

NWTF Technical Committee Representatives' Report - PA Chapter NWTF

Board of Directors Meeting, Jan. 12, 2014

Submitted by: Mary Jo Casalena, Wildlife Biologist II, Game Bird Section,
Bureau of Wildlife Management, PA Game Commission

Harvest Management

- 2013 spring season results will be reported when data analyses are finalized.
- Fall harvest report cards received to date total approximately 5% less than the same point in 2012, but 4% higher than 2011.
- Even with declining fall harvests, the fall hunting tradition remains strong, especially when compared to other northeastern states. Pennsylvania exhibits the highest 10-year average fall harvest (22,260), followed by New York (9,700), and Virginia (4,300).
- From 2008-2012, fall harvest averaged 62% females (combined adults and first-year birds), 22% adult males, and 16% first-year males.
- Fall 2014 and spring 2015 wild turkey season/bag limit recommendations from staff to the Board of Commissioners will be the same as we presented in October (changes from 2013-14 **highlighted**):

Seasons	2014-2015 Seasons Recommendation
Fall – WMU 2B (shotgun & bow/arrow)	Nov. 1-21 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall – WMU 1B	Nov. 1-8 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall – WMUs 1A, 2A, 2D, 2F, 2G, 2H	Nov. 1-15 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall – WMUs 2C, 2E, 3D, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D & 4E	Nov. 1-21 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall - WMUs 3A, 3B, 3C	Nov. 1-15 & Nov. 27-29, 2014
Fall – WMU 5A	Nov. 6-8, 2014 (Thur – Sat)
Fall – WMUs 5B, 5C & 5D	Closed
Spring – Youth Hunt (statewide; bearded bird)	April 25, 2015
Spring – Statewide (bearded birds)	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 5A:** Maintain 3-day season, but shift format from Tuesday-Thursday to **Thursday-Saturday**.
 - Including a Saturday 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:**
 - The May 2nd opening date is in accordance with WTMP specification of opening the regular season the Saturday closest to May 1 to minimize hen disturbance and mortality prior to peak of incubation.
 - We continue to recommend against any expansion of afternoon hunting during 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. We recommend against any season changes with potential negative effects on breeding hens at this time.

Turkey Population Management

- Summer 2013 turkey population index, calculated from statewide WCO sighting surveys:
 - above previous 10-year average, probably due primarily to favorable weather conditions during peak of hatching, late May through early June.
 - A welcome change from previous 4 years of below-average reproduction.
 - As is typical for wild turkey reproduction, population trends varied considerably by WMU.
- Summer 2013 turkey population index from WMU 5A:
 - Michaux State Forest - highest population index since surveys were initiated in 1998.
 - 2013 was second year of turkey surveys in 2 valleys (either side of South Mountain) to monitor growing population throughout WMU 5A.
 - Turkey sightings decreased by 29% in Chambersburg Valley to 92 turkeys seen per 1,000 miles.
 - In Gettysburg Valley 27 turkeys seen per 1,000 miles compared to 0 in 2012.
- 3 plots were surveyed in late summer as part of the Eastern Oak Mast Survey.
 - Results were variable.
 - Red oak acorn crops; moderate to high on Ridge/Valley and Pocono Plateau sites, low to moderate on Allegheny Mountain site.
 - White oak acorn crops; moderate on Ridge/Valley site, low to moderate on Pocono Plateau site, and low on Allegheny Mountain site.
 - Beginning 2014 PGC will increase the sampling to 2 survey plots per WMU to provide a more robust sampling framework across all ecological regions of the state.
- Collaborated with a researcher at East Stroudsburg University to develop project plan to conduct genetic comparisons of wild turkeys from Michaux State Forest area with wild populations elsewhere in the state and specimens of game farm origin, as requested by the Board of Commissioners.
- In cooperation with PANWTF Habitat Committee and DCNR we received, reviewed, and summarized into a spreadsheet 75 wild turkey habitat enhancement project proposals (\$148,985 total requested) submitted for possible PANWTF funding in 2014. (Meeting scheduled Feb. 9, 2014.)

Wild Turkey Hen Harvest Rates and Annual Survival Rates Study

- Study Area 1: WMUs 2C, 2E, 4A, 4B and 4D – 2013 fall turkey season increased from 2 to 3 weeks,
- Study Area 2: WMUs 2F, 2G and 2H – 2013 fall turkey season decreased from 3 to 2 weeks.
- 3-day Thanksgiving season remained the same.
- 22 leg banded females (3 with radio-transmitters) reported harvested (7 in SA1, 15 in SA2; Table 1).
- Since October, 5 leg banded birds were reported found dead, 2 in SA 1 (roadkill and unknown cause) and 3 in SA2 (2 unknown causes, 1 killed by farm machinery while nesting in hayfield during summer).
- 1 leg band harvest report from a hen captured in 2011 as an adult and released with leg band and radio transmitter. We subsequently recovered only the transmitter in the woods one month later and, until now, were uncertain as to the hen's outcome. Transmitter must have slipped off hen, which does not occur often.
- Winter turkey trapping: mid-Jan to mid-March, leg band an additional 310 hens (155 per Study Area).
- Volunteers welcome – inform us of flocks, assist with baiting/trapping.
- Satellite transmitters recovered from mortalities to be re-deployed (to total 30 per Study Area).
- 41 transmitters active (20 in SA1, 21 in SA2) as of early January.
- Since late September, we lost contact with 3 transmitters (1 in SA1, 2 in SA2) and recovered 11 transmitters: 3 legally harvested (SA2); 2 poached (SA1); 3 mammalian predation (SA2); 2 natural infection (SA1, one of which was confirmed Lymphoproliferative disease virus and avian pox virus, the 8th confirmed case of LPDV in Pennsylvania since 2012); 1 unknown cause (SA1).
- Harvest rate and survival data are being analyzed.

- Keeping 2013 fall season lengths for each Study Area in place during 2014 will be crucial for obtaining adequate data to draw meaningful conclusions from this research.
- 80% of transmittered hens have moved from summer brood-rearing areas. In some cases movement may have been prompted by hunter activity during rifle bear and deer seasons.
- Fall Turkey Hunter Survey scheduled to begin in January to assess hunter satisfaction and participation with aspects of fall turkey hunting seasons; postcards will be mailed to 10,000 randomly selected hunters to complete on-line survey, with paper copy supplied if no response; 4th year.

Table 1. Hunter reported harvests of leg banded female wild turkeys during the fall 2011, 2012 and 2013 wild turkey hunting seasons in Pennsylvania.

1st Season,				
Year	Study Area	Season Length	Thanksgiving Season	Total
2011	SA1	9, 2 wks	1	10
	SA2	12, 3 wks	1	13
2012	SA1	3, 2 wks	0	3
	SA2	5, 3 wks	4	9
2013	SA1	6, 3 wks	1	7
	SA2	13, 2 wks	2	15

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; WCO of the Year, Brian Singer – Westmoreland County, & Joe Kurz Award winner, Colleen Shannon – NC Region Land Manager.
 - Possibly PGC Bureau of Wildlife Habitat Management representative.

Information and Education

- Updated calendar year 2012 WMU-level harvest data and historic (1915-present) statewide harvest data on our web site.
- New section in Game News called Research Briefs. Jan. 2014 issue included “Best Season Yet” regarding the hen study. Look for additional submissions regarding all aspects of wild turkey management.
- In cooperation with our agency spokesperson we recorded 6 Radio PA programs on wild turkey research, management, and hunting season structures.
- Preliminary hunting related shooting incidents (HRSI) from spring 2013 hunting season: 2 non-fatal; 1 victim shot in mistake of game; 1 victim in the line of fire.