

Fall Turkey Harvest Report 2008

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Abstract

Wisconsin's fall turkey hunting season was the longest on record. The season ran for 69 days, from 13 September through 20 November. For the fall of 2008, the 46 Turkey Management Zones (TMZ) were combined into 7 TMZ's to allow hunters who receive permits a larger area to hunt. Statewide, the number of permits available increased from 94,800 in 2007 to 95,700 in 2008. Total permits issued through a random drawing process and over-the-counter sales were 76,448. Permitted hunters harvested 10,698 turkeys for a success rate of 14.0%. This rate is similar to success rates from the fall hunt of 2007 when 14.9% of permit holders killed a bird. Heavy rains in the Southwestern third of the state may have affected brood survival in that portion of the state; the rest of the state had a healthy turkey population heading in the fall season.

Methods

Harvest information was obtained through mandatory registration of harvested turkeys. Turkey registration stations were paid either \$35 for the season or 35¢ per bird registered, depending on which amount was greater at each station. Registrars were required to collect the zone, date of kill, sex and age of each turkey killed. Registration records were entered into the DNR UNIX production server by regional personnel and summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

Results

The fall hunting season structure was changed in 2007, with the season opening concurrent with the opening of the archery deer season. In 2008, this allowed fall turkey hunters 69 days afield to pursue turkeys. This was done to allow hunters to enjoy an extended season and increase their chances of bagging a bird. Past modern fall hunts have ranged from 7-62 days.

Hunting Zones

In an effort to expand turkey hunting opportunities, the 46 Turkey Management Zones (TMZ) were combined into 7 larger zones in the fall of 2008. The whole state was open to fall turkey hunting for the first time in 2008 (Figure 1).

Permit Levels

Permit levels vary depending on the spring hunting success, amount of timber, hunter interference, and turkey population densities and distributions within zones. With turkey brood production somewhat below to average for some parts of the state in 2008, and spring success leveling off, the WDNR Wild Turkey Committee only increased permit levels slightly for the 2008 fall season (Table 1).

Permit Selection

All applicants were required to pay a \$3 fee for an application to enter the preference drawing. Preference for permits was given first to landowners (up to 30% of permits available in each zone), followed by residents who applied for but did not receive a permit in the fall of 2007, other residents, and finally non-residents. Applications were randomly selected, but first choice zones

of all applicants within each preference category were issued available permits before second, third, fourth, etc. choices were filled.

Like in the spring, left over permits were sold (\$10 for resident, \$15 for non-residents) over the counter at DNR license sales locations on a first come first served basis at a rate of one permit per day. This continued until all permits available for a zone were issued. A total of 11,329 permits were issued this way.

Harvest and Success Rates

Fall turkey hunters harvested 10,698 turkeys in the fall of 2008. This is a decrease from the 12,010 harvested in the fall of 2007. Data on the historical fall turkey harvests are summarized in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Beginning in 2007, the start of the fall turkey season was moved up from the 1st of October to open current with the archery season in mid-September. This was done to give hunters more opportunity to hunt fall turkeys. The fall turkey season also overlapped a statewide 2-day youth deer hunt, and a 4 day antlerless only gun deer season in all but the Northeastern ¼ of the state. All hunters are required to wear blaze orange during these deer seasons, except archery. The blaze orange requirement probably had the effect of eliminating days of turkey hunting.

For the second year of a three year trial, hunting of fall turkey with the aid of dogs was allowed in 9 counties in the west central part of the state. It was legal to fall turkey hunt with the aid of dogs in the following counties: Crawford, Richland, Sauk, Vernon, La Crosse, Monroe, Juneau, Jackson, and Wood (Fig. 1).

The fall hunter's success rate (percent of permit holders that harvested a turkey) decreased from 14.9% in 2007 to 14.0% in 2008. Success rates varied by zone from 12 to 17%, with the highest success rate occurring in Zone 7 (Figure2, Table1). There are a number of factors that affect turkey success rates: turkey abundance, weather, other concurrent hunting seasons, and permit levels. As permits become more common, they may fall into the hands of the less devoted turkey hunter, primarily bow hunters who may apply for a turkey permit on the off chance that one might walk under their tree stand while bow hunting. These less dedicated hunters may never go out with the sole purpose of hunting turkeys. Lastly, the sale of second tags to hunters could have an effect on success rates, as they may feel more "invested" in harvesting a turkey as they had to pay some amount for the permit as opposed to getting it free from the DNR. Fall Turkey Hunter surveys show that hunter participation in 2008 was 70%, higher than the 68% in 2007, but lower than the average between 1989 and 2007 of 73%. Hunter success rates are uncorrected for non-active hunters, actual success rates are higher.

Age and Sex Ratios

The number of adult turkeys harvested (65%) was slightly higher than in 2007 (63%). Females comprised 55% of the harvest while males accounted for 45%. Adult females comprised 32% of the fall harvest, juvenile hens 23%, gobblers 32%, jakes 11%, and unknowns 0.3%. Adult males comprised a larger part of the harvest than in 2007 (31% gobblers).

Adults are generally believed to be less vulnerable to fall hunting than juveniles, particularly for hens. There are probable prestige biases at work also, where hunters are reluctant to admit to killing a juvenile bird. Registration station attendants confusing jakes as adult hens, or the hunting methods and selectivity of Wisconsin hunters toward adults could also be factors affecting adult to juvenile ratios.

Accidents

There were no fall turkey hunting accidents reported for the 2008 season. This is the second fall season where Wisconsin had no fall hunting accidents. Since fall hunting of turkeys began in 1989 there have been 26 non-fatal hunting accidents with an average of 1.3 per year.

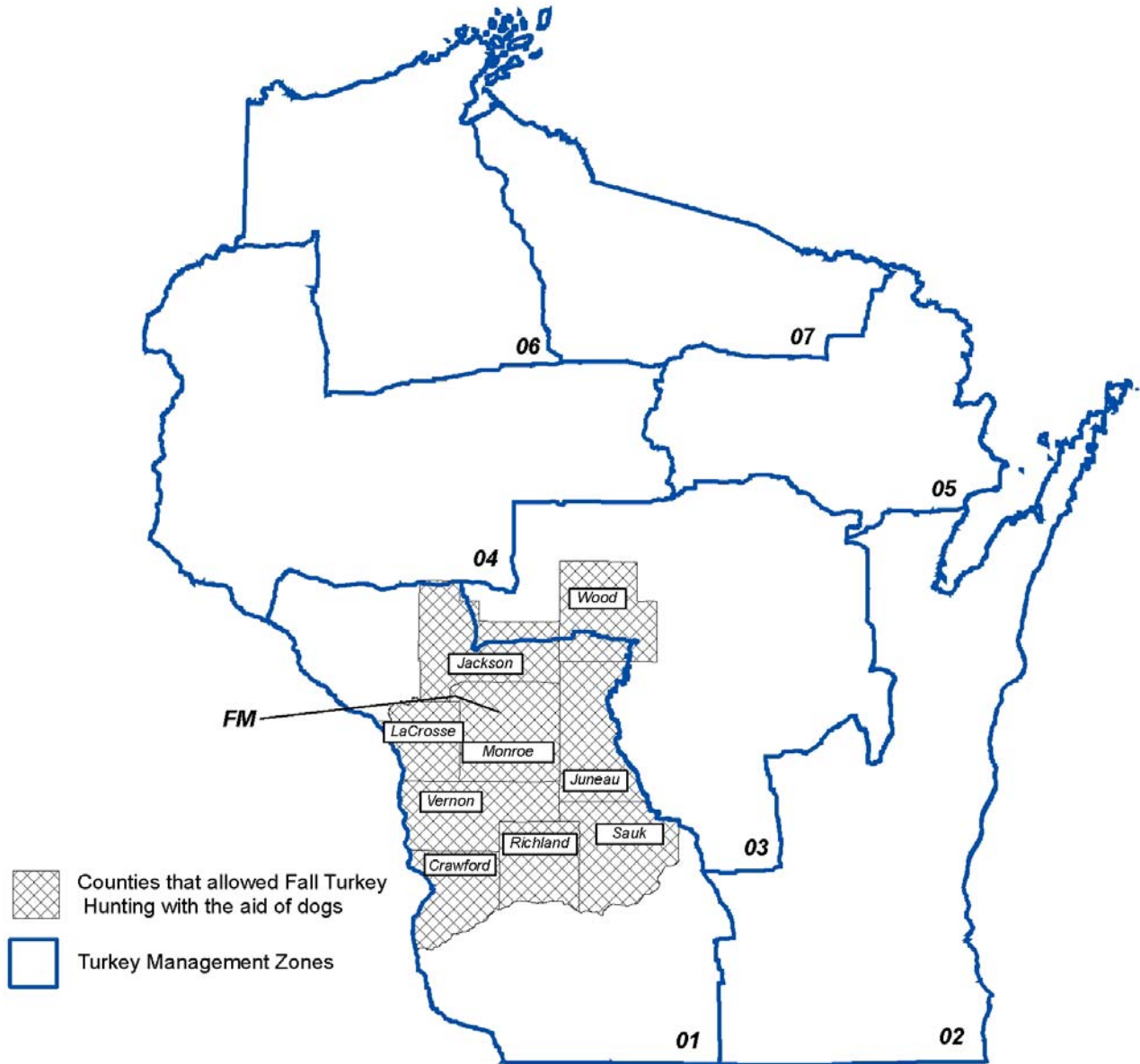


Figure 1. Fall turkey hunting zones and counties open to hunting with the aid of dogs, 2008.

Table 1. Turkey kill by zone, age and sex, permits issued, and permit success rate for 2008.

Zone	Hens	Juv. Hens	Toms	Jakes	Unks	Total Harvest	Permits Available	Permits Issued	% Success
1	671	625	604	276	5	2,181	27,500	17,870	12.2%
2	689	446	882	274	8	2,299	17,400	17,400	13.2%
3	1,079	777	932	292	16	3,096	30,000	21,927	14.1%
4	675	465	823	208	4	2,175	15,000	13,254	16.4%
5	176	91	218	75	2	562	3,800	3,800	14.8%
6	53	47	91	22	0	213	1,400	1,400	15.2%
7	28	23	38	14	1	104	600	600	17.3%
FM	16	24	10	10	1	61		197	31.0%
Unk	2	0	3	2	0	7			
Totals	3,389	2,498	3,601	1,173	37	10,698	95,700	76,448	14.0%

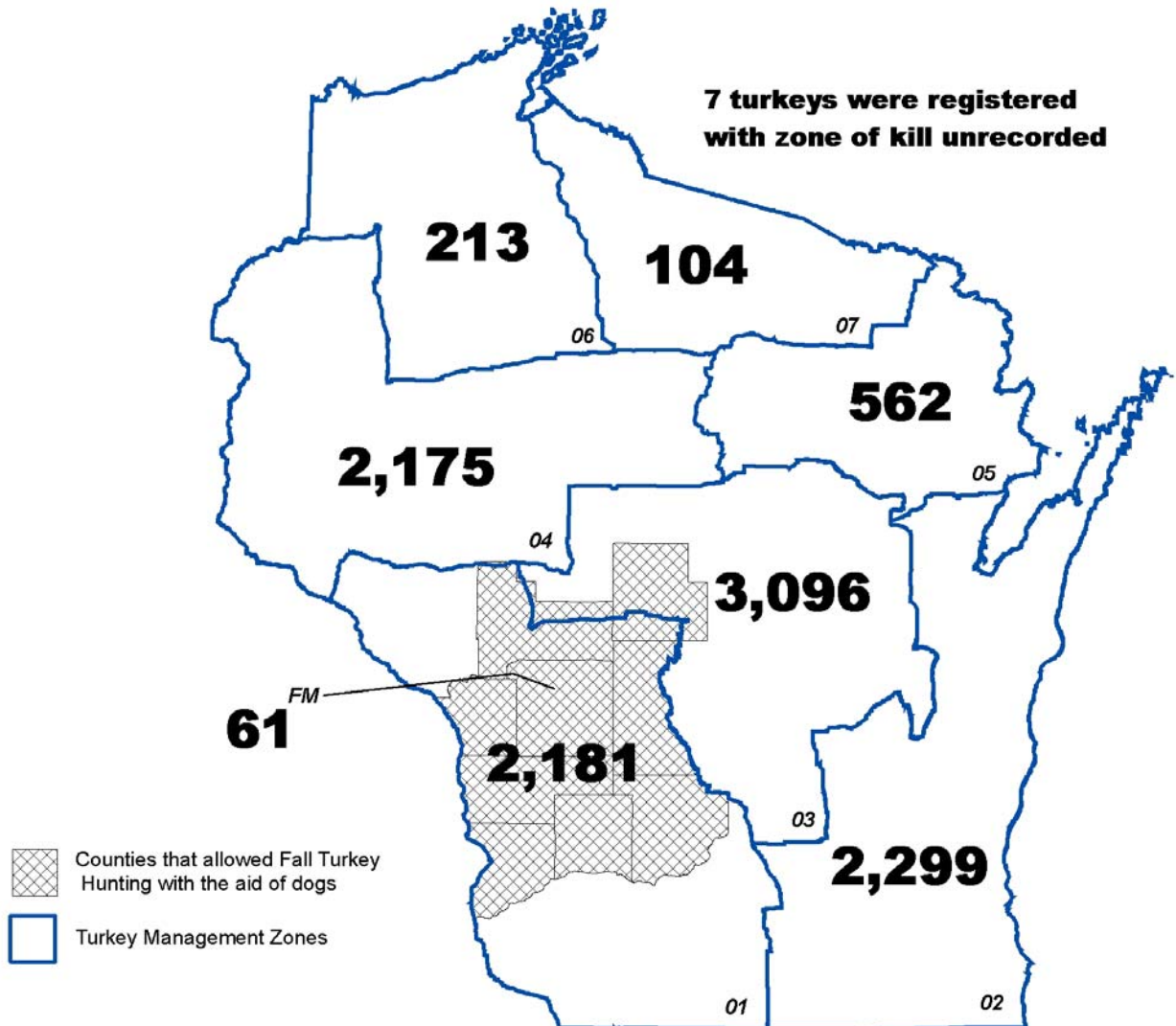


Figure 2. Fall turkey harvest by zone, 2008.

Table 2. Historical number of permits issued, harvest, and permit success for fall turkey hunting, 1989-2008.

Year	Permits Issued	Harvest	Permit Success
1989	7,260	1,570	21.6%
1990	12,465	3,433	27.5%
1991	16,668	2,904	17.4%
1992	24,997	5,024	20.1%
1993	31,449	5,625	17.9%
1994	17,889	3,896	21.8%
1995	28,555	6,241	21.9%
1996	30,779	6,305	20.5%
1997	32,569	6,004	18.4%
1998	41,131	8,845	21.5%
1999	55,479	10,825	19.5%
2000	69,566	11,263	16.2%
2001	71,601	11,029	15.4%
2002	75,040	10,860	14.5%
2003	78,831	12,554	15.9%
2004	79,178	10,362	13.1%
2005	85,678	10,650	12.4%
2006	78,782	12,108	15.4%
2007	80,382	12,010	14.9%
2008	76,448	10,698	14.0%

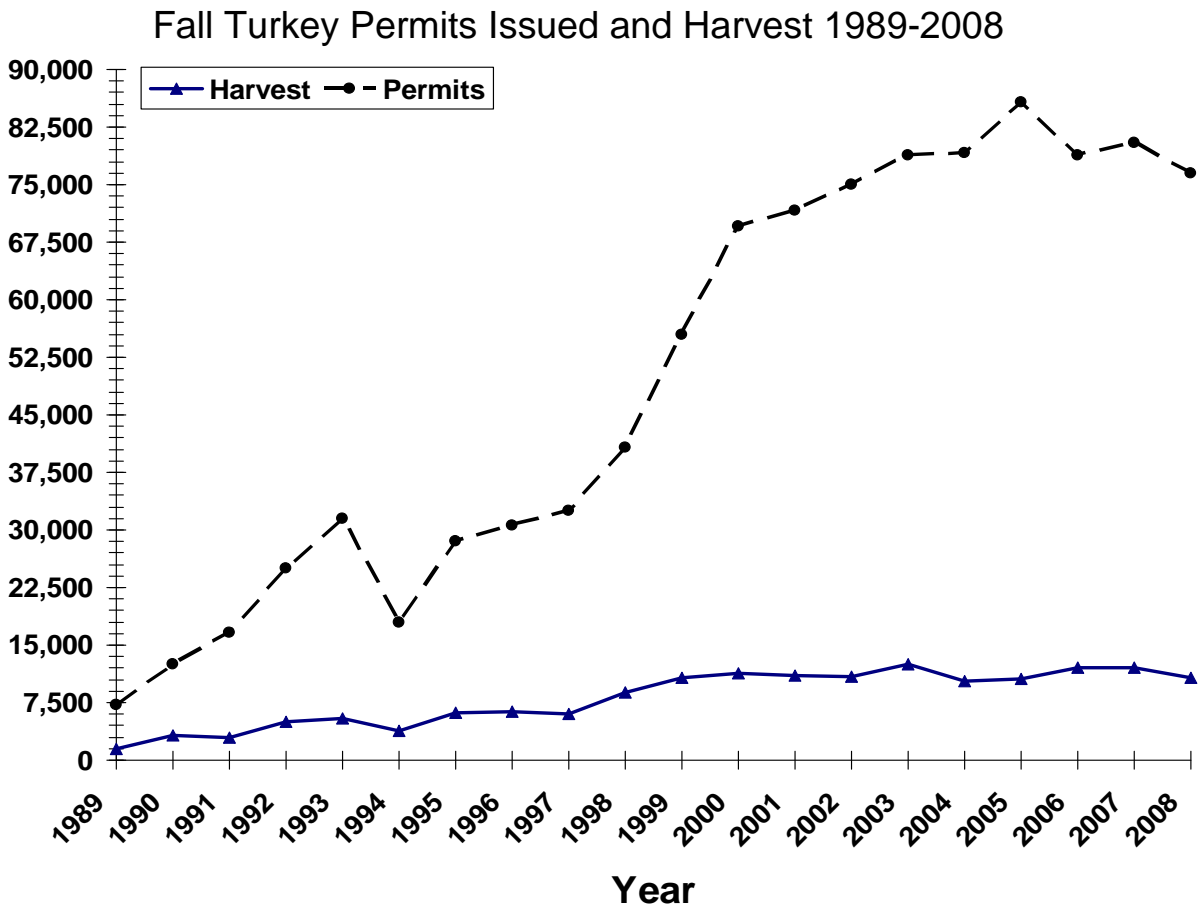


Figure 2. Fall turkey permits issued, and harvest, 1989-2008.