.
 - Not all individual WMUs demonstrated improvement and longer-term trends warrant season reductions in 3 WMUs and season liberalization in 1 WMU.

WILD TURKEY		
Seasons	2013-2014 Seasons	2014-2015 Seasons Recommendation
Fall – WMU 2B (shotgun & bow/arrow)	Nov. 2-22 & Nov. 28-30, 2013	Nov. 1-21 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall – WMU 1B	Nov. 2-9 & Nov. 28-30, 2013	Nov. 1-8 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall – WMUs 1A, 2A, 2D, 2F, 2G, 2H	Nov. 2 -16 & Nov. 28-30, 2013	Nov. 1-15 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall – WMUs 2C, 2E, 3D, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D & 4E	Nov. 2-22 & Nov. 28-30, 2013	Nov. 1-21 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall - WMUs 3A, 3B, 3C	Nov. 2-22 & Nov. 28-30, 2013	Nov. 1-15 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall – WMU 5A	Nov. 5-7, 2013	Nov. 6-8, 2014 (Thur – Sat)
Fall – WMUs 5B, 5C & 5D	Closed	Closed
Spring – Youth Hunt (statewide; bearded bird)	April 26, 2014	April 25, 2015
Spring – Statewide (bearded birds)	May 3-31, 2014	May 2-30, 2015

- **WMU 1B:** Maintain 1-week season + 3-day Thanksgiving season for 2nd year. Even though spring harvest density doubled since last year, harvest densities continue to be well below average.

- **WMU 3A, 3B & 3C:** Shorten fall seasons from 3 weeks (+ 3 days) to 2 weeks (+ 3 days). One-week reduction in first season segment is advised over elimination of the 3-day Thanksgiving season segment because it is likely to achieve a greater reduction in harvest.
- **WMU 3A:**
 - 2013 spring harvest density was lowest on record and 50% below 10-year average.
 - 2013 summer sightings were 2nd lowest on record (1998 was lowest) and have been below 10-year average for last 6 years.
 - Poults recruitment, as measured by number of poults seen per all hens seen during summer sighting surveys, has decreased since 2008 (3.7 poults/hen) to 2013 (1.0 poults/hen).
 - Although the WTMP specifies to shorten fall season after 3-year decreases in both population indices and spring harvest index has not yet declined for 3 consecutive years, the precipitous decline in this year's spring harvest density accompanied with the 6-year decline in summer sightings reflect an unprecedented decline in the wild turkey population in this WMU and suggest that immediate action is warranted.
- **WMU 3B:**
 - We noted last year that in accordance with the WTMP, we would propose shortening the 2014 fall season if population trend indices did not improve in 2013.
 - Indices have been showing decreasing trends for the past 5 years.
 - 2013 spring harvest density was lowest on record, was 40% below 10-year average, and has been below the 10-year average for the past 4 years.
 - 2013 summer sightings were 2nd lowest on record (1996 was lowest), were 53% below 10-year average, and have been below the 10-year average for the last 2 years.
 - Poults recruitment has shown a declining trend from 1998 (2.9 poults/hen) to 2013 (0.4), which is well below the level needed to maintain population size.
- **WMU 3C:**
 - We noted last year that in accordance with the WTMP, we would propose shortening the 2014 fall season if population trend indices did not improve in 2013.
 - Indices have been showing decreasing trends for the past 4 years.
 - 2013 spring harvest density was 22% below 10-year average, and has been below the 10-year average for 2 of the past 4 years.
 - 2013 summer sightings were lowest on record, were 62% below 10-year average, and have been below the 10-year average for the last 5 years.
 - Poults recruitment has shown a declining trend from 1998 (1.7 poults/hen) to 2013 (0.5), which is well below the level needed to maintain population size.
- **WMU 3D:** Maintain the traditional 3-week season + 3-day season.
 - As with WMUs 3B and 3C, we noted last year that in accordance with the WTMP, we would propose shortening 2014 fall season if population trend indices did not improve.
 - Unlike 3B and 3C, improvement was observed.
 - Spring harvest densities, which had been 38-59% below 10-year average from 2010-2012, were within 18% of (though still below) average.
 - Summer sighting indices increased to 29% above 10-year average.
 - Poults recruitment increased to 2.3 poults/hen from 1.4 in 2012.
 - We remain concerned about this turkey population where 2012 spring harvest density was 59% below 10-year average. If indices do not continue to improve in 2014, WTMP criteria will likely lead to a recommendation to decrease the 2015 fall season by one week.
- **WMU 5A:** Maintain 3-day season, but shift format from Tuesday-Thursday to **Thursday-Saturday**.
 - Several indices indicate the need for continued caution with fall seasons:

- Although spring harvest densities are similar to 10-year average, they are < 0.5 bird/sq. mile;
 - WCO summer sightings have not shown a consistently increasing trend since the most recent season change (closed season to 3-day midweek season in 2010);
 - 2013 poult recruitment was slightly below long-term average.
- However, the more detailed weekly population surveys show the population on Michaux State Forest, where most hunting still occurs, has continued to increase, and fall harvests have been minimal.
- Current population is substantially higher than it was prior to season closure and flocks are well-distributed throughout the Michaux State Forest and the surrounding valleys.
- Including a Saturday in the 3-day season was requested by the WMU 5A Wild Turkey Task Force, should increase hunter opportunity and satisfaction and we believe the turkey population has recovered sufficiently to absorb the minor increase in harvest.
- **2015 Spring Season:**
 - As with the May 3 opening in 2014, some hunters might perceive a May 2 opening as “late”, but adherence to WTMP specification of opening the regular season the Saturday closest to May 1 (rather than some earlier date) remains vitally important to minimize hen disturbance and mortality prior to peak of incubation.
 - Total Saturdays in 2014 & 2015 proposal remain same as in seasons (2012 & 2013) opening late April.
 - We recommend against any expansion of all-day / afternoon hunting to the earlier portion of the regular season and / or youth spring gobbler season. During early portion of the season hunter participation is high and hens are still somewhat prone to disturbance and mortality, though the risk is less than prior to May 1. Wild turkey populations have generally been trending downward and remain below average across much of the Commonwealth; we recommend against any season changes with potential negative effects on breeding hens.
- **2nd (special) spring license:**
 - Although sales have been increasing, the number of second gobblers actually harvested has not changed substantially (i.e. success rates on second tag have decreased).
 - We will continue to monitor harvest totals and harvest composition from these licenses to ensure they do not result in unacceptably high harvest rates on adult gobblers.
 - At this time there does not appear to be a need for any restrictions on these licenses.
 - Purchasers of this license are required to report regardless of whether or not they used the tag. From 2006-2010 we sent reminders to non-reporters and consistently only 5% of non-reporters harvested a second turkey. Our next mailing to non-reporters is scheduled for 2015. However, with installment of the Automated Licensing System, sales have doubled. As per a discussion item during the July PANWTF Board meeting, the PGC will send reminder postcards to non-reporters in 2014, instead of waiting until 2015, to determine if the harvest from non-reporters has changed significantly. Thank you for your input.
- Gamebird Section attended annual meeting - Northeast Upland Game Bird Technical Committee held in Massachusetts.
 - 12 states.

- All state biologists provided oral and written reports regarding their state's upland gamebird management and research.
- Continuing to investigate the need to develop a Northeastern (multi-state) consortium to examine large-scale trends in turkey populations (via examining each state's brood data), and causative factors. Southeastern and Midwestern states each already have a regional consortium.
- Working on recommendations for each state 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.
- Investigating emerging infectious diseases in game birds, if they are affecting populations, and working with the NE Disease Cooperative and SE Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study to identify sampling and surveillance techniques, especially for Lymphoproliferative disease (LPDV).

Wild Turkey Hen Harvest Rates and Annual Survival Rates Study

- Study Area 1: WMUs 2C, 2E, 4A, 4B and 4D; Study Area 2: WMUs 2F, 2G and 2H.
- Late summer turkey trapping mid-Aug to Oct.31 to leg band an additional 150 hens (75 per Study Area; 460 total per year), for brood flocks to estimate fall harvest rates by age.
- Satellite transmitters recovered from mortalities being re-deployed (30 total per Study Area).
- Males incidentally trapped receive non-reward leg bands.
- Trapping success this fall excellent (71% of goal) compared to last fall (37% of goal).
- Total banded to date: 1,616 females (256 also received transmitters), 388 males.
- 54 transmitters active (25 in SA1, 29 in SA2).
- Hen mortality rates during summer brood-rearing decreased from nest incubation in spring.
- Since end of July, 1 transmitter recovery (SA2), unknown cause + 3 censored because they died within 1 week of trapping (1 in SA1, 2 in SA 2), 3 stopped transmitting for unknown reasons (1 in SA1, 2 in SA2).
- 1 transmitter found by interested sportsman via a metal detector after he called in leg band and learned the hen also had a transmitter, but we had lost contact with it last December. Due to proximity to road and condition of transmitter, we believe hen likely was hit by a vehicle and later died..
- 7 transmittered hens have moved toward wintering grounds away from summer nesting/brooding areas; one traveled 9.4 miles.
- Submitted abstract, "Timing of spring wild turkey hunting in relation to nest incubation" for inclusion into 11th National Wild Turkey Symposium (to be held Dec. 2016).

WMU 5A Wild Turkey Task Force

- Sept. 30, 2013 was the annual cooperative meeting among PGC, Bureau of Forestry, NWTF and local chapters NWTF.
- Discussed WMU 5A wild turkey population trends, harvests and habitat management on Michaux State Forest.
- Long-term population monitoring on Michaux State Forest show population increase with minimal fall harvests since the 3-day season was initiated.
- Michaux State Forest is actively managing and improving wild turkey habitat across the SF.
- Road closures in Michaux SF during spring hunting season remain and one additional road was closed for the spring 2013 season. No negative comments, so this road closure will occur each spring.
- Due to expanding turkey populations in valleys east and west of Michaux SF, in 2012 two turkey survey routes were added to closely monitor populations off the SF. Broods sighted in both valleys this year.

- Given current population trend and continued habitat management, group agreed to recommend the 2015 fall season remain 3 days, but include a Saturday to provide more hunting opportunity; Thursday – Saturday instead of current Tuesday - Thursday.

2014 National Convention

- PGC attendees:
 - Board of Commissioners R. Schlemmer, B. Hoover, J. Delaney and R. Martone.
 - PGC Gamebird Section Supervisor, Ian Gregg.
 - PGC Award winners, TBA; WCO of the Year & Joe Kurz Award.
 - Possibly PGC Bureau of Wildlife Habitat Management representative.

Information and Education

- Updated WTMP appendix is being posted on our wild turkey web page.
- Game News article, October 2013, “Why Fall Turkey Seasons Have Changed”.