



A L A B A M A

Full Fans & Sharp Spurs



WILD TURKEY REPORT 2019



Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources



2019 ALABAMA WILD TURKEY REPORT

Welcome to *Full Fans & Sharp Spurs* the sixth edition of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, Wild Turkey Program report. This report provides turkey hunters and others with information concerning Alabama's wild turkey resource. The report contains biological and sociological data used by ADCNR to monitor and manage the state's turkey population.

This year we saw a slight decrease in participation in the avid turkey hunter survey, and we continue to encourage all turkey hunters to become partners with ADCNR in the conservation and management of Alabama's wild turkeys. Your participation in the avid turkey hunter survey is key to providing vital information used to better manage the resource. Any avid turkey hunter who would like to participate in the survey, contact ADCNR Upland Game Bird Coordinator Steven Mitchell at steven.mitchell@dcnr.alabama.gov.

Your membership in the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) benefits wild turkeys in Alabama tremendously. The Alabama Chapter of the NWTf is a strong supporter of ADCNR and their efforts to manage turkeys in Alabama. Through Hunting Heritage Super Fund and Tag Fund expenditures as well as property acquisitions, NWTf has helped open access for hunters to thousands of acres and has enhanced even more acres for wild turkey in Alabama. In addition, NWTf partially funds an adult mentored hunts staff position and sponsors a reward program for people who provide significant information that leads to conviction of people illegally hunting turkeys. Anyone with information on illegal turkey hunting in Alabama should call 1-800-GameWatch.

Anyone with information on illegal turkey hunting in Alabama should call 1-800-GameWatch. Thank you for your efforts to enhance the management of that noble bird, the wild turkey. ✎

Cover Photo: Tes Randle Jolly



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) is pleased to share the sixth edition of our Wild Turkey Program Report, *Full Fans & Sharp Spurs*. In these pages, you will find results of our avid turkey hunter survey as well as our wild turkey brood survey. While this is not scientific data, it is valuable information that overtime will reveal trends in our wild turkey population. We hope you enjoy this program report and extend you an invitation to assist us in collecting data. You will find directions for how you can assist inside.

This publication is a joint venture with the Alabama Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf). NWTf is a strong conservation partner putting thousands of dollars on the ground in Alabama and across the country.

This report would not have been possible without the assistance of the ADCNR IT staff, ADCNR Communications and Marketing staff, the field staff of the Wildlife Section, and the members of the Alabama Wild Turkey Committee.

The data in this report was provided by WFF staff, other agency personnel, private land-owners and turkey hunters from across the state. It would not be possible without your continued support.

Thank you all.
Steven Mitchell

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Kay Ivey – Governor

Alabama is blessed with an abundance of wildlife, and that didn't happen by chance. The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is committed to the management of our wildlife resources with an eye on future generations. The Department's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division deserves our thanks for its diligent commitment to ensure that Alabama's diverse wildlife species, including the Eastern wild turkey, thrive while providing as much access as possible to the people of our state.

The *Full Fans & Sharp Spurs* publication is a result of the combined efforts of dedicated turkey hunters and organizations like the National Wild Turkey Federation, who provide the data necessary to ensure our wildlife resources will continue to be a source of great pride for Alabama.



Christopher M. Blankenship – Commissioner
Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Many people don't realize that our largest game bird, the Eastern wild turkey, was once almost gone from the Alabama landscape. In the earlier 20th century, the wild turkey was limited to small pockets in the state, mainly the southwest portion, due to subsistence hunting and a lack of conservation efforts.

Thankfully, the Legislature realized the need for a state agency to oversee the health and revitalization of Alabama's vast natural resources, and the Alabama Game and Fish Commission was created in 1907. In the 1940s, a concentrated restocking effort began to trap wild turkeys in southwest Alabama and relocate them to other parts of the state to establish viable populations throughout the state.

By the early 21st century, almost 2,000 turkeys had been captured and released in 46 Alabama counties, and turkey hunters enjoyed the benefits of that long-term effort. To continue to take advantage of the cherished turkey-hunting pursuit, the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division is charged with ensuring wild turkey populations continue to thrive. That effort requires the help of the many avid turkey hunters across our state, which has one of the most diverse ecosystems in the nation. The addition of the mandatory Game Check system, which requires hunters to report their turkey harvests, was the first step in the continuing effort.

One thing about data I have learned during my years with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is that the more data points provided, the more reliable the conclusions. Therefore, I urge all dedicated turkey hunters to join the Avid Turkey Hunter Survey and help the Department ensure that future generations can experience the thrill of chasing turkeys in our great state.



Chuck Sykes – Director, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division

I challenged each of you last year to make it a priority to introduce someone new to turkey hunting. I certainly hope you accepted the challenge and were able to experience what I have for the past several years. Just like last year, I was lucky enough to accompany four first timers into the turkey woods. Two harvested their first birds, one had a swing and a miss, and one never had an opportunity to pull the trigger. Regardless of the outcome of individual hunts, I consider this season a huge success. There is nothing like sharing that first turkey hunting experience with an adult hunter. It helps me reconnect with the amazing sights and sounds of a spring morning and especially the anticipation of hearing that first gobble. Even though hunter numbers are declining nationally,

we can reverse that trend by becoming a mentor to someone this upcoming season. I want to thank the Alabama State Chapter of the NWTf for their continued support of turkey conservation and turkey hunters. Without their financial support and the willing participation of their members and many others in the avid turkey hunter survey, this publication wouldn't be possible. Good luck this season in the turkey woods and hopefully your ears will be filled with gobbles and your game bag with full fans and sharp spurs!



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WILDLIFE AND FRESHWATER FISHERIES TURKEY COMMITTEE – *Formed 2014*



Alabamians have enjoyed a healthy wild turkey population for decades. Through trapping and relocation, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) replenished and bolstered wild turkey numbers throughout Alabama and in other states as well.

Turkey hunters in Alabama are afforded one of the longest spring seasons and most liberal bag limits in the country.

In the past, Alabama's turkey management team has consisted of primarily a turkey project leader and an assistant. These biologists have monitored the population trends in Alabama and surrounding states. Recently, neighboring states have reported a decline in their turkey populations. Furthermore, our

statewide surveys have indicated a downward trend in our reproductive success. These factors prompted the wildlife section to form a turkey committee with representation from each WFF district.

These wildlife biologists have conducted stakeholder meetings to solicit input from hunters and have met extensively with researchers from Auburn University. These collaborations have resulted in a Wild Turkey Research Project on a scale never attempted in Alabama. We are measuring survival, productivity and movements of turkeys in the three most significant landscapes for turkey populations in the state. This information will provide valuable insights for future wild turkey management. Working together, we hope to ensure the maximum sustainable wild turkey population to be enjoyed by future generations.

Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries – District Offices

District 1

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dcnr.d1wff@dcnr.alabama.gov

District 2

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Jacksonville, AL 36265
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District 3

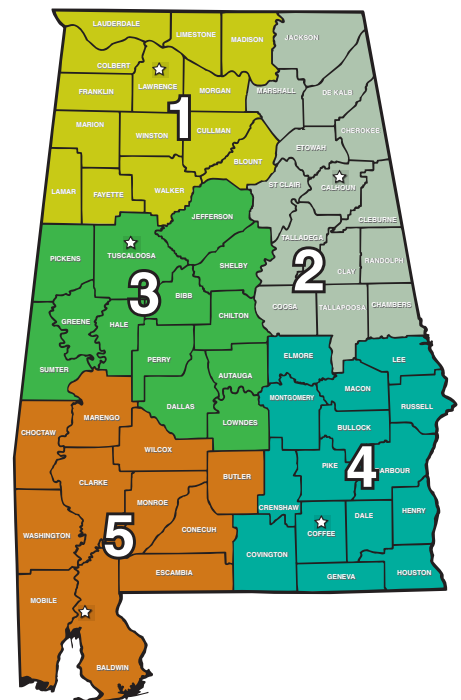
8211 McFarland Blvd., West
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334-289-8030 (Demopolis)
dcnr.d3wff@dcnr.alabama.gov

District 4

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District 5

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Spanish Fort, AL 36527
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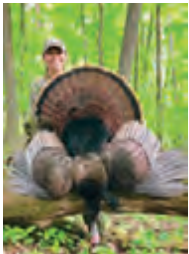


ADCNR COMMITTEE MEMBERS



Jud Easterwood — *District 1 Representative*

Jud is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and earned a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Science from Auburn University in 1999 and a Master of Science in Wildlife Biology from Colorado State University in 2002. He has worked on Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and on private lands in several Southeastern states and in Colorado focusing on the management of wild turkeys, deer, bobwhite quail, and waterfowl. In 2006, he began working for the Alabama Division Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries as the biologist on the Jackson County Waterfowl Areas. In 2011, he became the District 1 Supervising Biologist. Jud is primarily interested in wild turkey research and management and thoroughly enjoys serving as a District 1 Wild Turkey Committee member.



Courtenay Conring — *District 2 Representative*

Courtenay earned her Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Sciences and Management from the University of Georgia in 2013 and her Master of Science in Wildlife, Aquatic, and Wildlands Science and Management from Texas Tech University in 2016. She has worked on wildlife refuges managing for an array of gamebird species and assisted in research projects focusing on gamebirds including waterfowl, sandhill cranes, and northern bobwhites throughout the southern U.S. In December 2016, she accepted a position with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries as the biologist over the Jackson County Waterfowl Areas. Courtenay is passionate about improving habitat for wild turkeys, assisting in turkey research, and preserving Alabama's turkey hunting heritage.



Jeff Makemson — *District 3 Representative*

Jeff is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and has been employed by the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries for 25 years. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Science from Auburn University in 1989. Jeff worked as the area wildlife biologist on the Oakmulgee Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for 23 years. Through his management efforts, and with the partnership of the U.S. Forest Service, the 45,000-acre Oakmulgee WMA is one of the state's top public turkey hunting areas. Jeff is the District 3 Wildlife Supervisor, covering a 13-county region of West Central Alabama. Jeff is very passionate about improving habitat for wild turkeys on our public and private lands across Alabama, assisting in turkey research, and preserving our hunting heritage.



Adam Pritchett — *District 4 Representative*

Adam Pritchett earned his Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Sciences from Auburn University in 2002. He began his career as a wildlife biologist with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries in 2005 at Barbour WMA. Adam's continued efforts to enhance habitat for wildlife populations on the 29,000-acre WMA has made it one of the more popular public turkey hunting areas in southeast Alabama. Adam provides technical assistance to landowners for managing the wildlife on their property.



Steve Barnett — *District 5 Representative*

Steve Barnett is a Certified Wildlife Biologist. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Management from Auburn University in 1984 and worked for the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries from 1986 until he retired in 2019. Steve was the former District 5 Wildlife Supervisor in southwest Alabama and Wild Turkey Project Leader. He now assists the Upland Game Bird Program as a retired part-time employee. Steve and his wife, Victoria, co-authored the book, *The Wild Turkey in Alabama*, in 2008.

NWTF & AWF COMMITTEE MEMBERS



Brandon Bobo — National Wild Turkey Federation Representative

Brandon is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and prescribed burn manager who earned his Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Sciences from Auburn University while working for the National Park Service. He served as the Mississippi Regional Biologist for the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) starting in January 2013, and served as an Alabama District Biologist from 2015 until 2019. With NWTF, Brandon was primarily responsible for giving technical assistance and providing guidance on management plans to landowners, as well as oversight of partnerships with organizations, and state and federal agencies within the state. He has served on both the Mississippi Longleaf Council and Mississippi Prescribed Fire Council. Brandon also served as chairperson of the Alabama Resource Advisory Committee and has represented the NWTF on the Alabama Shortleaf Pine Initiative Committee, the My Alabama Woods Team, Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystems Partnership, Talladega Mountain Longleaf Conservation Partnership, and the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Turkey Committee.



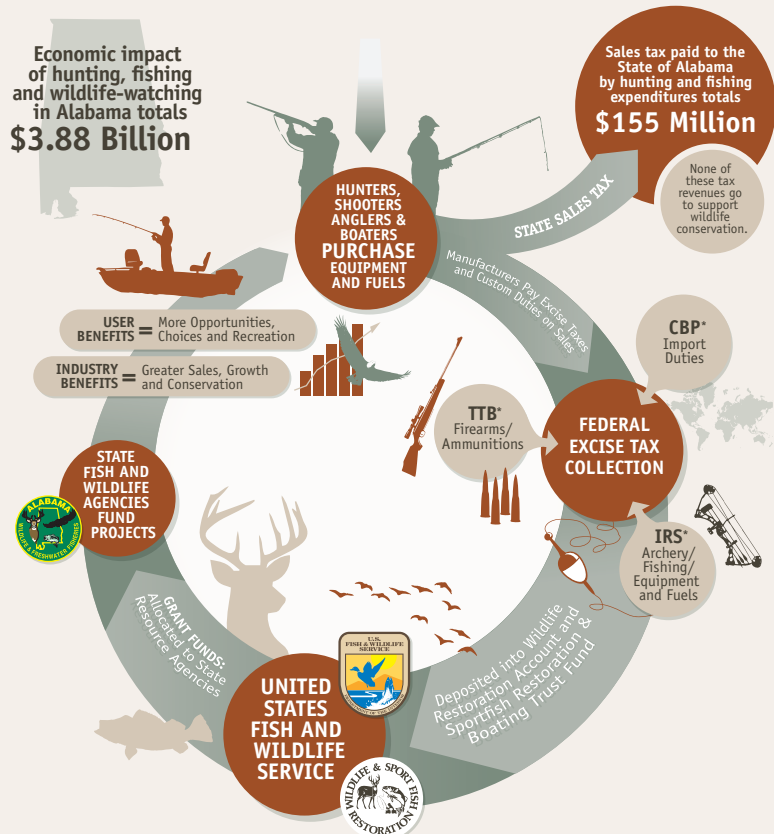
Kyle Marable — Alabama Wildlife Federation Wildlife Biologist

Kyle holds a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Sciences from Auburn University and a Master of Science in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from Mississippi State University. Between undergraduate and graduate school, Kyle primarily worked to establish upland quail habitat as part of a Habitat Improvement Team in western Kentucky. His passion for ecosystem establishment, restoration, and management led him to join the Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF) as a Resource Stewardship Biologist providing technical assistance to private landowners. Kyle is honored to represent AWF on the turkey committee and work toward improving the habitat and understanding of wild turkeys in Alabama.

HOW HUNTING AND FISHING IS FUNDED IN ALABAMA

Hunting and Fishing are great pastimes that offer tremendous recreational value for the participants. Conservation is big business for the state's economy and benefits all Alabama citizens, whether they hunt or not. It is important that everyone has an understanding of the economic importance of hunting and fishing in Alabama.

Not everyone helps fund wildlife conservation, but everyone benefits.





ALABAMA TURKEY SURVEYS



ALABAMA AVID TURKEY HUNTER SURVEY (2019 RESULTS)

The Alabama Avid Turkey Hunter Survey was initiated in 2014 to provide the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) with biological information about wild turkey populations in the state. Cooperating hunters are asked each year to record their observations from their hunts during the spring season. The gobbling activity and observational data obtained assists the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) wildlife biologists in monitoring turkey populations and in making management decisions. WFF appreciates those who are willing to take time to collect and submit this valuable information. All turkey hunters are encouraged to take part in this effort. This is an opportunity to be directly involved in the conservation and management of wild turkeys in Alabama. An invitation to participate in the survey is located in this report.

Gobbling Activity

The number of individual gobblers and total number of gobblers heard are used as indices to gobbling activity.

Gobbling activity is reported as the average number of gobbles heard during 10 hours of hunting. Gobbling activity is considered an indicator of hunting quality and may show a trend reflecting the number of gobblers in the population. The data can also be used to examine trends in the chronology of peak gobbling activity throughout a season.

Turkey Observations

Turkey observations are classified as gobblers, jakes, and hens. Observation rates are reported as the average number of gobblers, jakes, or hens observed during 100 hours of hunting. Observation rates provide indices to sex ratios, gobbler age ratios, and population size and trends. Jake observations reflect recruitment of males into the population from the previous year's hatch, and provide an index to the potential number of 2-year-old gobblers in the population during the next spring turkey season. High numbers of 2-year-old gobblers often lends itself to a good gobbling year. ♡



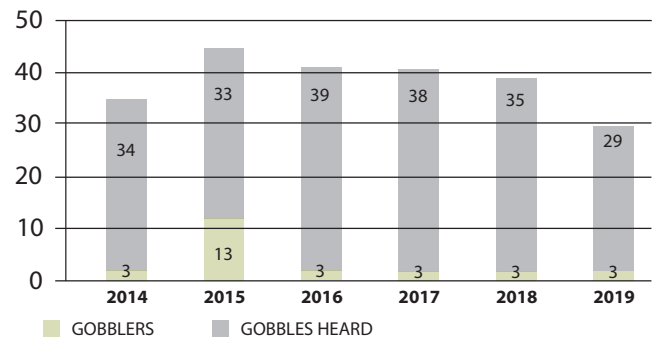
DISTRICT 1

District 1 is comprised of 14 counties in the northwest part of the state. It has several physiographic regions that are unique to north Alabama. The Plateau region consists of the Interior Low Plateau, Appalachian Plateau, and Tennessee Valley regions. The plateau is dominated by upland Oak/Hickory and Oak/Pine forest intermingled with pasture, grazing, and agricultural crops. Soils adjacent to the major rivers and flood plains in this region are highly fertile, and thus support much agricultural production, especially in the Tennessee Valley. Topography can vary greatly from steep ridges to low lying valleys. The Fall Line Hills separate the Appalachian Plateau from the Upper Coastal Plain. This area is characterized by gently rolling hills dominated by Pine/Oak forest and Oak/Gum/ Cypress bottom lands near major drainages. The greatest habitat diversity in the state is located in the Fall Line Hills.

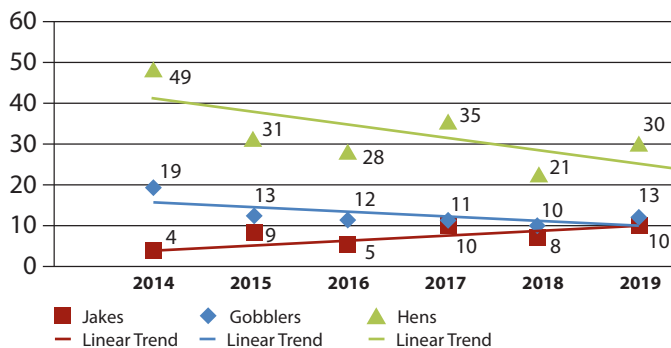
Harvest and Observations

Cooperators in District 1 reported hearing 5,314 gobblers from 503 gobblers and harvesting 47 birds during the 2019 spring turkey season. Compared to 2018 (n= 60 birds harvested), there was a 22% decrease in the number of birds reported harvested in District 1. Within the district, harvest intensity was greatest during mid-season, with peak harvest activity occurring during weeks 4 and 5, which was also the peak weeks of activity in previous years. Over the past six (6) years trends in turkey observations for District 1 indicate avid hunters on average are observing 3.5 less hens and 1.2 less gobblers annually than previous years but are observing more jakes each year at a rate of one jake more observed than the previous year.

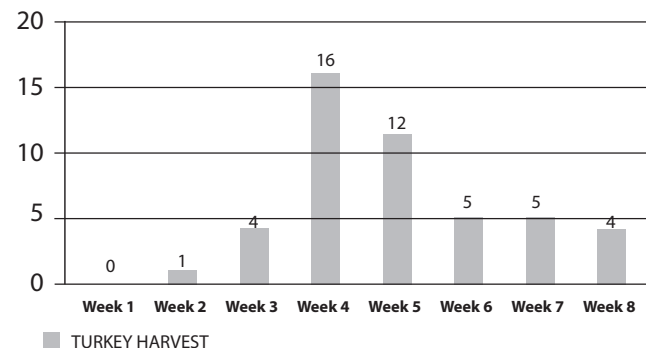
Gobblers and Gobbles Heard per 10 Hours Hunted



Turkey Observations per 100 Hours Hunted



Spring Season Harvest by Week



District 1 - Wildlife Management Areas that Provide Turkey Hunting

LAUDERDALE WMA

By Daniel Toole, Retired WMA Wildlife Biologist

Lauderdale WMA encompasses 20,343 acres in Lauderdale County acquired under the Forever Wild Land Trust and the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF). The WMA landscape consists of mature hardwoods, loblolly pine plantations, short-leaf pine reforestation areas, and recently harvested areas. Hardwood drains of various sizes and shapes designated as streamside management zones are interspersed throughout the pine plantations of varying age classes. This

diversity of timber types is managed to provide a multitude of habitat types for wild turkeys. Prescribed burning has been utilized in past years on the WMA on a relatively small scale. Beginning in fall 2014, prescribed burning efforts were increased greatly and will continue to be implemented on a three-year interval as a major tool to improve and maintain favorable habitats for wild turkeys. In conjunction with previously established wildlife openings, additional early successional units will be created and managed with prescribed fire, drum chopping, bush-hogging, and seasonal disking. For more information on Lauderdale WMA, contact the District 1 office at 256-353-2634.

RIVERTON COMMUNITY HUNTING AREA

By Daniel Toole, Retired WMA Wildlife Biologist

Riverton Community Hunting Area (CHA) encompasses approximately 5,316 acres in Colbert County acquired by the Forever Wild Land Trust. Loblolly pine plantations, shortleaf pine reforestation, and areas of recent timber harvests dominate the upland landscape on this CHA. Streamside management zones are interspersed throughout the area, providing a bottomland hardwood component to the landscape. For more information on Riverton CHA, contact the District 1 office at 256-353-2634.

FREEDOM HILLS WMA

By Daniel Toole, Retired WMA Wildlife Biologist

Freedom Hills WMA occupies approximately 33,896 acres in Colbert County acquired by the Forever Wild Land Trust and WFF. The WMA contains tracts of mature hardwoods, dense loblolly pine plantations, shortleaf pine reforestation, and recently harvested areas. Hardwood drains of various sizes and shapes are interspersed throughout the WMA as streamside management zones among most of the plantation pines. Timber stand diversity provides a wide array of habitat types to benefit turkeys. Prescribed burning has been utilized in the past will continue to be implemented on a three-year interval to improve and maintain habitats beneficial to wild turkeys. In addition to the previously established wildlife openings, additional early successional units will be established and managed with prescribed fire, drum chopping, bush-hogging, and disking. For more information on Freedom Hills WMA, contact the District 1 office at 256-353-2634.

BLACK WARRIOR WMA

By Kevin Pugh, WMA Wildlife Biologist

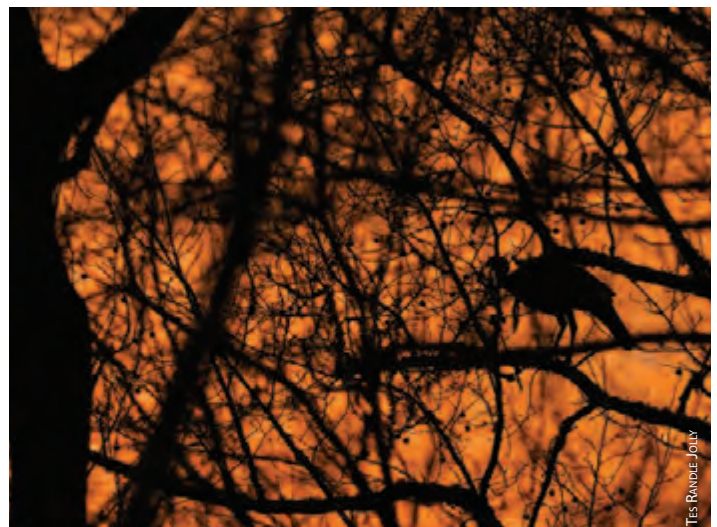
Black Warrior WMA provides public hunting opportunities through a long-standing cooperative partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. This WMA is located in the Bankhead National Forest in Winston and Lawrence counties and encompasses over 92,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service Lands, including the 26,000-acre Sipsey Wilderness. Mature hardwood/hickory or hardwood/

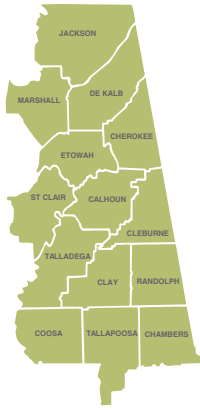
pine forest timber stand components dominate the landscape of the WMA. Recently, an effort to convert and restore loblolly pine stands to more naturally occurring shortleaf pine has been initiated. In addition, recent efforts to increase thinning operations in the pine stands has produced valuable early successional habitat for nesting and brood-rearing hens, which is of limited availability in this forest. Prescribed fire is frequently implemented during both dormant and growing seasons to produce a wide array of vegetative diversity. Wildlife openings are planted with a variety of warm and cool season grains, peas and clovers in order to provide year-round supplemental food sources for wild turkey. For more information on the Black Warrior WMA, contact the District 1 office at 256-353-2634.

SAM R. MURPHY WMA

By Kevin Pugh, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Sam R. Murphy WMA contains approximately 17,625 acres located near Guin, Alabama, in Marion and Lamar counties. The Murphy Family continues to participate as a valuable partner in conservation with WFF by providing public hunting opportunities at no cost to the state. Plantations of loblolly pine of various age classes tend to dominate the landscape of this commercial forested WMA, with stands of mature hardwoods along steep slopes and streamside management areas and agricultural fields along the river. The numerous wildlife openings distributed throughout the WMA are managed to provide warm and cool season supplemental food sources to all species of wildlife. For more information on the Sam R. Murphy WMA, contact the District 1 office at 256-353-2634. ✓





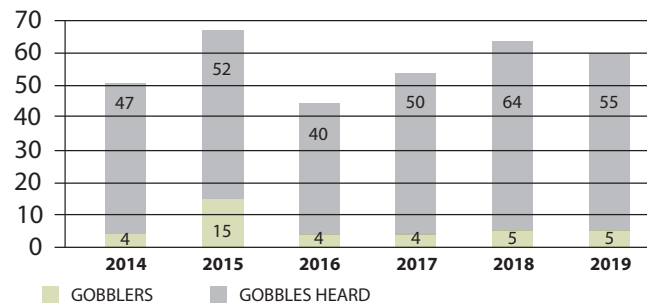
DISTRICT 2

District 2 consists of 14 counties stretching from east-central Alabama to the northeast corner of the state. It is a linear, diverse area that encompasses the Piedmont, Interior Plateau, Southwestern Appalachian, and Ridge and Valley Ecoregions. The lower portion of the district is mostly rolling hills and becomes more mountainous moving northward. The flora is also very diverse. Longleaf pine is found in the lower portions of the District while loblolly and shortleaf pine are more dominant further north. Deciduous forests of primarily oak and hickory are located throughout the region often in drainages and on steep ridges. District 2 is dissected by three river systems, the Tennessee in Jackson County, the Coosa in the Central Counties, and the Tallapoosa in the southern counties. The Talladega National Forest Shoal Creek Ranger District and the Talladega Ranger District provide 233,500 acres of primarily forest habitat within the district.

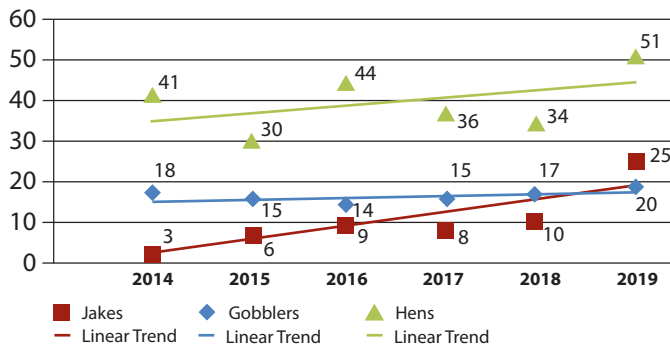
Harvest and Observations

Cooperators in District 2 reported hearing 12,752 gobblers from 1,243 gobblers and harvesting 77 birds during the 2019 spring turkey season. Compared to 2018 (n= 66 birds harvested), there was a 17 % increase in the number of birds reported harvested in District 2. Within the district, harvest intensity was greatest during the first half of the season, with peak harvest activity occurring during weeks two and four, whereas in 2018 harvest intensity peaked in the latter half of the season around week six. Over the past six years, trends in turkey observations for District 2 indicate avid hunters on average are observing 1.5 more hens and 3.4 more jakes annually than in previous years, but are observing about the same number of gobblers each year.

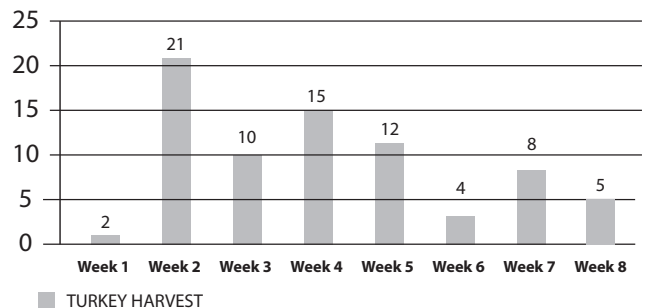
Gobblers and Gobbles Heard per 10 Hours Hunted



Turkey Observations per 100 Hours Hunted



Spring Season Harvest by Week



District 2 - Wildlife Management Areas that Provide Turkey Hunting

JACKSON COUNTY WMAS AND REFUGES

By Courtenay Conring, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Jackson County WMAs and Refuges are comprised of three WMAs and two Refuges primarily managed for waterfowl and other small game. The WMAs and refuges combined occupy 26,934 acres located along the Tennessee River in northeast Alabama (Southwestern Appalachians ecoregion) between the towns of Scottsboro and Stevenson. The WMAs and refuges are provided through a cooperative partnership between Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and WFF. Raccoon Creek WMA in

Jackson County has a tract acquired through the Forever Wild Land Trust – the Coon Gulf Tract. This property consists of 3,500 acres of mountainous terrain with oak-hickory hardwood forested slopes and planted pines with a few grass openings intermixed on the plateau. Native warm season grasses are managed for in the openings through a bi-annual prescribed fire regime to provide more nesting and brood-rearing habitat for wild turkeys. Coon Gulf Tract is the only tract on the Jackson County WMAs and refuges that offers turkey hunting opportunities. For more information about the Forever Wild Coon Gulf Tract, contact the Jackson County WMAs and Refuges office at 256-437-2788.

JAMES D. MARTIN – SKYLINE WMA

By Brae Buckner, WMA Wildlife Biologist

James D. Martin–Skyline WMA is located approximately 17 miles North of Scottsboro in Jackson County (Southwestern Appalachians Ecoregion) and is primarily mountainous. The WMA represents a cooperative partnership of landowners including Alabama Power Company, the Forever Wild Land Trust, and WFF. The area is 60,732 acres and represents a varied collection of habitats including mature hardwood forests, upland pine stands, active timber harvests, fallow areas, and agricultural fields. The area is managed for wild turkeys through prescribed burning, management of cool and warm season wildlife openings, timber stand improvements, native warm season grass establishment, and roadside management to promote bugging areas for hens and broods. Habitat diversity allows for suitable nesting, brood-rearing and winter range habitats across the WMA. For additional information, please call 256-587-3114.

LITTLE RIVER WMA

By Brandon Howell, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Little River WMA exists through a unique cooperative partnership between the Alabama State Parks Division, National Parks Service, the Forever Wild Land Trust, and WFF. Located just east of Fort Payne, Alabama, in Cherokee and DeKalb counties, the WMA occupies more than 13,000 acres of land held by the cooperative agencies and programs. Habitat types range from loblolly plantations on the plateau to hardwoods spanning from the slopes to the bottomlands along Little River. Timber thinning operations and prescribed fire are utilized to encourage open habitats of early successional vegetative species to produce nesting and brood rearing habitat for wild turkey throughout the WMA. Warm and cool season herbaceous plantings and natural openings are also established throughout the WMA to provide supplemental nutrition and provide additional habitat. For more information, contact the District 2 office at 256-435-5422.

CHOCOLOCCO WMA

By Brandon Howell, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Chocolocco WMA represents a continued cooperative conservation effort between the U.S. Forest Service, Alabama Forestry Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and WFF. The WMA is located just east of the Anniston/Oxford area in Calhoun and

Cleburne counties and occupies more than 56,000 acres of land owned by those agencies. The WMA hosts a wide array of habitat types including longleaf pine stands, loblolly pine plantations, mixed hardwood pine forests, upland and bottomland hardwoods of all age classes, and recently harvested areas. Timber stand management practices such as mid-rotation timber removal, thinning operations, and prescribed burning all make for a considerable contribution to the wild turkey populations residing on the Chocolocco WMA. These management strategies have greatly increased the number of turkeys in the past two decades and will likely continue due to our valuable cooperative partnerships. For more information, contact the District 2 office at 256-435-5422.

HOLLINS WMA

By Steven Mitchell, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Hollins WMA represents a cooperative partnership between WFF, the U.S. Forest Service, and private landowners. The WMA provides 26,795 acres of public hunting opportunity in the rolling Appalachian foothills of Talladega and Clay counties in the Piedmont ecoregion near the town of Hollins, Alabama. The area consists of mature longleaf pine stands, mixed hardwood-pine stands, and hardwood drains. More than 130 permanent wildlife openings have been established throughout the WMA. Openings are maintained in a variety of warm and cool season plantings to benefit wild turkey and other wildlife species. Long rotation longleaf and loblolly pine timber management coupled with a two to three-year rotational prescribed fire regime produces a valuable collection of habitats for wild turkeys. Other management practices that benefit turkey populations include mowing, strip disking, and selective timber harvesting. For more information, contact the District 2 office at 256-435-5422.

COOSA WMA

By Steven Mitchell, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Coosa WMA encompasses 16,255 acres in the Piedmont ecoregion of Alabama, near Rockford in Coosa County between Montgomery and Birmingham. Through the Forever Wild Land Trust, the State of Alabama owns 11,330 acres of the WMA with the rest of the acreage comprised of long-term leases with cooperative partners including Alabama Power Company, Clairmont Springs LLC, Hancock Forest Management Inc., and Coosa Investment Company LLC to provide public hunting opportunities. Coosa WMA represents one of the state's oldest established hunting areas. The west side of the area is bordered by the Coosa

River, with portions of Mitchell Lake contained within the WMA. The WMA accounts for thousands of acres of mountain longleaf pine habitat interspersed by hardwood drains, mixed pine-hardwood, loblolly pine stands, and recently harvested areas in the process of being restored to longleaf pine stands. The property hosts one of the last remaining populations of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (RCW) outside of Alabama's national forest system. Heavy thinning operations of mature pine stands and prescribed

burning conducted on three- to five-year rotations are management practices used to manage for RCW. These wildlife management techniques also serve to create ideal nesting and brooding habitat for wild turkeys. Other management practices used to benefit wild turkeys on the area include mowing, strip disking, and maintaining permanent wildlife openings in a variety of warm and cool season forages. For more information, contact the District 2 office at 256-435-5422. ✎



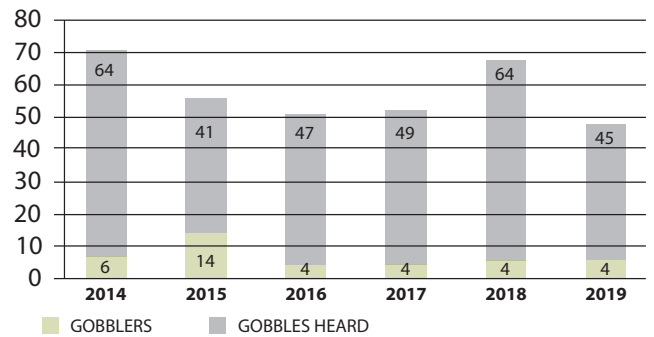
DISTRICT 3

This region consists of 13 counties in west-central Alabama. It is a very diverse region consisting of eight ecoregions: southern inner piedmont, blackland prairie, flatwoods/blackland prairie margins, fall line hills, southeastern floodplains and low terraces, low rolling hills, sandstone ridges, and shale hills. The southern portion consists mostly of blackland prairie, bottomland hardwoods, Oak/Gum Cypress bottomlands near major drainages, and industrial pine forest habitats. This area lies below the fall line and has mostly flat, to slightly rolling, terrain. Soils adjacent to the major rivers and flood plains in this region are highly fertile, and thus support much agricultural production. The soils are typically not rocky. The northern portion of the district consists of the fall line hills with rocky soils. It is comprised of mostly oak/hickory, mixed pine/hardwoods, industrial pine forest habitats, intermixed with transition zones thus creating a diverse collection of habitats.

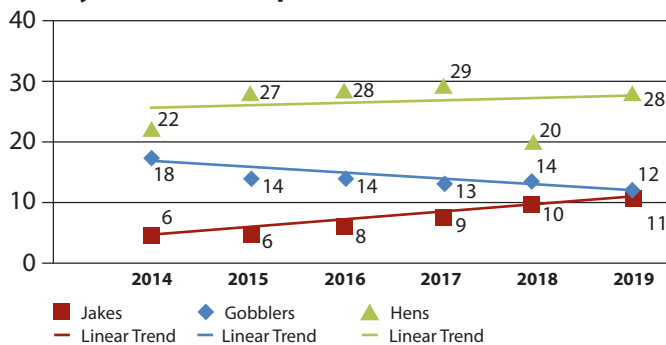
Harvest and Observations

Cooperators in District 3 reported hearing 14,799 gobblers from 1,308 gobblers and harvesting 99 birds during the 2019 spring turkey season. Compared to 2018 (n= 104 birds harvested), there was a 5 % decrease in the number of birds reported harvested in District 3. Within the district, harvest intensity was greatest during the first half of the season, with peak harvest activity occurring during weeks two and three. Over the past six years, trends in turkey observations for District 3 indicate avid hunters on average are observing one more jake annually than in previous years and about the same number of hens each year, but they are observing one less gobbler annually than in previous years.

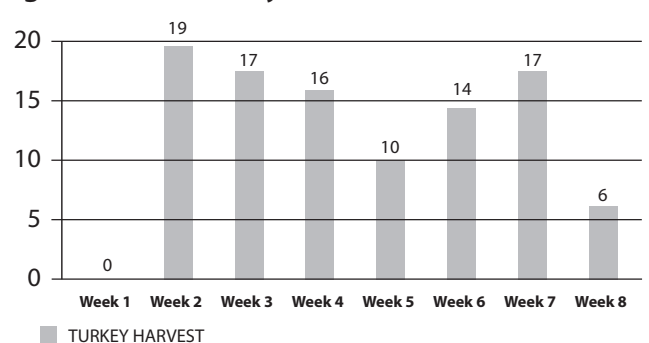
Gobblers and Gobbles Heard per 10 Hours Hunted



Turkey Observations per 100 Hours Hunted



Spring Season Harvest by Week



CHARLES D. KELLEY-AUTAUGA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

By Dalton Bray, WMA Wildlife Biologist

The 9,138-acre Charles D. Kelley/Autauga WMA is centrally located in Alabama. It is in northeast Autauga County, 15 miles north of Prattville, Alabama. Historically, the area was managed as an industrial pine forest planted in loblolly and longleaf. Hardwoods occupy the bottomlands and established stream-side management zones. Rolling hills and sandy soils are found throughout this unique and diverse WMA. This important public outdoor recreational area was recently purchased in a partnership through several phases by WFF and the Forever Wild Land Trust. The WMA is managed through a cooperative partnership between the ADCNR's WFF and State Lands divisions. The area boasts a healthy population of white-tail deer, turkey and small game animals. More than 80 wildlife openings are managed for a variety of cool and warm season crops for wildlife. Pine stands are burned on a three-to five-year prescribed burn rotation to enhance nesting and brood rearing habitat for many wildlife species. Extensive powerline rights-of-way and old logging decks are manipulated to maintain early successional habitats. Gates have been installed to minimize vehicular disturbance during peak nesting and brood rearing season for many wildlife species. Some areas will remain gated during turkey season to create popular walk-in turkey hunting areas. Many generations of Alabamians will greatly benefit from this public land acquisition and conservation partnership. For more information, please contact the District 3 office at 205-339-5716.

CEDAR CREEK SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY HUNTING AREA (SOA)

By Justin Gilchrist, Area Wildlife Biologist

Cedar Creek Special Opportunity Area (SOA) is a unique property in south Dallas County bordering the Alabama River and Cedar Creek between Selma and Camden. WFF, along with the Forever Wild Land Trust worked cooperatively to purchase this property for the public to experience this special hunting opportunity. This SOA has a limited number of slots for a successful permit holder and guest to hunt a dedicated 300- to 400-acre unit for two to four day durations. These smaller units and limited quota (random drawn permits) hunting format is designed to reduce hunting pressure and increase the quality of the hunting experience. Permits to hunt the SOA are obtained through an online selection process. Interested hunters can apply

and select desired hunt dates. The cost for this unique hunting experience is only the purchase of a state hunting license and WMA license. Management of the SOA is conducted through a collaborative partnership between the WFF and State Lands Division. In each hunting unit, wildlife openings are planted in a variety of cool season crops to supplement native vegetation benefiting a variety of wildlife species. Prescribed fire is utilized to manipulate existing pine stands and conducted annually on a three-to five-year rotation. While current camera surveys indicate whitetail deer and turkey are found throughout the property, planned management efforts will greatly improve the habitat, population, health, and age structure of these species. Many generations of Alabamians will greatly benefit from this public land acquisition and conservation partnership. For more information, contact the Demopolis office at 334-289-8030.

PORTLAND LANDING SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY HUNTING AREA (SOA)

By Justin Gilchrist, Area Wildlife Biologist

Portland Landing SOA was an exciting new public land hunting opportunity for the 2018-19 season. This unique property is in south Dallas County and borders Pine Barren Creek, on the Dallas/Wilcox county line. WFF, along with the Forever Wild Land Trust, purchased this property in partnership for the public to experience this special hunting opportunity. This SOA will have a limited number of slots for a successful permit holder and guest to hunt a dedicated 300- to 400-acre unit for two to four days. These smaller units and limited quota hunting format was implemented to reduce hunting pressure and increase the quality of the hunting experience. Permits to hunt the SOA are obtained through an online selection process. Interested hunters can apply and select their preferred hunt dates. The cost for this unique hunting experience is only the purchase of a state hunting license and WMA license. Management of the SOA will be conducted by the cooperative partnership of the WFF and State Lands Division. In each hunting unit, wildlife openings will be planted in a variety of cool and warm season crops to supplement the native vegetation to benefit a variety of wildlife species. Prescribed fire will be implemented seasonally throughout the SOA to sustain and enhance wildlife populations and habitats. These planned management efforts will greatly improve habitats, population, health, and age structure of these species. The Portland Landing SOA will also serve as the hub for the Adult Mentored Hunt Program (AMH). The AMH program was established to provide a one-on-one opportunity to anyone over the age of 19 who is new to

hunting or has limited lifetime hunting experience. This program provides new hunters the opportunity to learn, from experienced hunters, basic hunting skills, and about our valued hunting traditions. Many generations of Alabamians will greatly benefit from this public land acquisition and conservation partnership. For more information, contact the Demopolis office at 334-289-8030.

MULBERRY FORK WMA

By Chas Moore, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Mulberry Fork WMA is located just north of the Black Warrior River in southern Walker and eastern Tuscaloosa counties near the town of Oakman. Hunting rights on this 33,280-acre tract were secured by the Forever Wild Land Trust from Molpus Timberlands for WFF to manage and conduct public hunting programs. The terrain is very steep and rugged, as this area represents the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains. Molpus Timberlands primarily manages the loblolly pine stands on the WMA as a commercial forest with timber stand ages ranging from recently harvested to 25 years of growth. Streamside management zones are scattered and interspersed throughout the property and primarily consist of older aged hardwoods. Roughly 40 wildlife openings are planted annually for both cool and warm season supplemental forage for wild turkeys. For more information, please contact the District 3 office at 205-339-5716.

WILLIAM R. IRELAND SR. - CAHABA RIVER WMA

By Chas Moore, WMA Wildlife Biologist

William R. Ireland Sr.- Cahaba River WMA lies along the Cahaba River in central Alabama in Shelby and Bibb counties near the towns of Helena, Montevallo, and West Blocton. The WMA encompasses a total land acreage of 37,897 acres. Molpus Timberlands owns 27,894 acres in which hunting rights have been acquired through the Forever Wild Land Trust with WFF managing the hunting programs. Other valuable cooperative landowning partners include Hancock Forest Management (2,744 acres), RMS (3,070 acres), and USX (689 acres). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service owns another 3,500 acres, known as the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, and is included in the WMA. The terrain throughout the area is very steep, rocky, and rugged. The uplands are typically plantation pine stands managed on a 25- to 30-year rotation with older stands typically being thinned.

Streamside management zones are abundant along the many creeks that feed into the Cahaba River and are comprised of older aged hardwoods. Approximately 80 wildlife openings managed in cool season and warm season forage crops to benefit native wildlife of the WMA and are scattered throughout the area. For more information, contact the District 3 office at 205-339-5716.

OAKMULGEE WMA

By Drew Tincher, Area Wildlife Biologist

Established in 1937 as a cooperative partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, the Oakmulgee WMA is the oldest WMA in Alabama. The WMA consists of 45,000 acres located in Bibb, Hale, Perry and Tuscaloosa counties in west central Alabama. The terrain is reminiscent of the landscape just north of the fall line with its moderate to steep rolling hills. Longleaf pine stands dominate the upland ridges with mature hardwoods in the bottomlands. Following U.S. Forest Service requirements to manage for the red-cockaded woodpecker, pine stands are thinned to a park-like appearance and burned on a three- to five-year rotation. The prescribed burning practice implemented by the U.S. Forest Service on the WMA greatly enhance habitat conditions for the wild turkey and many other wildlife species. This forest management regime type creates ideal nesting and brood rearing habitat for wild turkeys. More than 100 wildlife openings are planted and maintained in a variety of warm and cool season forages throughout the WMA. Selected areas are seasonally closed to motorized vehicles to create popular walk-in turkey hunting areas. For more information, contact the District 3 office at 205-339-5716.

LOWNDES WMA

By Dalton Bray, Area Wildlife Biologist

Lowndes WMA encompasses 15,920 acres acquired in a cooperative partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Forever Wild Land Trust, and WFF to provide public hunting opportunities and other outdoor recreational activities. Lowndes WMA is located in the northwest corner of Lowndes County approximately 4 miles northwest of the town of White Hall and 30 miles west of Montgomery. Lowndes WMA lies along the Alabama River and consists of fallow agricultural fields, hardwood river bottoms, swamp drainages, and mixed pine hardwood stands. Approximately 6,200 acres of fallow agricultural fields have been replanted with a mix of hardwood

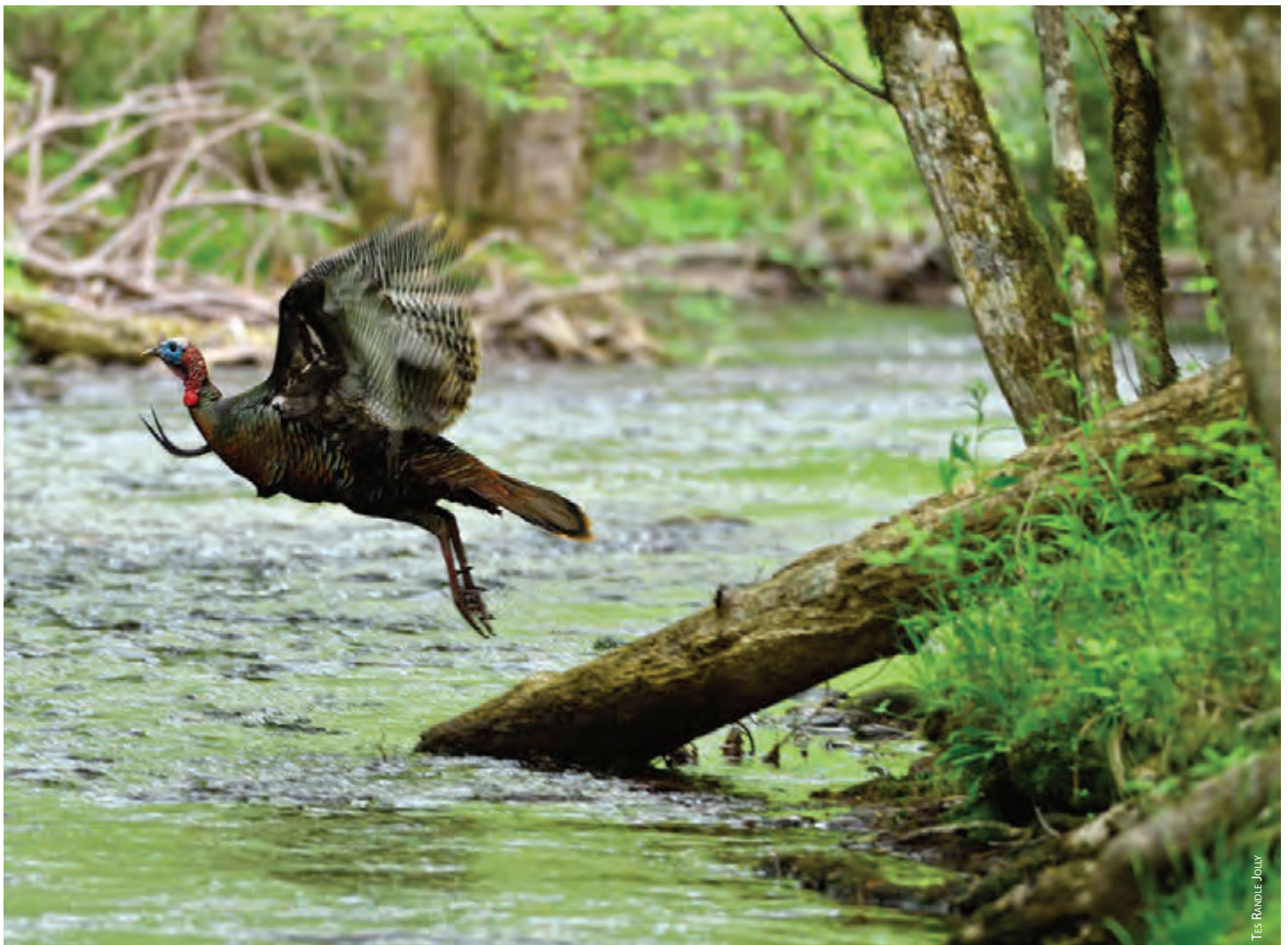
species. Eighty-seven permanent wildlife openings are scattered throughout the WMA, three green tree waterfowl reservoirs, and mourning dove fields provide a diversity of outdoor recreational hunting opportunities. The wildlife openings are planted in a variety of cool season grains and clovers to benefit a variety of wildlife species. Loblolly pine stands on the area are prescribed burned on three-year rotations to provide suitable habitat and brood rearing for wild turkeys and other wildlife species. Other wildlife management practices that benefit wild turkey populations include mowing, strip disking, and selective timber harvests. For more information, call the District 3 office at 205-339-5716.

DAVID K. NELSON WMA

By Justin Gilchrist, WMA Wildlife Biologist

David K. Nelson WMA is located at the confluence of Tombigbee and Black Warrior rivers near Demopolis, Alabama. The funding

for this land acquisition and management support for this WMA are provided by a cooperative partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The WMA is composed of nine tracts of land comprising 8,557 acres. The WMA is predominately alluvial river floodplains and bottomland hardwood habitat intermixed with various managed pine stands and native warm season grasses. Approximately 70 acres of wildlife openings are planted annually in both warm and cool season seed varieties throughout the WMA. Pine stands and native warm season grass openings are burned on a three to five- year rotation. These prescribe burns are implemented to provide maximum benefit and improved habitat quality for the wild turkey and a variety of other wildlife species. The 2,500-acre Damsite Tract is the only unit within the WMA that is accessible by vehicle. The remaining eight tracts are accessible by boat only. For more information, call the Demopolis office at 334-289-8030. ✎



TES RANDLE JOLLY



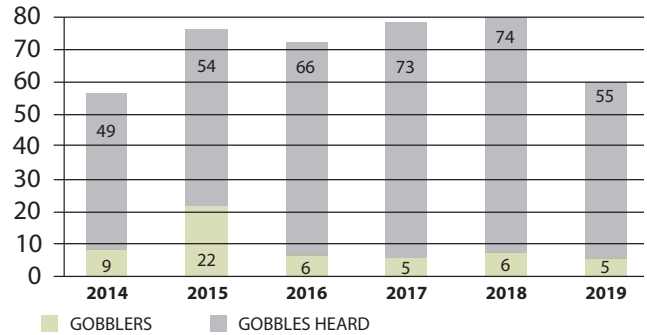
DISTRICT 4

This region consists of 15 counties in the southeastern corner of Alabama. This region has four eco-regions: piedmont, coastal plain, black belt, and lower coastal plain. The piedmont area is located on the northern fringe of the region and is mostly mixed pine-hardwood forest type with rocky mountainous terrain. The black belt region is centrally located in the region and is mostly a grassland area with some oak-hickory forest along with loblolly pine plantations. The coastal plain has mostly hardwoods in the riparian areas and a mix of loblolly and longleaf pines in the uplands. The lower coastal plain is located along the southern most portion of the region and consists of swampy gum-cypress lowlands and the uplands begin dominated by longleaf pine.

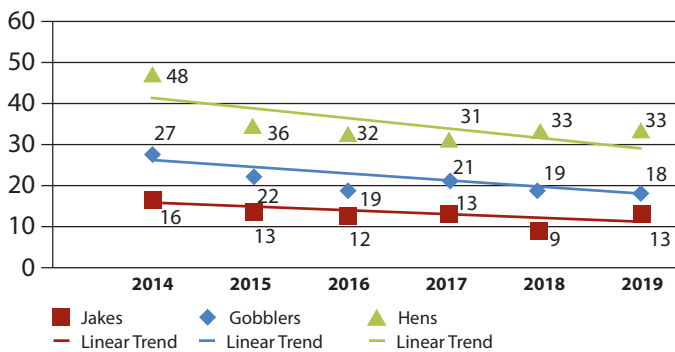
Harvest and Observations

Cooperators in District 4 reported hearing 13,122 gobblers from 1,087 gobblers and harvesting 69 birds during the 2019 spring turkey season. Compared to 2018 (n= 56 birds harvested), there was a 23 % increase in the number of birds reported harvested in District 4. Within the district, harvest intensity was greatest during the first half of the season, with peak harvest activity occurring during weeks two and four. Over the past six years, trends in turkey observations for District 4 indicate avid hunters on average are observing 2.4 less hens, 1.5 less gobblers, and 1 less jake annually than in previous years.

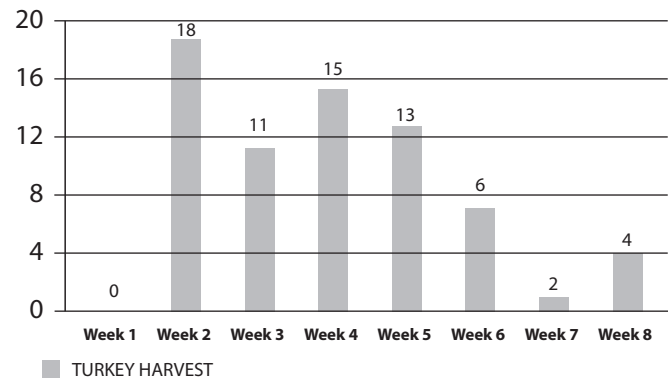
Gobblers and Gobblers Heard per 10 Hours Hunted



Turkey Observations per 100 Hours Hunted



Spring Season Harvest by Week



District 4 - Wildlife Management Areas that Provide Turkey Hunting

FOREVER WILD GOTHARD – AWF YATES LAKE WEST WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

By Richard Tharp, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Forever Wild Gothard–AWF Yates Lake West WMA is located in Elmore County just north of the city of Tallassee. The WMA encompasses 5,883-acres initially acquired by the Forever Wild Land Trust in 2009 to provide public hunting opportunities and is cooperatively managed by the Alabama State Lands Division and WFF. Since the initial purchase of 3,518 acres in 2009, the WMA

has acquired an additional 2,365 acres through the Forever Wild Land Trust. The area is heavily forested and primarily consists of uneven-aged, mixed hardwood-pine stands. Mature hardwoods are scattered throughout the area, primarily located along the steep slopes and drains that border the Tallapoosa River. Mature stands of longleaf pine can still be found along the ridge tops of gradually steepening slopes. No food plots are currently planted on the area; however, habitat management practices, such as timber management and prescribed burning assists in improving habitat quality. For more information, please call 334-347-1298.

BARBOUR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

By Adam Pritchett, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Barbour WMA is located in Barbour and Bullock counties near the small town of Clayton. It encompasses 29,644 acres including property acquired through the Forever Wild Land Trust and WFF. Most of the area consists of longleaf and loblolly pine timber with hardwoods in the streamside management zones but older stands of mixed pine/hardwood timber remain to occupy portions of the WMA. The northern portion of the WMA has been restored to a longleaf pine ecosystem. Frequent prescribed burning is utilized as a habitat management tool on the entire area to produce viable turkey habitats. The long-term timber management goal is to establish uplands in an open pine habitat, converting loblolly pine stands to longleaf pine where soils are appropriate and maintain and enhance hardwood stands on steep slopes and in drainage systems. Permanent wildlife openings are scattered throughout the entire area and are planted with both warm and cool season crops to provide year-round food and cover for turkey and other wildlife. For more information, contact the area biologist at 334-529-3222.

BLUE SPRING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

By Griff Johnson, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Blue Spring WMA is a cooperative partnership between the WFF and the U.S. Forest Service. Blue Springs WMA is 24,783 acres nestled within Conecuh National Forest. Longleaf and slash pine dominate the forest with hardwoods in the uplands and bottom-land stream corridors. The U.S. Forest Service manages the forest on a long-term rotation of 70 plus years. These long rotations are part of their comprehensive plan to restore historical longleaf pine habitat in the coastal plain. The U.S. Forest Service utilizes prescribed fire on a two to five-year rotation, and mechanical understory and mid-story removal to help promote suitable habitat for a variety of species like Eastern wild turkey. In addition to the U.S. Forest Service forest management practices, WFF manages permanent wildlife openings to provide quality habitat for a variety of wildlife species. For more information, please call 334-898-7013.

BOGGY HOLLOW WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

By Griff Johnson, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Boggy Hollow WMA is a cooperative partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, NWTF, and Quail Forever. Boggy Hollow consists of approximately 7,000 acres within the Conecuh National Forest in Covington County, Alabama. This WMA is managed as a bobwhite quail focal area and will provide additional habitat for nongame species including gopher tortoise and red-cockaded woodpecker. Boggy Hollow WMA is located off State Route 137 just west of Wing, Alabama. The terrain is flat to low rolling hills, typical of the lower coastal plain. Mature hardwoods primarily reside along streamside management zones and drains. In addition to an emphasis on quail habitat, Boggy Hollow will also provide exclusive small game and deer hunting opportunities during regular season dates. Thursdays and Fridays will be dedicated to squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, and opossum hunting. Quail hunters will have dedicated hunting days on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Deer hunters have been provided archery-only hunting days Sunday through Tuesday. Turkey hunting will also be permitted on Boggy Hollow, on regular season dates.

GENEVA STATE FOREST WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

By Griff Johnson, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Geneva State Forest WMA is a cooperative partnership between the WFF and the Alabama Forestry Commission. It spans 16,634 acres, of which Alabama Forestry Commission owns 7,280 acres. Alabama Forestry Commission acreage is forested with longleaf and slash pine burned at two to three- year intervals. Some mature hardwoods are present along small creek bottoms. Through timber management carried out by Alabama Forestry Commission, a mosaic of suitable habitat is created for Eastern wild turkey. Two recent purchases by WFF added 9,354 acres to the WMA. The new addition consists of industrial managed loblolly pine plantations of varying age classes in which several older stands have been thinned. Terrain on both ownerships is flat to low rolling hills. Permanent openings are managed to provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species. For more information, please call 334-898-7013.

UCHEE CREEK SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY AREA (SOA)

By Richard Tharp, Wildlife Biologist

Uchee Creek SOA is a public land hunting opportunity that opened for the 2018 season. This property is located in Northwest Russell County southwest of Phenix City near Seale, Alabama. This diverse property is bisected by Uchee Creek and contains some coveted black belt soils. The Forever Wild Land Trust purchased this property and partnered with WFF to allow the public a special hunting opportunity. Uchee Creek SOA will have a limited number of openings for a permit holder and guest to hunt a predetermined hunt unit for two to four days. This

format of a limited quota (random draw hunts) and hunt unit setting is designed to reduce hunting pressure and provide for a quality hunting experience. Permits to hunt the SOA are obtained through an online selection process. Interested hunters can apply and choose their preferred hunting dates. Licenses required are a state hunting license and a WMA license. Management of the SOA is a partnership of the WFF and Alabama State Lands Division. Each unit contains wildlife openings that are planted in a variety of cool season crops to supplement the native vegetation to benefit many wildlife species. Annual prescribed fire is utilized as a management tool. This SOA has a healthy population of white-tailed deer and Eastern wild turkey and provides an enjoyable and rewarding hunting experience for many hunters. For more information, contact the District 4 office at 334-347-1298. ✂



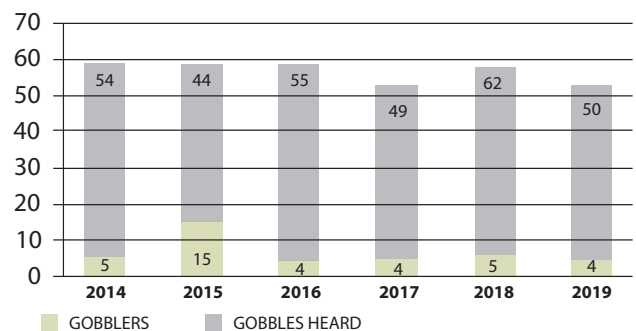
DISTRICT 5

District 5 consists of 11 counties in southwest Alabama. This ecoregion is part of the Coastal Plains which rises from gentle, rolling hills in the south, to steep, mountain-like ridges to the north. The extreme north end of the district transitions to open prairie. This region is bisected by the lower reaches of the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers, the confluence of which forms the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Forest types include uplands dominated by piney woods interspersed with oak, beech, and magnolia with broad stream bottoms in oak, gum, bay, and cypress associations. Loblolly pine plantations are the major forest type throughout with scattering compartments of historic longleaf.

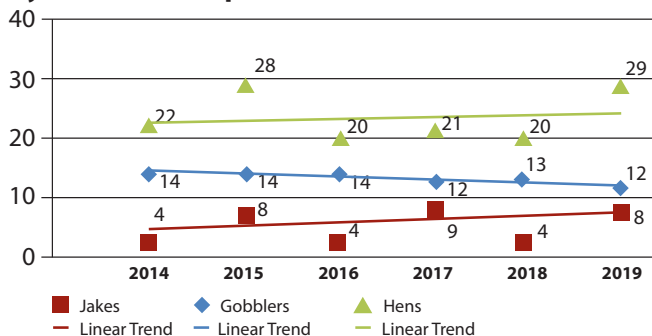
Harvest and Observations

Cooperators in District 5 reported hearing 13,444 gobblers from 942 gobblers and harvesting 70 birds during the 2019 spring turkey season. Compared to 2018 (n= 75 birds harvested), there was a 7 % decrease in the number of birds reported harvested in District 5. Within the district, harvest intensity was greatest during the first half of the season, with peak harvest activity occurring during weeks two and three, which was also the peak weeks of activity in previous years. Over the past six years, trends in turkey observations for District 5 indicate avid hunters on average are observing 0.3 more hens and 0.4 more jakes annually than in previous years, but are observing 0.5 less gobblers annually than in previous years.

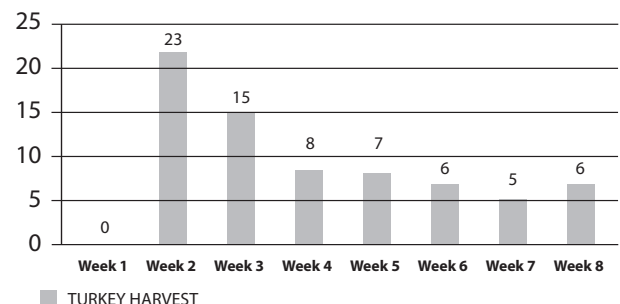
Gobblers and Gobbles Heard per 10 Hours Hunted



Turkey Observations per 100 Hours Hunted



Spring Season Harvest by Week



District 5 - Wildlife Management Areas that Provide Turkey Hunting

W. L. HOLLAND AND MOBILE-TENSAW DELTA WMA

By Thomas E Harms, WMA Wildlife Biologist

W.L. Holland and Mobile-Tensaw Delta WMA is located in the lower portion of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta south of Interstate 65 in Baldwin and Mobile counties. The area encompasses approximately 51,040 acres of tracts acquired by the Forever Wild Land Trust, WFF, and our cooperative partners in conservation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Ducks Unlimited. The W.L. Holland and Mobile-Tensaw Delta WMA are primarily composed of open marsh in the lower regions with islands of bay, cypress, and tupelo gum as latitude increases, which is primarily accessible only by boat. Two compartments are accessible by vehicle. One tract, termed the Jacinto Port tract, is in transition to be restored to a longleaf pine community leaving hammocks of live oaks with scattered pockets of other hardwoods in lower areas. Rotational prescribed burning of this tract will assist turkey of the area in providing early successional acreage to enhance nesting and brood rearing habitats. For more information, contact the District 5 office at 251-626-5474.



PERDIDO RIVER WMA

By Chris Nix, Supervising Wildlife Biologist

Perdido River WMA encompasses approximately 17,337 acres east of Robertsdale in Baldwin County. The acreage was acquired through purchases by the Forever Wild Land Trust and State Lands Division to provide hunting and recreational opportunities in southwest Alabama. The WMA is primarily composed of plantation pine timber stands with interspersed streamside management zones along the drainages and the Perdido River. An effort to restore coastal tracts of longleaf, through the conversion of the numerous loblolly plantations is currently in progress on the WMA. Thinning operations of both loblolly and longleaf stands are being conducted and prescribed fire is currently implemented to maintain these areas to provide improved nesting and brood rearing habitats on the area. Permanent wildlife openings are also maintained in a mixture of warm and cool season plantings to benefit turkeys. For more information, contact the District 5 office at 251-626-5474.

UPPER DELTA WMA

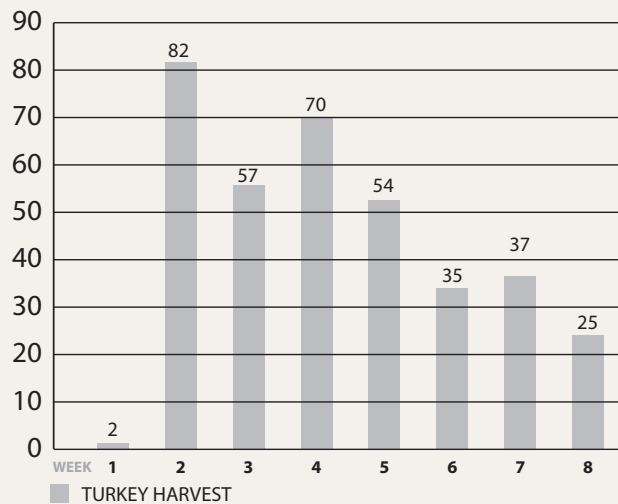
By Thomas E. Harms, WMA Wildlife Biologist

Upper Delta WMA is located in the northerly portions of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta in Baldwin and Mobile counties, north of Interstate 65. The WMA encompasses approximately 42,451 acres resulting from acquisitions completed by the Forever Wild Land Trust, Alabama Wildlife Federation, and WFF to provide public hunting opportunities. The majority of the WMA lies within the alluvial floodplains of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta with its meandering waterways and interior scattered islands comprised of low perimeter hardwood ridges with interior basins dominated by cypress and tupelo gum. The majority of this WMA is accessible only by boat. A marginal acreage is composed of upland habitats primarily in the north Baldwin County section. This portion is accessible by vehicle and consists of loblolly pine plantations currently being restored to longleaf pine. This restoration will provide our wildlife managers a better opportunity to manage these longleaf stands with prescribed fire to provide for more suitable nesting and brood rearing habitats for wild turkeys. For more information, contact the District 5 office at 251-626-5474. ✎

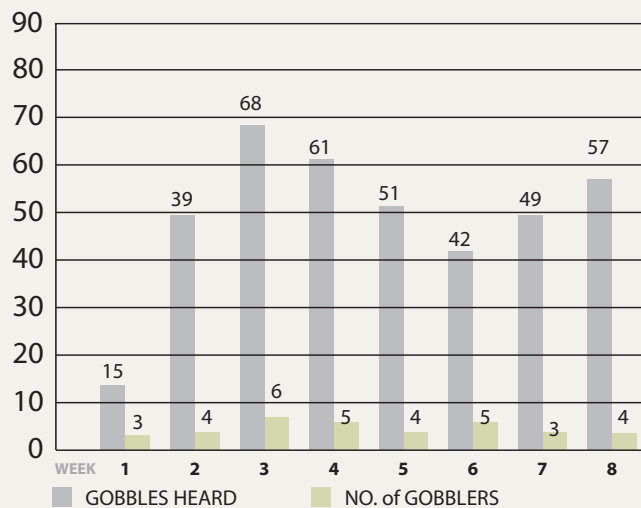
2019 Statewide Harvest and Observations

Cooperators statewide reported hearing 59,431 gobblers from 5,083 gobblers and harvesting 362 birds during the 2019 spring turkey season. Compared to 2018 (n= 361 birds harvested), the number of birds reported harvested statewide remained nearly the same to last year. Statewide harvest intensity was greatest during the first half of the season, with peak harvest activity occurring during weeks two and four.

Spring Season Harvest by Week



Spring Season Gobblers and Gobblers Heard per 10 Hours Hunted by Week



* Harvest numbers compiled from 218 avid hunter survey respondents and represent only a subset of the total harvest within Alabama.



BROOD SURVEY

Reproduction

During the months of July and August, the wild turkey brood survey is conducted across the state by WFF personnel, resource professionals from other state and federal agencies, and interested hunters and landowners. This effort began in 2010. Brood surveys provide information concerning reproduction and are valuable in monitoring turkey population trends. Hens observed with at least one poult are considered successful. Hens without poults are considered unsuccessful. It is assumed they either did not attempt to nest, abandoned their nest, lost their nest to predation or human disturbance or had no poults survive. Average brood size is the total number of poults divided by the number of successful hens and provides an index to poult survival. Poults per hen is defined as the number of poults observed divided by the total number of hens seen. Poults per hen is the most practical reproductive index because it considers successful hens, unsuccessful hens and poult survival.

Wildlife biologists typically rate brood survival based on the average number of poults per hen. Recruitment of four or more poults per hen is considered excellent, three is good, two is fair, and one or less poult per hen is poor. While survival of one poult per hen is poor, researchers contend that as long as hens are

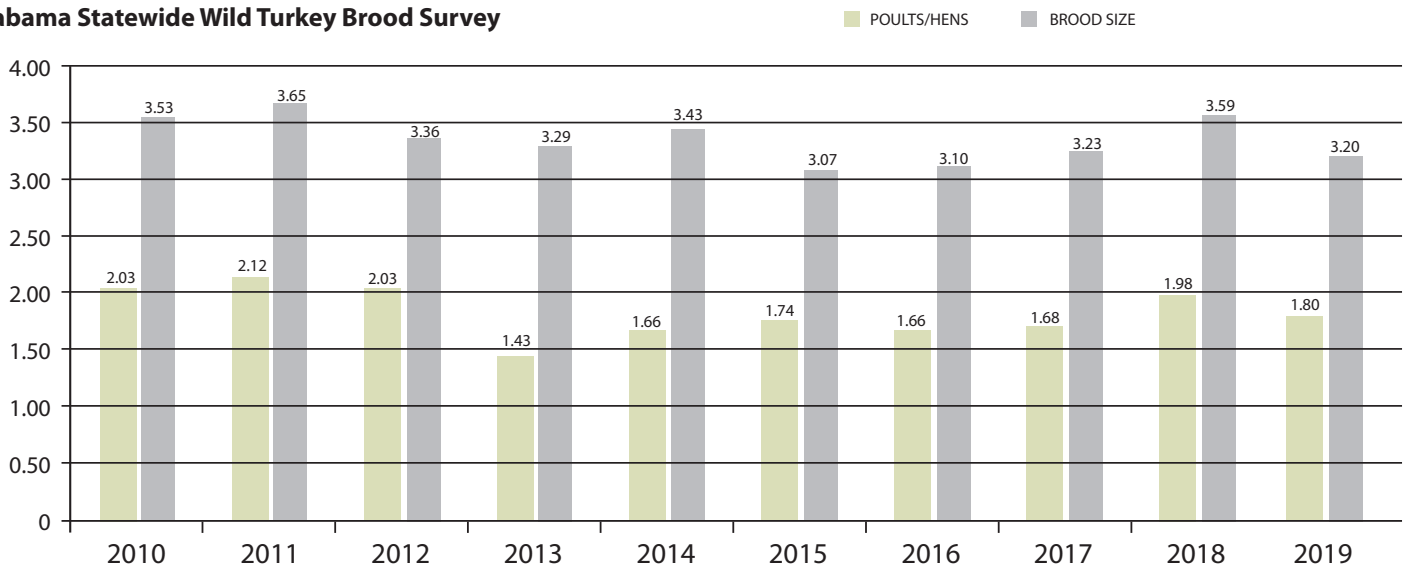
successful, a turkey population can be maintained. However, the goal is to optimize conditions through habitat enhancement and other management applications to promote optimal reproductive success and high turkey populations.

Although it is not considered scientific data, results of the brood survey play a critical role in our assessment of turkey populations. Therefore, it is imperative that we receive as accurate data as possible. In order to make a viable estimate of reproduction, we need input from every county in the state. If you have the time and desire to take part in the brood survey we would like to talk with you.

The survey begins July 1st and ends August 31st. During that time, we ask that you record any turkeys you encounter in your normal daily activities. If poults are seen we ask that you provide a size class estimate. In addition, we need to know the date and location. Our brood survey packet will provide a guide sheet to assist you with survey information and how to enter your data online.

If this is something you are interested in, please contact ADCNR Upland Game Bird Coordinator, Steven Mitchell at steven.mitchell@dcnr.alabama.gov.

Alabama Statewide Wild Turkey Brood Survey



2019

2019 WILD TURKEY BROOD SURVEY OBSERVATIONAL DATA SUMMARY

Observational surveys were conducted during the months of July and August.

	OBSERVATIONS	TURKEYS OBSERVED					POULTS PER HEN	BROOD SIZE	PERCENT OF HENS WITH POULTS	GOBBLER TO HEN RATIO
		GOBBLERS	HENS - WITHOUT POULTS	HENS - WITH POULTS	POULTS	UNKNOWN				
STATEWIDE	921	869	561	724	2318	229	1.80	3.20	56.34%	1:1.48

DISTRICT 1 TOTALS	276	162	175	203	568	61	1.50	2.80	53.7%	1:2.33
DISTRICT 2 TOTALS	246	284	128	243	807	100	2.18	3.32	65.5%	1:1.31
DISTRICT 3 TOTALS	153	234	82	134	446	35	2.06	3.33	62.04%	1:0.92
DISTRICT 4 TOTALS	177	128	134	109	376	25	1.55	3.45	44.86%	1:1.90
DISTRICT 5 TOTALS	69	61	42	35	121	8	1.57	3.46	45.45%	1:1.26

PIEDMONT	132	122	63	119	379	19	2.08	3.18	65.38%	1:1.49
SOUTHEASTERN PLAINS	582	512	377	426	1307	110	1.63	3.07	53.05%	1:1.57
RIDGE & VALLEY	45	109	30	35	101	21	1.55	2.89	53.85%	1:0.60
SOUTHWESTERN APPALACHIANS	145	108	76	130	483	79	2.34	3.72	63.11%	1:1.91
INTERIOR PLATEAU	17	18	15	14	48	0	1.66	3.43	48.28%	1:1.61

HUNTING CLUB	31	32	19	16	49	0	1.40	3.06	45.71%	1:1.09
PUBLIC	14	12	17	11	30	3	1.07	2.73	39.29%	1:2.33
PRIVATE	463	528	274	360	1234	94	1.95	3.43	56.78%	1:1.20
DMAP	2	5	2	2	16	0	4.00	8.00	50.0%	1:0.80
WMA	363	214	220	308	903	126	1.71	2.93	58.33%	1:2.47
SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY AREA	33	50	20	10	33	1	1.10	3.30	33.33%	1:0.60
FEDERAL	15	28	9	17	53	5	2.04	3.12	65.38%	1:0.93



JOIN THE AVID TURKEY HUNTER SURVEY TEAM

ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT TURKEY HUNTING?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF TURKEYS IN ALABAMA?

IF YOUR ANSWER IS YES, THEN READ ON.

The Avid Turkey Hunter Survey was initiated in 2014 as a means of collecting long-term data on turkey activity and population numbers. The data collected by cooperators forms the basis for this report. We appreciate all of those who took part and need much more participation. The more hunters that participate the better our data will be. From this dataset, biologists at ADCNR gain valuable information on statewide and regional trends in gobbling activity, hunter effort, harvest rates, age structure and sex ratios. This knowledge ultimately helps ADCNR make decisions that link the interests of sportsmen with management of the state's turkey resource. These decisions directly affect your recreational opportunities as a sportsman and conservationist. The data you collect will provide valuable insight concerning management questions regarding the seasons or bag limits. Will certain regulations improve or degrade the quality of turkey hunting? These are topics that should be vitally important to the avid turkey hunter.

Participation in this process allows hunters a unique opportunity to directly contribute to the conservation and manage-

ment of turkey in Alabama. Participants will receive a copy of *Full Fans & Sharp Spurs*, the Alabama Turkey Program annual report that discusses turkey population trends, biology and management in each area of the state.

How Can I Participate?

If you turkey hunt in Alabama you are eligible and encouraged to participate. The only cost to you is a minute or two of your time following every hunt to record information on what you observed. Many hunters keep a hard copy of their data and enter it on our research website at the end of the season, while others enter their data each day.

If you would like to become involved, please contact the ADCNR Upland Game Bird Coordinator listed below or go to www.outdooralabama.com/wild-turkey. Your efforts will assist ADCNR in monitoring Alabama's turkeys to make decisions in the best interest of the resource and the hunters. ✓

For questions or to participate in the survey, please contact:

Steven Mitchell, Upland Game Bird Coordinator

Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Wildlife Section
steven.mitchell@dcnr.alabama.gov



Tes Rancie Jolly



GAME CHECK & WILD TURKEYS

The 2018-19 seasons marked the third year of mandatory Game Check for turkey. We commend all who lawfully complied with the recording and reporting their harvests. Your participation enables wildlife biologists with WFF to make better management decisions on your behalf. Harvest data obtained through Game Check provides resource managers with information that was unattainable in the past.

From 1963 through 2017, WFF conducted an annual hunter harvest mail survey. The survey provided useful information regarding the number of turkeys harvested. However, the mail survey sampled only licensed hunters which represents less than 50% of the estimated hunting population within Alabama (*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, 2011*). Unfortunately, a better understanding of the state's turkey harvest, and how harvest is distributed across the state and throughout the season was needed to better inform management decisions. The incomplete representation of harvest and harvest distribution for turkey can lead to misinformed management decisions that could negatively impact species populations and ultimately hunter dissatisfaction with harvest opportunities.

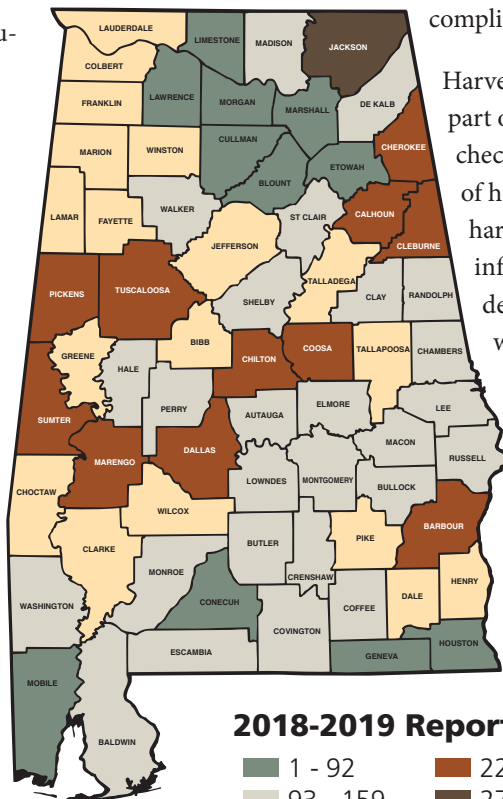
The new mandatory Game Check allows for harvest data to be obtained from both licensed and license exempt hunters for a more accurate representation of harvest statewide. Through Game Check participation, biologists can observe trends in harvests at the county level, statewide, or on specific public landholdings such as wildlife management areas. In addition, Game Check provides data on harvest characteristics such as harvest timing and intensity during a season. Accumulation of more detailed and representative harvest data over multiple seasons offers biologists a means for targeted management recommendations to ensure healthy and sustainable populations of wild turkeys. For turkey hunters, this translates to more gobbling birds and

ample harvest opportunities.

As with any new program, change sometimes can be slow to accept. Beginning in the 2017-18 season, we transitioned from our traditional harvest mail survey to a more efficient telephone survey performed by Responsive Management, Inc., to acquire hunting and harvest information for comparative analysis with Game Check. The updated harvest surveys poll both license and license exempt hunters for a better representation of overall harvest statewide. Our 2018-19 harvest survey identified a turkey harvest of 25,750 gobblers.

The third year of mandatory Game Check resulted in a total of 10,948 turkeys reported (9,645 in 2018). Comparing the telephone survey harvest estimate against turkeys reported through Game Check, reporting compliance with the mandatory Game Check program is only at 42.5%. Obviously, compliance is not where it needs to be. However, we did have a 13% increase in reporting compliance from the 2017-18 season, which was only 34.3%. Over time as more hunters discover how simple the process is to report their harvest, we are confident compliance will increase.

Harvest data collection is an extremely valuable part of managing Alabama's wild turkey. Game check provides WFF with data regarding timing of harvest, harvest number, and distribution of harvest throughout the state. This invaluable information is used to guide management decisions regarding hunting season frameworks, such as setting timing of seasons, bag limits, and zones, as well as population management. Please do your part to Game Check and help us better manage for you! More information about Game Check is on the back cover of this publication and may also be found at www.outdooralabama.com. 🦃



Turkey Harvests Reported through Game Check

2019 Reported Turkey Harvest Per Hunter*		
# of Turkey Harvested Per Hunter	Frequency for # Turkey Harvested Per Hunter	% Frequency for # Turkey Harvested Per Hunter
1	3,897	37.0%
2	1,384	26.3%
3	573	16.3%
4	281	10.7%
5	202	9.6%
6,339¹		

¹ Number of Unique Turkey Hunter IDs in Game Check
*Totals do not include automated telephone reporting data

2018 Reported Turkey Harvest Per Hunter*		
# of Turkey Harvested Per Hunter	Frequency for # Turkey Harvested Per Hunter	% Frequency for # Turkey Harvested Per Hunter
1	3,420	61.63%
2	1,177	21.21%
3	545	9.82%
4	227	4.09%
5	178	3.21%
5,549¹		

¹ Number of Unique Turkey Hunter IDs in Game Check
*Totals do not include automated telephone reporting data

2019 Season Harvest Totals
Harvest Total Without Auto Phone Reporting 9,435
Total Harvest 10,948

2018 Season Harvest Totals
Harvest Total Without Auto Phone Reporting 9,213
Total Harvest 9,570

FIRST HARVEST CERTIFICATE

The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries First Harvest Certificate program is designed to honor that special moment in which a hunter harvests his/her first gobbler. Certificates are available to provide a way to remember those first special moments in a hunter's lifetime.



If you would like to download a First Harvest certificate,
visit www.outdooralabama.com/hunting.



FEEDING & WILD TURKEYS

By Steven W. Barnett, Wildlife Biologist, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries

The phrase “a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing” has never been more relevant than when it comes to feeding wildlife. There seems to be an innate desire among many hunters and landowners to feed wildlife to either help meet a physical condition objective and/or provide an aid to harvest game. The cultural, sociological, and psychological reasons for feeding are many, but this article will not debate those reasons. The purpose of this article is to provide more than just a little bit of knowledge about the potential unintended consequences of wild turkeys that visit feed sites.

Corn, the most common type of feed used for game, often contains an associated toxin called aflatoxin when corn becomes moldy. Aflatoxins are poisons produced by the fungi *aspergillus* and are found in contaminated corn and other small grains. The negative effects depending on level of toxicity include liver damage, compromised immune function, and death. Lab results from an experiment conducted at the Southeast Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study in Georgia found that even aflatoxin contamination as low as 100 parts per billion caused decreased immune function in wild turkey poults. Unfortunately, corn that is too contaminated for other uses often ends up as “wildlife food.” Aflatoxin contamination of corn has occurred in Alabama. In the mid-1990s, The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) was made aware of toxicology results reported by a concerned hunter pertaining to a sample of shelled corn that was tested. The results indicated a level of aflatoxin at 140 parts per billion. As it turned out, a farmer was selling about 50 tons of this corn as “wildlife feed” because it was too contaminated to use as dairy cattle feed. In another case, a hunting club reached out to WFF to test corn before feeding wild turkeys. They were storing about

6,000 pounds of corn that was reportedly picked before drying and stored in bulk in a 10-foot by 12-foot concrete floor building. The toxicology report indicated a very high level of aflatoxin at 450 parts per billion. Thankfully, the corn was not used as wildlife feed. In any artificial feeding scenario, the level of toxicity and its effect on wild turkeys may depend on consumption amounts of natural forages versus contaminated feed during daily activities and over time.

Disease transmission at concentrated feeding sites is also of concern. One of the more prevalent infectious wild turkey diseases that has seen an increased reporting rate throughout Alabama is Avian Pox. It is a virus caused by biting insects, primarily mosquitos, and can cause mortality. Infected turkeys usually develop warty lesions on unfeathered areas. The lesions are commonly visible on the head and neck. There are several means of transmission. Skin to skin contact or scabs shed from warty lesions ingested by other turkeys can spread the disease. Although not directly linked to feeding, turkeys infected with a disease such as Avian Pox create the potential for spread at concentrated feeding sites where turkeys are exposed to infected birds or feed off the same “plate” of contaminated soil. Another malady may lurk in these contaminated soils in the form of a parasite. Blackhead, a protozoan

parasite (*Histomonas meleagridis*), causes necrosis of the liver and can lead to high mortality rates.

The histomonad parasites are ingested by turkeys carried by cecal worm larvae or earthworms. Again, there is no conclusive evidence connected to feeding but there is evidence that the likelihood of disease transmission increases as the concentrated density of wildlife in an area increase. Unfortunately, the same





AVIAN POX



BLACKHEAD (*Histomonas Meleagridis*)

holds true for human species as well. If you see a wild turkey that appears sick or find a fresh carcass, please contact WFF immediately so we may develop an action plan. District office locations and contact information are shown on page 5.

Predation is another consideration at feeding sites. Many folks who feed wildlife year-round or on a temporary basis tend to monitor activity with trail cameras. Whether you intend to capture photos of deer or wild turkeys, you are bound to get images of non-target visitors such as raccoons, feral pigs, coyotes, foxes, and bobcats. They tend to find feeding sites as good hunting grounds. The problem with attracting an increased number of predators to areas of feed is the potential for predators to encounter nearby nesting hens or hens with broods. Raccoons and feral pigs are major nest depredators and other predators mentioned may prey upon nesting hens or broods.

So, what does all this mean specific to wild turkey management? The message from WFF wildlife biologists has not changed. As stated on page 41 in *The Wild Turkey in Alabama* (Barnett and

Barnett, 2008), “Supplemental feeding is not recommended as a turkey management practice.” Feeding wild turkeys is wrought with problems foreseen and unforeseen. Proper habitat management should continue to be the number one focus of creating conditions for wild turkeys to thrive and promote population growth. From the use of fire to enhance brood rearing range to managing oaks for maximum acorn production to a targeted approach to furbearer and feral pig trapping, landowners can make their properties more attractive to meet year-round needs of wild turkeys. The more landowners working together towards a common goal to improve wild turkey habitat the greater the potential to positively impact broad landscapes across the state. Please be mindful that good deer woods are not necessarily good turkey woods. Deer can thrive in thickets. Turkeys do not.

Our team of WFF private lands wildlife biologists are eager to assist landowners in meeting wildlife management objectives with site visits and individualized management plans. Contact your district office to set up an appointment with a Technical Assistance Biologist. We are waiting to hear from you! 🦃



TURKEYS AT FEEDING SITE



COYOTE AT TURKEY FEEDING SITE



SOME HENS WITH POULTS AND SOME WITH NONE – WHAT’S GOING ON?

By Adam Pritchett, Wildlife Biologist, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries



The Eastern wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*) has seen overall population declines throughout the southeastern landscape for the last decade or so. Numerous state wildlife agencies and universities have been performing research to determine the causes of decline. Many research projects have been successful at helping us understand more about the life cycle, breeding habits, nesting habits, nesting success, habitat requirements, and the effects of predators on local turkey populations. However, none of these projects have identified any single underlying cause of widespread population decline. Predation of both individuals and nests, disease, hunter harvest, lack of optimal habitat, and a decrease in production are all factors influencing population declines. All of these potential causes for population decline warrant further discussion. However, for this article, I'll focus on the possible causes of a decrease in production.

Poult production, or the lack thereof, has been identified as a primary factor influencing regional turkey populations. Poult production has a direct correlation to nesting success and habitat quality. Wild turkeys generally produce one clutch per year with the average clutch size being 12. So, if every hen produced a successful clutch and averaged 12 poult per clutch then why don't we have a turkey sitting on every limb? Well, all hens aren't producing a clutch and we can't expect production to be that high in a wild population. But, what production levels should we expect to see in wild populations in the southeastern U.S.? Recent research shows that nesting success varies from year to year with the influence of factors such as weather and habitat conditions. Southeastern studies have shown a range of 13 to 34% of hens produce a successful clutch. A successful clutch is defined as having one egg hatch. That means that 66 to 87% of nests never hatch a single egg.

Research has shown a range of only 1.5 to 34% of poults reach maturity. Not only is it difficult for a hen to have a successful clutch but it's just as difficult to raise those poults to maturity. The average number of poults produced by all hens in a population gives us what is called a poult per hen ratio. Many researchers consider a poult per hen ratio of two to one to be a stable turkey population. As an example, you are on a piece of property during the month of July and observe a group of four hens that didn't have any poults with them. Then just a couple hundred yards ahead you see two hens that had 12 half-grown poults with them. Now you have observed 12 poults and six hens between the two groups and that reduces to a 2:1 ratio. Many states are seeing regional poult per hen ratios consistently below the 2:1 threshold. If this ratio is the new normal, populations will continue to decline, and we will need to determine what is necessary to turn it around.

There are many factors that affect nesting success or cause nest failures. Habitat conditions and spatial arrangement is one of the most important factors influencing nesting success. Not only do you need proper habitat conditions and structure, but you need it arranged in such a way that it is accessible within a hen's home range. Hens need habitat that has overhead vegetative cover to hide their nests, but the ground level needs to be open enough for the hen to easily escape an approaching predator. Once they have successfully hatched their clutch, they need good brood rearing habitat for food, and it needs to be adjacent to some escape cover. It doesn't matter how many times a hen nests or how many eggs she hatches. If she cannot raise those poults so that they contribute to the next years population then all her efforts were futile.

Predators are a major factor for nest failure and a major reason why some hens don't produce poults that contribute to next year's population. Recent studies have shown that predation accounts for anywhere from 51 to 93% of nest failures. High populations of nest predators such as raccoons, opossums, skunks, crows, foxes, or opportunistic nest destroyers such as feral hogs can be detrimental to the success of a nesting hen. A recent study conducted in Arkansas showed during the incubation period hens have an increased susceptibility to predation and their survival rate can be as low as 75%. Adult turkeys and poults that have achieved the ability to fly are mostly preyed upon by bobcats, coyotes, and eagles. Trapping furbearing predators, especially just prior to and during nesting season, can be very beneficial to nesting success.

Another factor that can reduce nesting success is disturbance during the incubation period. Hens that are repeatedly spooked off nests during the incubation process will likely abandon them. This could be caused by hunters who repeatedly bump hens off nests. It could also be because of a group of predators such as coyotes or opportunistic nest destroyers such as feral hogs that are frequently moving through an area where a hen is incubating a nest. Either way, nest abandonment can be the result. Literature shows that hens will often re-nest but each time the poult production potential is reduced due to smaller clutches.

In general, most people think that all hens will nest; however, some hens might fail to nest at all. Many have seen those small

groups of hens during the early summer months hanging out in an open field just after an afternoon rain shower. I often wonder what happened, why don't those hens have poults with them? Did all those hens lose their nests or broods to predation? Usually I surmise that to be the case. What if those hens didn't attempt to nest for whatever reason and if that is the case why not? A recent study by the University of Tennessee showed only a 75.7% nesting rate among hens that were tracked with radio transmitters. Meaning almost 25% of the hens did not attempt to nest at all. Why? The available habitat conditions, the hen's health and fitness level, and the availability of gobblers for breeding are all factors that could contribute to this. Habitat conditions may play a major role in the decision to attempt at nesting. The availability of high-quality nesting habitat, within their home range, might be low and instead of a hen nesting in poor habitat where she bears even greater susceptibility to predation, she may just choose to forgo a nesting attempt that year. Thus, the population may be at or near carrying capacity for that particular area and the risks outweigh the rewards. Importance should then be placed on an abundance of high-quality nesting habitat that is interspersed with good brood rearing habitat and escape cover. Habitat conditions could also play a role in the fitness of individual hens. Older hens in the population that aren't at peak fitness levels anymore might at some point stop attempting to nest. Conversely, hens that are just maturing may not have the necessary resources to be at a high enough fitness level to produce their first clutch of eggs yet. Both scenarios would produce adult hens that did not generate a brood for that year.

Another reason a hen might not attempt to nest is if there are not enough gobblers around to breed every hen. However, there has not been enough research on the topic to understand if a hen does not breed with a gobbler, will she attempt to nest at all, or will she nest but lay unfertilized eggs? The hen's fitness level may come into play again here and if she is in good physical condition, she might lay a clutch of eggs even if she hasn't been bred. Hunter harvest of a large proportion of gobblers in an area in the spring before the peak nest initiation period could be a factor that would reduce the number of successfully hatched nests. So, are we harvesting too many gobblers too early in the season? In areas where turkey populations are declining that could very well be the case.

The take home message for landowners and wildlife managers is to focus on habitat improvements to improve nesting and brood rearing habitat to minimize nest depredation and brood mortality. Furbearer and feral hog trapping can certainly be incorporated into a holistic wild turkey management plan, but habitat improvements should be the priority. Keep in mind that the potential for habitat enhancement is up to private landowners over most of the landscape. As far as regulating the harvest of wild turkeys, state agencies are charged with that duty and many states in the southeast are currently researching causes of declines including gobbler harvest prior to peak nest initiation and potential impacts to population growth. Stakeholder support of season and bag limit recommendations based on sound science is crucial for positive change. ✎



TURKEYS ON FIRE - GROWING SEASON BURNS AND BENEFITS TO NESTING TURKEYS

By Jud Easterwood, Wildlife Biologist, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries

The thought of fire running through woodlands while turkey hens are sitting tightly on their nests of 13 eggs makes a large proportion of turkey hunters cringe. After all, we like our turkey eggs hatched, not fried, right? While a few nests are lost during growing season prescribed burns (burns conducted during spring or summer months), the truth is a burned nest does not necessarily mean no poults. There are many factors affecting turkey nest success in a landscape dependent on fire. The wild turkey's adaptability, plus the timing, size, shape, and frequency of the burn all play a critical role in assuring land managers they are benefitting the turkey population in the long run even when the prescription calls for burns to be conducted during the growing season.

Adaptation

Turkeys evolved over time in the southeastern U.S., an area that was once dominated by longleaf pine forests and savannas believed to cover some 90 million acres. Many believe these vast coastal plain forests naturally burned every two to three years due to abundant fuels such as pine needles, annual grasses, and forbs that were ignited by frequent lightning fires. Even the more inland piedmont forests supported fire every four to five years. Wild turkeys were abundant during these times of vast longleaf and pine/hardwood forests in the Southeast. The timing of fires was not chosen by a land manager or natural resource agency, they occurred whenever Mother Nature allowed. Considering most lightning strikes

in Alabama occur during the summer months (June through August), our turkeys certainly evolved with growing season fires. In past studies in the Southeast, anywhere from 25% to more than 50% of adult hens have attempted to re-nest after their first

nest failed. Whether nests are lost by predation or growing season fires, there's a reasonable chance the hen will attempt to nest again. Increasing the amount of early succession vegetation on the landscape with prescribed fire promotes forbs and grasses that enhance food production and protective cover thus creating the potential for increased brood survival.

Seasonal Timing

Among the many benefits of winter burns are prevention of wildfire risk, recycling of dead vegetation to ashes and more absorbable nutrients for existing plants, aesthetics, and promotion of desirable plant species. While winter burning can provide multiple benefits, not all unwanted vegetation can be killed while burning during the winter. Often, hardwood encroachment can only be managed by conducting burns while the plants are actively growing. When

conducting a well-planned prescribed burn during the growing season, fire-adapted plants are not damaged, yet the encroaching hardwoods are killed or greatly reduced in density.

One consideration that has proven beneficial to both nesting hens and turkey habitat is timing the burn during the growing season, but after most turkeys have nested. Based on research conducted



by Dr. Craig Harper at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, instead of burning April and May, targeting July through October can be just as effective, if not more effective in some cases, in reducing undesired vegetation and providing early succession vegetation required by turkeys. The bonus is that this timing can all but eliminate concerns with destroying turkey nests in most parts of Alabama.

Size and Shape

Through extensive research being conducted by the University of Georgia and led by Dr. Mike Chamberlain, evidence is emerging that if prescribed burns are conducted at reasonable scales, benefits to turkey populations are remarkably positive. While we often discuss burns in acreage, perhaps shape and distance to unburned adjacent cover are more important than size. Turkeys are attracted to recently burned areas, but the question has been whether large-scale burns are good for turkeys. In one study, nesting hens selected recently burned areas, but strongly preferred the outer 400 meters inside the burn. This might suggest that a long, linear burn that is adjacent to an unburned block might be preferred over a large square block. Individual properties, manpower, resources, free time, and landscape can certainly be limiting factors when planning for burns, but any time there is an option to burn smaller blocks or consider the “depth” of the burn, a turkey population can benefit greatly by doing so.

Frequency

It has been well established that turkeys require early succession vegetation in order to maintain healthy populations. The tender grasses and forbs produced after a burn attracts insects necessary for fast growth of young poults and are selected by hens during the egg-laying period. In another study, prior to initiating their first nests, hens avoided mature pine stands that had not been burned in two growing seasons. Once they were brooding, they completely avoided mature pine stands that had not been burned in three growing seasons. The reasons for this avoidance might include the lack of vegetation attracting insects and cover that was too dense for their comfort. The bottom line is that in pine-dominated areas, burning different blocks frequently (every three years at minimum) will provide vegetation that hen turkeys select at some point during the reproductive season. Once this is combined with the consideration of adjacent habitat and the fire interval of surrounding blocks, turkey habitat can be improved dramatically.

The Take Home Message

Sometimes it is necessary to conduct burns during the growing season in order to create suitable habitat for wild turkeys. Fire in the spring turkey woods might be scary to many turkey enthusiasts, but there are many factors that can be considered to reduce nest loss, ensure optimal forage opportunities, and provide ideal cover for nesting hens and poults. Factoring in specific timing, size and shape, and frequency, while considering adjacent habitat suitability can assist land managers to reach goals of a growing,

healthy turkey population. Just because there might be prescribed fire in the growing season does not necessarily mean your turkey eggs are cooked; it is likely creating more beneficial turkey habitat that will result in even more turkeys down the road. In other words, the short-term losses are greatly outweighed by the long-term benefits. For any land manager who is interested in maximizing these long-term benefits, the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries offers free assistance through consultation with one of our wildlife biologists. ♡





THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY OF WILD TURKEY PREDATOR MANAGEMENT

By Courtenay Conring, Wildlife Biologist, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries



As turkey hunters, we have all experienced it at least once. That gut-wrenching feeling you get when you find a destroyed turkey nest, or worse, a dead hen or poult. I immediately feel the loss that turns into vengeful thoughts aimed at the predator I assume committed the act. I believe in that moment if I were to cross the predator, and I knew I was not compromising a chance at a nearby gobbler, I would kill it. Joe Hutto, author of *Illumination in the Flatwoods*, said it best when he said, “We have this distinctly human concept of good and bad. Nature doesn’t have that. It just is. I’m not comfortable with that. I’m not accepting of the fact that we live in a profoundly brutal world.” This mentality is shared by most hunters and is one of the main driving forces behind predator removal management. The reality is we cannot remove every predator, some are even protected by law. Additionally, we are targeting a small portion of the species capable of preying on turkeys. Time and time again wildlife research shows that predator removal can impact game numbers at small scales, but is time consuming, not cost effective, must continue indefinitely to maintain results, and your dollars are better spent on habitat improvements. Yet, we continue to remove predators, especially during turkey season.

Raccoons, opossums, bobcats, foxes, and coyotes are most land managers main targets when controlling predators for wild turkey management. It is easy to understand why. They are larger, more

visible, often more willing to co-exist with humans, thus earning their reputation as predators on the farm and in backyards. Who has not heard of a farmer losing some chickens to a fox or the story of a house cat being killed by a coyote in the backyard? These personal testimonies paired with the villainous, clever characters these species play in folklore have facilitated our cultural perspectives of these animals. Folklore aside, research supports our suspicions as well. Research on these meso-mammals and their relationships with ground nesting birds has been conducted across the country. Variations in results have been attributed to meso-mammal densities, weather, geographic regions, vegetation types, season, and turkey life stages, but the common conclusions are always that they do in fact eat turkeys or eggs. While our concentrated predator control efforts are justified, these meso-mammals are not the only predators and often not the most prevalent predators affecting turkey populations.

Turkeys are most vulnerable at the nest level. Every omnivore or carnivore that comes across a turkey nest will capitalize on the opportunity, but we mostly point our fingers at raccoons and opossums. In studies looking at egg and poult survival, raccoons are always one of top two species responsible for losses, and opossums and foxes are often mentioned as well. Two species tend to be discounted by land managers but depredate nests at rates comparable to raccoons: crows and skunks. It has been reported

crows and skunks are responsible for a higher percentage of nest losses than raccoons on some study sites in the southeastern United States. While you can legally trap skunks in Alabama, I am guessing they are targeted less by land managers because they are nocturnal, so less seen, and no one wants to handle one if trapped. Similarly, crows fly under the radar as nest predators for many land managers because they are abundant and hiding in plain sight. They are commonplace, so we overlook their presence and behavior. One study looked at wild turkey nest predators in east Texas via artificial nest monitoring and found that 48% of artificial turkey nests were depredated by crows. Crows are game birds in Alabama, but as a WMA manager and hunter I do not believe they are pursued by many hunters in the state and it is illegal to trap them.

Poult are less vulnerable than eggs but are still handicapped due to size and their inability to fly during their first 9-14 days of life. The majority of poult mortality occurs during this flightless period, with survival estimates (proportion of sampled poults surviving) reported at or less than 0.45 in most southeastern studies. In addition to most species previously mentioned in this article, feral dogs and cats are overlooked predators that pose threats to poult survival, especially in areas with high stray populations like we have in Alabama. One study that monitored poult mortality on Skyline WMA in the 1980s, reported that wild dogs accounted for 15% of poult deaths. I have not seen any numbers specifically related to poults, but given outdoor cats kill an estimated billion+ birds per year, there is a chance that turkey poults make the list. Another feral species that has the potential to wreak havoc on nests and poults are wild hogs. It is suggested that hogs are much like opossums or armadillos in that they do not seek out nests per se but destroy them and sometimes broods or brood-rearing habitat as collateral damage when rooting. No matter their intent, these feral animals can be extremely detrimental to all ground-nesting birds and should be removed.

Once a turkey reaches two weeks old and can fly, their chance at surviving increases significantly, but as the circle of life goes they still have predators through adulthood. Great horned owls have been reported decapitating turkeys on the roost and it is known that eagles (golden and bald) are also capable of taking an adult turkey. Before you load your shotguns, it should be noted that all raptors and migratory birds are protected and killing one, even on your own land, could result in a federal fine or jail time. On the ground, bobcats are common predators of adult turkeys throughout most of the year in the southeast, while coyotes are a more

primary predator in the southwestern United States. Both bobcats and coyotes are more successful at taking adult turkeys during the spring when nesting hens and distracted gobblers are more vulnerable. It has been suggested that coyotes are likely more of an annoyance and disturbance, which could still indirectly affect turkey reproduction efforts.

The point of this article is not to deter any land managers from removing predators but is more of an opportunity to showcase the big picture. The raccoon who eats the turkey egg may be eaten by the bobcat who would have otherwise taken a hen, killing an entire brood. For every predator you remove, another is waiting to take its spot. If you are feeling hopeless and think turkeys do not stand a chance, do not fret. The silver lining is that turkeys have evolved with many of these predators and have still managed to reproduce successfully for thousands of years. Removing some of these predators, especially the non-native ones, could give the turkeys a better chance of survival, but it should not be the

only management on our properties. We must remember to mitigate the negative impacts we, as humans, have on wildlife as well.

The number one reason for decline in most species worldwide is not high predator densities, but habitat loss or degradation. In the case of turkeys, this can come in the form of urban sprawl or from routinely mowing a field every spring. There are countless articles online and otherwise that explain how to better improve properties for turkeys, so I will not be redundant in preaching best management practices. I will provide you with some easy advice on what not to do if you want to reduce predation risk via habitat management. Research has shown that nesting hens select areas with 1-1.5 meter (4-5 ft) tall vegetation and interspersed woody stem cover. These are the openings and forest understories that are “ugly”

or “overgrown” and our societal-taught minds tell us to clean up. With that said, land managers should look at these areas like a turkey and avoid burning or mowing at large scales during the nesting and brood-rearing months (March 15-June 15). While growing season fires and mowing are great at meeting early successional plant needs of turkeys and cause minimal direct turkey/ nest losses, they do reduce cover. In the southeast, you can see very similar vegetative responses to these disturbances between March through September, so why would we want to reduce cover during some of the most critical months if we do not have to? In addition to maintaining nesting and brood cover, scheduling these practices later in the growing season means we reduce the disturbance of hens tending their young and allow poults to reach flying age, subsequently increasing their chance at survival. ✎



NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION

Craig Scruggs, Alabama State NWTF Chapter President



My term as President of the Alabama Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) ended in August 2019. Looking back over my two terms at the helm, I can say that it has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Busy, but rewarding! If anyone thinks the NWTF is only about turkeys, they're wrong. It's about wildlife conservation as a whole, but, more importantly, it's

about education and service to our fellow man.

In 2018, the Alabama state and local chapters spent \$379,562 on mission delivery projects. The NWTF funds an Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) employee who teaches hunter safety and conducts youth outreach events. This individual also serves as our NWTF "Save the Habitat, Save the Hunt" coordinator. We also provide landowner technical assistance statewide with an NWTF biologist. The International Hunter Education Association (IHEA) awarded the Alabama NWTF special recognition for longtime excellence and service to the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) and IHEA-USA.

One of the most rewarding accomplishments we have made over the past four years is seeing the Archery in the Schools Program grow. We have gifted many schools with money to pay for equipment and seeing more than 1,700 students turn out for the state tournament is amazing! Knowing these kids have chosen archery over other, perhaps, not so healthy activities gives me hope for the future.

The NWTF Scholarship program is another way we give to our youth, having contributed over \$17,000 in scholarship money. Each year we receive many, many applications from high school seniors. Looking at their grades and reading their essays is quite a task because they are all outstanding, and it makes choosing one winner really tough. The year before last, the Alabama scholarship winner went on to win the NWTF National Scholarship.

Our NWTF collegiate programs have grown considerably. Both the University of Alabama and Auburn University have NWTF chapters on campus, hosting successful banquets each year. The University of Alabama chapter has also been recognized at the National Convention awards banquet for two consecutive years,

and their clay shooting team at nationals won fourth place competitively and first place academically.

At the National Convention in February 2019, the Alabama Chapter took second place for the L.A. Dixon, Jr., Memorial Outstanding Chapter Award. Steve Barnett, our Technical Committee Representative, won the coveted Henry S. Mosby Award, and the Alabama State Chapter was also recognized for conserving or enhancing the greatest number of acres within a state. The Tuscaloosa Chapter took home the L.A. Dixon, Jr., Award for Outstanding Chapter Grand Slam.

Many friendships have come from my affiliation with the NWTF, and I can say without hesitation that this is one of the finest groups of men and women I could ever hope to be associated with. They have a passion not only for the wild turkey, but for wildlife in general, for conservation, and for this great country. I'm referring to those in national leadership positions all the way down to the local chapter men and women. And yes, while the wild turkey is at the hub of the organization, what touches me most is the compassion NWTF members have for their fellow man.

When I see these volunteers using their time to teach young people about the outdoors or take the handicapped hunting or honor our military and veterans, it makes me proud. If you don't believe there are still good people in America, just go hang out with a chapter of the NWTF. Yes, we love hunting, but, more importantly, we believe in the right to bear arms, in prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, and standing for our national anthem because respect for our country and freedom is rooted deep within our hearts. The men, women, and young folks of the NWTF are the kind of people who are the backbone of this country. We need more of them. I realize I'm most likely preaching to the choir, but if you're reading this, please know that I applaud you and thank you for your beliefs, your hard work, and your dedication.

In closing, I want to thank the Alabama State Chapter Board of Directors and Officers for their hard work and support. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the NWTF Regional Directors. These are the individuals who many times don't get the thanks and credit they deserve. They work tirelessly setting up and conducting banquets, grab a few hours sleep, and hit the road to start all over again. I couldn't have done the last four years without the help of all these people. ✎

Brandon Bobo, NWTF Regional Biologist



As we surpass the midpoint of a decade of avid turkey hunter survey observations and data collection and compilation, we are continuing to obtain more definitive and substantial trend data in regards to turkey population, reproductive success and recruitment of new poults into our state's overall population.

Obviously Game Check is providing an abundance of critical information when considering potential recommendations for season structure changes in framework and bag limits. As states all throughout the Southeast continue to make better, more recent scientific research-based decisions in terms of season openings, lengths, and bag limits, Alabama is tirelessly pursuing the optimal decisions based on the data we have to guide our turkey management suggestions. The supplementary data that the avid turkey hunter survey provides is paramount, as is the continued expansion of avid turkey hunter participation for larger sample sizes of data, which will help to guide informed management decisions, as well as provide insight to the population dynamics throughout all regions of the state.

As has become something of commonplace over the years of this publication, I have received wide variations in reports of hens with or without poults, as well as large gangs of jakes to very few or no juvenile recruitment into the population being observed. This is somewhat of a phenomenon, as well as individual variations in observations from folks throughout the state, but it is constantly variable even down to below the county level. The take home message I have begun to formulate over the past seven years fielding calls from turkey hunters across the Southeast overall, is that turkey populations can do some crazy, unexplainable things on a minute scale, even down to sustainable populations within a small given landscape, such as a small hunting lease, for example. This further solidifies the notion that we, as wildlife managers, have always preached, which is that there is no real substitute for active forest management on any tract of land, regardless of scale. So maybe the best we can do, is vigorously pursue the

provisioning of ideal turkey habitat, via conservation practices such as prescribed fire, thinning, herbicide treatments, mulching, planting, among a plethora of other beneficial practices.

This year, just as in years past, Alabama remains cemented among the top states in the country when it comes to accomplishments both on the ground, conserving habitat or in the field, recruiting new hunters. Our mission to conserve the wild turkey and preserve our hunting heritage has never held more weighted meaning than it does for all sportsmen and women today. This is what makes our partnership with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries so critical, as they're recognition of the dire need to recruit new hunters and their tireless pursuit of that goal, is in perfect alignment with the goals of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF). So, this year, make it a point to pass on this tradition and way of life that we hold so precious in our souls of getting afield pursuing game, and more importantly making lifelong memories with friends and family. I look forward to taking my seven-year-old daughter dove hunting in a few weeks now from the time I write this, on one of our partnered youth hunts with the state agency, and I can only hope that she might pass on that same way of life to others in the future.

On that note, I always make a point to thank my wife and daughter for supporting me in my endeavors afield, both for working towards the betterment of our natural resources and for pursuing the hunt, that we continue to chase those distant gobbles for! Of course, it goes without saying, but I still must applaud and thank all of NWTF's members, volunteers, sponsors, partners, and donors as you are all the life blood of our organization. I would be remiss not to pay homage to our partners, without whom we would never accomplish the feats that have been seen throughout the years, such as the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Natural Resources Conservation Services, U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Department of Defense, Alabama Forestry Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, the Longleaf Alliance, Alabama Forestry Association, American Forest Foundation, Alabama Cooperative Extension Services, Alabama 4-H Foundation, and several others not listed. ♡



ALABAMA'S NWTF OFFICER OF THE YEAR



Senior Conservation Enforcement Officer Curt Porter

The 2019 National Wild Turkey Federation Officer of the Year for Alabama is Senior Conservation Enforcement Officer Curt Porter. Officer Porter has been employed with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) since 2012. During his tenure, he has proven his deep commitment to protecting our great state's natural resources. He is a tremendous asset to the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF), the State of Alabama, and all Alabamians.

Officer Porter's professionalism, character, integrity, morals, positive attitude, and work ethic make him a role model for all law enforcement officers. He is always on-time for appointments and takes pride in his personal appearance, particularly in the uniform he wears. He continuously strives to apprehend violators of all types of wildlife crimes by going above and beyond his normal duties. Porter has developed his investigative skills to the degree that he can immediately recognize illegal activity. He is very detailed and thorough in preparing and documenting evidence to ensure that prosecutors and judges can easily construe that evidence. This has resulted in the near 100% conviction rate that Officer Porter maintains within the court system.

Senior Conservation Enforcement Officer Porter is currently assigned to Fayette County in WFF District 1. Fayette County is in the northwest portion of the state and is a very rural and sparsely populated area loaded with turkey habitat. Many hunters come from neighboring counties and from out of state to hunt turkey there.

Fayette County has always had an abundant population of wild turkey and is one of the top turkey hunting counties in Alabama.

Officer Porter works diligently to patrol his assigned area and enforce ADCNR's laws and regulations pertaining to illegal turkey

hunting. During the 2019 spring turkey season, Porter made and assisted on a total of 19 turkey hunting related arrests and warnings that resulted in \$5,564 in fines and court costs. The arrests from this past year were for various violations. However, five of the arrests this season were for hunting by the aid of bait, with one of those being a second offense where the violator paid a \$754 fine and had his hunting privileges revoked for one year.

Earlier in his career, Porter was involved in a very important investigation involving wild turkeys. He assisted the Division's Special Investigations Unit with an investigation into a landowner that orchestrated the purchase of 200 wild turkeys from an online source and then released these wild turkeys onto his property. Due to disease risks, this has the potential to be detrimental to the state's wild turkey population. Upon the investigation's completion, Senior Officer Porter arrested the landowner on 10 counts of illegal importation of wild turkeys and 10 counts of illegally releasing captive wild turkeys onto private property. The landowner pled guilty to the charges in district court and paid a total of \$5,408 in fines and court costs.

Senior Officer Porter is always eager to participate in public outreach programs. He has participated with Becoming an Outdoors-Woman events, the National Archery in Schools Program, the NWTF sponsored Feathers, Fins, and Furs event, the Forestry Awareness Week Now program, kids fishing events and fishing events for disabled citizens. Being a member of the NWTF, Senior Officer Porter has attended and participated in local NTWF chapter banquets as well. He is a certified Hunter Education Instructor and has assisted with numerous hunter education classes during his career.

Curt Porter is not only an outstanding Conservation Enforcement Officer but an educator, a mentor, and an advocate of hunting and fishing heritage. He is defined by his dedication to the resources. He works hard to protect the wild turkey for the benefit of future generations and is very deserving of this prestigious award.

It is for these reasons that Senior Conservation Enforcement Officer Curt Porter was selected as the 2019 NWTF Officer of the Year for Alabama. Regardless if he is chosen or not for the national award, Senior Officer Porter will continue to make the State of Alabama and NWTF proud through his conservation efforts both on and off duty. ♡



SHOTGUN WINNER



NWTF

Conserve. Hunt. Share.

John Golson received a Weatherby 12-gauge semiautomatic shotgun with pistol grip from the Alabama National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) State Chapter. Pictured with the happy winner is NWTF Regional Director Tyler Briggs. Golson, an avid turkey hunter from Greenville, Alabama, in Butler County, was randomly chosen from all 2019 Avid Turkey Hunter Survey participants. The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Avid Turkey Hunter

Survey provides WFF biologists with valuable information on statewide and regional trends in gobbling activity, hunter effort, harvest rates, age structure, and sex ratios. This knowledge ultimately helps the WFF make management decisions that link the interests of sportsmen with the wise use of the state's turkey resource. Thank you to all the hunters who participated in the survey and thanks to the Alabama Chapter of the NWTF for their strong support and for supplying the shotgun for the drawing.

NWTF HUNTING HERITAGE SUPER FUND AND TAG FUND 2019

As a bit of background regarding the Hunting Heritage Super Fund, these funds are generated through our fundraising events such as banquets, major donor events, gun blasts, etc. This is why it is imperative that our volunteers continue to remain the driving force behind our organization, and it becomes increasingly important to become an active National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) member in your local chapter if you are not already. For those of you interested in becoming a member please contact one of your local NWTF Regional Directors: Howard Dahlem at hdahlem@nwtf.net (North Alabama), Tyler Briggs at tbriggs@nwtf.net (Central Alabama) and Matt Wilkins mwillkins@nwtf.net (South Alabama).

Of the Super Fund dollars raised every year, the State Chapter earmarks 20% of the total funds towards a land acquisition account. This account is maintained for the specific purpose of handling upfront expenses of newly obtainable lands for due diligence and appraisals. Without the NWTF, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) would likely not be able to make the necessary initiation of the acquisition process, which is a real life example of how encouraging the partnership between NWTF and ADCNR has become for sportsmen and women in Alabama. We are currently in the process of obtaining some additional Wildlife Management Area (WMA) inholdings, and we're also excited about opportunities for the acquisition of additional Special Opportunity Areas (SOA) in the state. For more information on these new and innovative SOA, please visit outdooralabama.com.

The Alabama State Chapter of NWTF also has a separate fund dedicated to the accommodation of requests and supplementation of sound habitat enhancement projects on the ground in Alabama, as well as the ability to meet the fiduciary needs of outreach events and educational programs such as Archery in the Schools Programs, adult mentored hunts, Jake's Days, Women in the Outdoors Events, disabled hunter events among many others. These funds are generated through the sales of NWTF license plates in the state of Alabama, so keep in mind when buying your tag that almost \$50 of the purchase of that custom NWTF tag goes directly towards this account, and thusly, our Initiative to "Save the Habitat, Save the Hunt."

In combination of the Super Fund, Land Acquisition Account and License Plate Fund, the Alabama Chapter of NWTF were able to



Left to right: WFF Director Chuck Sykes; Steve Barnett, WFF Wild Turkey Project Leader; Alabama NWTF State Chapter President Craig Scruggs; Keith Gauldin WFF Wildlife Chief; and Alabama NWTF Board of Directors members, Craig Harris, Charlie Duckett, and Scott Brandon.

devote an amount of \$405,342.25 towards conservation projects, outreach and education, as well as public land acquisition among various other areas of esteemed funding support.

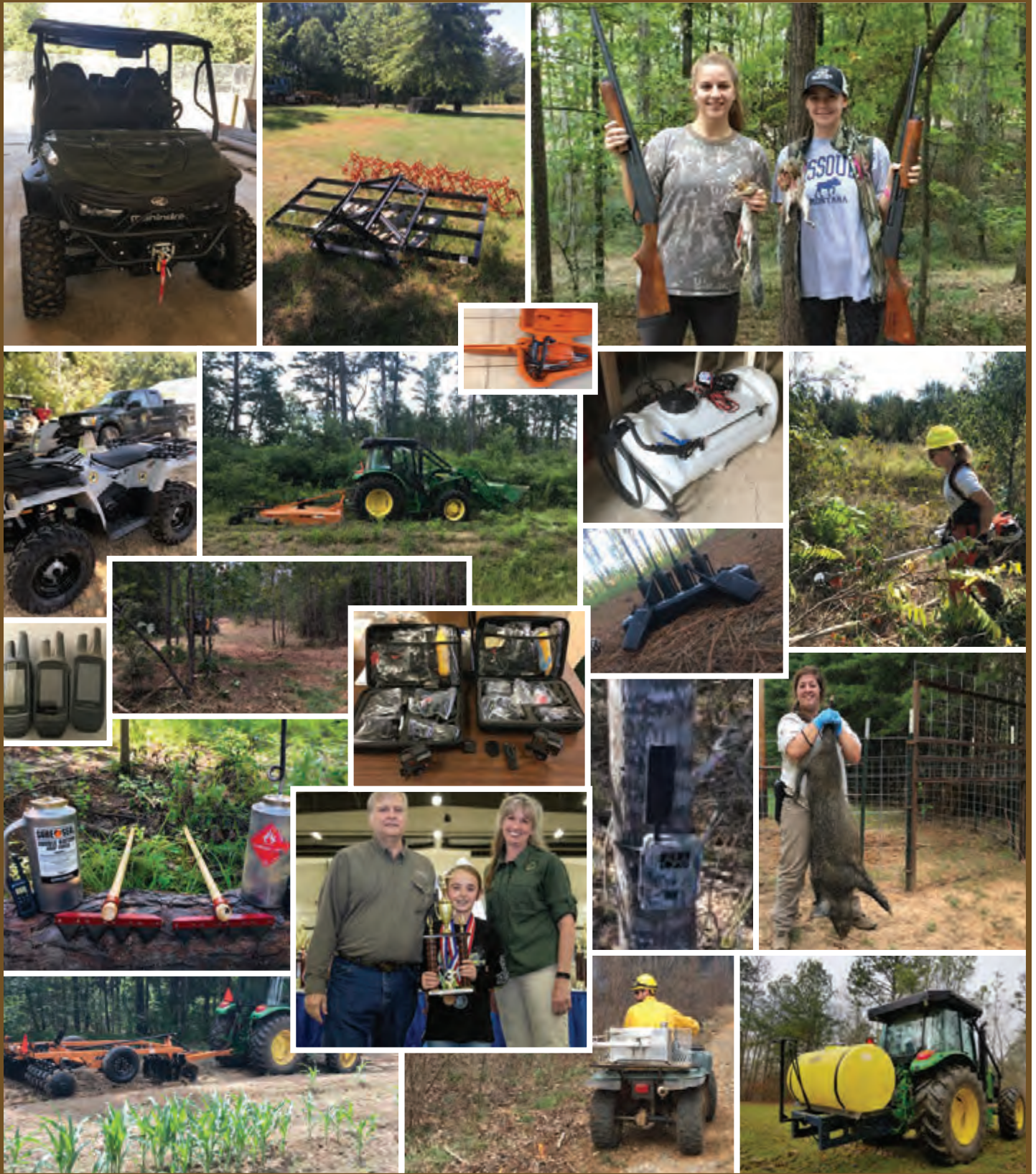
NWTF utilized its abundance of partners nationally and within state boundaries to leverage dollars for the furtherance of our mission of wild turkey conservation and hunting heritage preservation. This past fiscal year of 2019 NWTF in Alabama was able to provide the initial dollars towards projects that total in excess \$1.4 million. This means that for every \$1 raised and spent from NWTF through Super Fund dollars, almost \$6 were leveraged to be utilized for all the aforementioned uses. Another way we leverage these dollars is through the Wildlife Restoration Act, more commonly referred to as Pittman-Robertson dollars awarded to WFF, which allows the obtainment of a 3 to 1 match generated from licenses, ammunition, and firearms sales in the state. NWTF uses these funds to leverage our funds in one regard, while we also utilize other partners such as the U.S. Forest Service on stewardship contracts to generate a 4 to 1 match allowing us to maximize conservation work on National Forests. Other agencies and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) supply a plethora of matching funds as well. ✎

2019 ALABAMA STATE SUPER FUND EXPENDITURES

SCHOLARSHIPS	20 Local Chapter Scholarships	\$10,000.00
	1 State Scholarship	\$2,500.00
EDUCATION	Alabama's Archery in the Schools Program	\$11,895.00
	National Archery in the Schools Program Alabama state tournament	\$5,000.00
	Educational materials	\$12,619.00
	Full Fans and Sharp Spurs printing	\$7,162.00
HUNTING HERITAGE	High School and Collegiate Shooting Team Support	\$14,944.41
	National Assembly of Sportsman Caucuses	\$2,000.00
OUTREACH EVENTS	19 Total Outreach Events (Hunts, Jake's Days, etc.) across the state	\$9,250.00
	Becoming an Outdoors Woman Event	\$5,000.00
ALABAMA SUPER FUND PROJECTS - ACQUISITIONS, WMAS, SEED SUBSIDY, REWARDS, & RESEARCH	Habitat Projects	\$125,861.00
	Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership Burn Crew support	\$10,000.00
	Talladega Mountain Longleaf Conservation Partnership Burn Crew support	\$25,000.00
	Seed Subsidy and Conservation Seed Program	\$38,424.48
	Law Enforcement Rewards issued	\$1,000.00
	Land Acquisition Expenditures	\$1,820.73
TAG FUND PROJECTS	Additional Expenditures	\$123,601.36
	- JAKES Memberships	
	- Outreach Events	
	- Hunter Education Specialist Position Support	
	- Mentored Hunt Supplies	
	- Administrative (operational expenses)	
	- Local chapter committee meetings and incentives	
	- District NWTF Biologist Support	
	- Mail-out notifications, publications, and printing	
TOTAL		\$405,342.25



NWTf EXPENDITURES



When Tagging Out means so much more

You help us accomplish so much when you purchase an Alabama NWTF vehicle tag or boat registration.



Efforts invested in 2019...

\$405,341

on mission
delivery projects

\$22,250

on scholarships/
education

\$29,444

on shooting
teams

\$36,009

on conservation
seed program

Help promote our hunting heritage and drive conservation by getting your tag today.



www.alnwtf.org
facebook.com/AlabamaNWTF
Instagram.com/alnwtf_official





NATIONAL ARCHERY IN THE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

It was an exciting year for the 2019 National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) in Alabama. For the first time in program history, Alabama was able to give away scholarships at the state tournament. Alabama was recognized by NASP for being in the top five nationally for participation in the Academic Archer program. And finally, Alabama produced the Elementary Female National Bullseye and 3D Champion and the National third place High School team. These are excellent accomplishments made possible by all of our partners, but especially the Alabama Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf).

Almost 1,800 archers from grades 4 through 12 participated in the state tournament held on April 4-5, 2019, in Montgomery, Alabama. Participants qualified by competing in one of eight regional tournaments held around the state. More than 4,000 students competed in one of those regionals. WFF used the \$5,000 NWTf superfund money as a match with NASP and was able to award \$10,000 in scholarships to the overall top male and female archers as well as the high school podium finishers. Participants enrolled in the Academic Archer Program were also awarded \$2,500 scholarships through a random drawing.

The Academic Archer Program was created by NASP to recognize and encourage students in the classroom along with their participation on the archery range. Schools use local criteria to enroll students in the program. Students then receive certificates on awards day and are eligible for state and national scholarship opportunities along with the chance to win prizes from various NASP sponsors. This program reinforces many of the lessons that are the foundation of the NASP program. Some of these lessons include discipline, responsibility, hard work, and positivity. Alabama has worked to promote this program to our schools.

Alabama was the second state to implement the NASP curriculum into the public school system more than 16 years

ago. Over 400 schools have purchased equipment and are currently participating in the program as part of the physical education curriculum. With a conservative estimate of just 150 children per school at 400 schools, that means approximately 60,000 Alabama school children are being exposed to archery each year. One of those students is Mia Cornelson from Dixon Elementary in Mobile County. Mia, a 5th grader last year, shot a 294 out of 300 at the National Bullseye Tournament in Louisville, Kentucky. Mia also won the IBO 3D Championship. Alabama also had the boys third place finisher in the National IBO 3D Tournament in the Middle School Division. Forrest Calvert from Cullman Middle School claimed that trophy with a score of 291 out of 300.

The NWTf has been a strong supporter of NASP in Alabama for more than 12 years. Not only has the Alabama Chapter donated thousands of dollars to this worthwhile program, but its members have also participated as volunteers at the annual state tournament. Local chapters also provide equipment grants and volunteers in their communities.

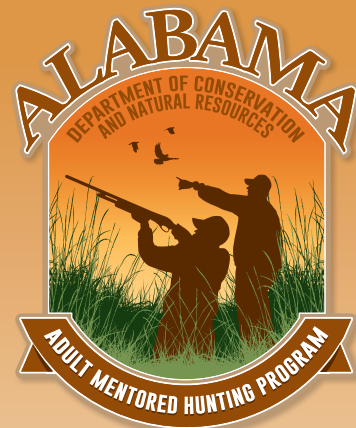
The benefits of the program include much more than learning a new sport. Archery and other shooting sports have a direct benefit to wildlife conservation by way of money generated from the Pittman-Robertson Excise Tax applied to archery equipment. Many of the participants, their friends, and families go on to become lifelong archers and lifelong contributors to wildlife conservation through the purchase of archery equipment. These are our future hunters and conservationist and this program is an investment in the future of NASP in Alabama and the future of our natural resources.

To learn more about Alabama's NASP program visit www.outdooralabama.com. ✎

BECOME A HUNTING MENTOR

HAVE YOU EVER
INTRODUCED
SOMEONE
TO HUNTING?

Teaching someone the skills they need to be a successful hunter and cultivate a lifelong passion for the outdoors can be very rewarding. The future of hunting in America depends on you.



Take'em hunting!

Become a hunting mentor and *Take'em hunting!*



Learn more about the mentor hunting program by visiting OutdoorAlabama.com or contact Justin Grider at justin.grider@dcnr.alabama.gov or 205-339-5716.

SAVE THE HABITAT. SAVE THE HUNT.



It gives us at the NWTF great pride to know that we are exceeding our goals at this halfway point of our 10 year Save the Habitat. Save the Hunt. Initiative. Thus far we've accomplished over 3 million acres of conserved habitat, with Alabama coming second in the U.S. with 313,833 acres contributed! We've also accomplished 559,833 acres of public access to hunting, with Alabama accounting for 8,065 of those acres through public land acquisition. Finally, we've been able to recruit about 1.3 million hunters across the country. The following is a list of the three main objectives for the initiative:

- Conserve or enhance at least 4 million acres of upland habitat.
- Create hunting access on at least 500,000 acres of new available lands.
- Create 1.5 million new hunters through outreach and legislation.

The following list of accomplishments should motivate any avid turkey hunter, volunteer, or just outdoor enthusiast to get involved and on-board with NWTF in its initiative to Save the Habitat. Save the Hunt. With help from volunteers as well agency and organization partnerships, we have been able to boast an overabundance of accomplishments towards the Save the Habitat. Save the Hunt. Initiative in 2019 as follows:

Alabama Save the Habitat. Save the Hunt. 2019 Accomplishments

PROJECT NAME	CONSERVED ACRES	ACCESS ACRES	AL CHAPTER NWTF DOLLARS \$	PROJECT MATCH DOLLARS \$
Public Land Project				
Oakmulgee Thinning and Mid-Story Work	1432	0	-	228,181.18
Ivory Mountain Area Wildlife Openings	10	0	-	2,469.00
Talladega RD Wildlife Openings	21	0	2,000.00	7,000.00
TMLCP Burn Crew	34,513	0	25,000.00	250,000.00
GCPEP Burn Crew	7,197	0	10,000.00	391,000.00
Pelham Range Wildlife Openings	36	0	3,000.00	7,000.00
AL State Lands Division Rx Fire	1,550	0	7,590.00	7,590.00
Alabama Forestry Commission	8,409	0	1,465.00	208,386.85
Coosa/Hollins WMA Rx Fire and Spraying	830	0	-	-
Choccolocco/Little River WMA Rx Fire	705	0	-	-
Jackson County WMA Hand Saw Work	17	0	-	-
Mulberry Fork WMA Disc Harrow	300	0	61,821.00	185,463.00
CSP and Seed Subsidy				
Seed Program Total	12,445	0	36,009.32	36,009.32
Totals:	114,919	0	\$ 160,070.32	\$ 1,119,462.50



Tes Randle Jolly

Wild Turkey Disease Mortality Form

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) is interested in documenting Wild Turkey Mortality caused by disease. Monitoring this mortality will provide information to assess the impacts of disease and help better manage the wild turkey resource. Sportsmen can play an important role by reporting sick or dead turkeys and assisting the ADCNR with obtaining birds for examination.

If you find any sick or dead wild turkey, please follow the procedures listed below. If you are unable to collect the carcass, reporting details and pictures of dead birds will provide valuable information. Also, please contact the ADCNR if you observe or have previously observed a sharp decline in a local turkey population.

HANDLING TURKEYS:

Sick turkeys should be reported to ADCNR Wildlife and Freshwater staff. Fresh carcasses of dead wild turkeys should be cooled as soon as possible by refrigeration or by putting the bird on ice in a cooler (it is best not to freeze the turkey). Submit the bird as soon as possible. However, if the turkey cannot be turned in to the ADCNR within 48 hours, it can be frozen as long as necessary.

CONTACTING ADCNR:

Contact ADCNR Upland Game Bird Coordinator, Steven Mitchell at steven.mitchell@dcnr.alabama.gov or your local ADCNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries District Office. Numbers are available on page 5.

RECORDING INFORMATION:

Please record the following information and submit this form with the turkey.

Name: _____

Address: _____

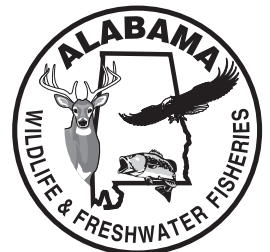
Phone: _____ Email: _____

Date turkey was found: _____ / _____ / _____

Location: (*property, road, county, town*) or *GPS coordinates*: _____

Description of turkey when found: _____

Additional Comments: _____





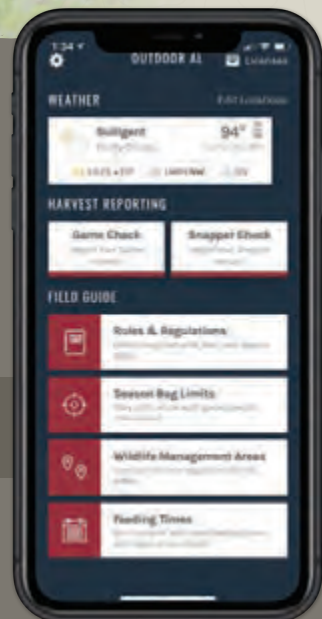
ALL ALABAMA TURKEY HUNTERS



GAME CHECK IS MANDATORY

All hunters are required to report their turkey harvest using **Game Check**, which will help the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources effectively manage wildlife for generations.

Check your harvest at OutdoorAlabama.com/GameCheck or by using the official ADCNR mobile app **Outdoor AL**



Search **OUTDOOR AL** on your app store!





A L A B A M A

Full Fans & Sharp Spurs

2019 WILD TURKEY REPORT



The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, national origin or disability in its hiring or employment practices nor in admission to, or operation of its programs, services or activities.

www.outdooralabama.com