

Fall Turkey Harvest Report 2014

by Brian Dhuey, Krista McGinley, and Scott Walter

Abstract

The fall turkey season ran for 69 days, from 13 September through 20 November. A second period fall hunt occurred from 1-31 December in Turkey Management Zones (TMZ) 1-5. Statewide, the number of permits available (96,700) was the same as in 2013. Total permits issued through a random drawing process and over-the-counter sales were 62,708. Permitted hunters harvested 4,228 turkeys for a success rate of 6.7%. This success rate was lower than the 7.1% recorded last year. Turkey brood production can affect the number of birds available to harvest in fall, brood production varied across the state and may have resulted in turkey numbers varying across the state. While turkey numbers vary among regions, on the whole turkeys are doing well with strong numbers into the fall hunting season.

Methods

Harvest information was obtained through mandatory registration of harvested turkeys. Starting in the fall of 2011 hunters were no longer required to take a harvested bird to a registration station, but instead could register their bird over the phone or on the DNR website. Information collected at the time of registration was the same as in the past with hunters required to inform the WDNR of the zone, county, date of kill, sex and age of each turkey killed. Registration records were summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

Results

The whole state was open to fall turkey hunting from 13 September – 20 November in 2014 (Figure 1). The fall hunting season structure was changed in 2009, with a second period added after the close of the 9-day gun deer season (in 2014 the second season ran from 1 - 31 December) in the southern Turkey Management Zones 1-5. This allowed most fall turkey hunters 100 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 - 99 days.

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 average to below for parts of the state in 2014, and spring success increasing, the WDNR Wild Turkey Committee did not change the permit level for the 2014 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 2013, 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, leftover 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 54,382 permits were issued through the drawing process and another 8,326 over-the-counter for a total of 62,708. This was less than the 64,983 issued in the fall of 2013.

Harvest and Success Rates

Fall turkey hunters registered 4,228 turkeys in the fall of 2014. This is a decrease from the 4,631 registered in the fall of 2013. Success rates were down, with 6.7% of permit holders killing a bird; lower than the 7.1% in 2013 and has decreased 4 of the prior 5 years. 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 concurrent with the archery season in mid-September. This was done to give hunters more opportunity to hunt fall turkeys. The fall turkey season overlapped a statewide 2-day youth deer hunt, all hunters are required to wear blaze orange during this deer season. This blaze orange requirement probably had the effect of eliminating days of fall turkey hunting.

After a successful three-year trial period, the use of dogs for fall turkey hunting was allowed statewide. It was legal to fall turkey hunt with the aid of dogs for the entire fall season.

The fall hunter's success rate (percent of permits that harvested a turkey) was 6.7%, down from 7.1% in 2013 and the lowest in the last several years. Fall success rates varied by zone from 5.8 to 9.9%, with the highest success rate occurring in Zone 1 (Figure 1, Table1). There are a number of factors that affect turkey success rates: turkey abundance, weather, other concurrent hunting seasons, permit levels and hunting techniques. 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, for example. These less dedicated hunters may never go out with the sole purpose of hunting turkeys. Data from the Fall Turkey Hunter Survey indicates that approximately 30% of hunters purchasing a fall turkey permit only hunt turkeys "opportunistically" when hunting other game. 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 through the drawing process from the DNR. Fall Turkey Hunter surveys show that hunter participation in 2014 was 65%, the same as in 2013, but lower than the average between 1989 and 2013 of 73%. Hunter success rates are uncorrected for non-active hunters and noncompliance, actual success rates are higher.

Age and Sex Ratios

The percentage of the harvest composed of adult turkeys (66%) was lower than in 2013 (71%). Females comprised 54% of the harvest while males accounted for 46%. Adult females comprised 35% of the fall harvest, juvenile hens 20%, gobblers 31%, jakes 14% and one unknown. The percentage of adult males in the harvest was lower than in 2013 (42% 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. Hunters could also be confusing jakes and juvenile hens as adult hens, or using hunting methods and selectivity toward adults. These all could be factors affecting adult to juvenile ratios.

Accidents

There was one fall accident during the 2014 hunting season. One hunter mistakenly identified another as a turkey. There have been no accidents in fall turkey hunting for six of the last eight years. Since fall hunting of turkeys began in 1989, there have been one fatal and 27 non-fatal hunting accidents with an average of 1.1 per year.

Table 1. Turkey kill by zone, age and sex, permits issued, and permit success rate for 2014.

Zone	Hens	Juv. Hens	Toms	Jakes	Unks	Total Harvest	Permits Issued	% Success
1	249	219	221	145	0	834	14,465	5.8%
2	450	203	456	161	1	1,271	18,000	7.1%
3	421	231	312	163	0	1,127	15,457	7.3%
4	180	98	165	68	0	511	8,446	6.1%
5	91	28	110	36	0	265	3,800	7.0%
6	37	20	37	13	0	107	1,401	7.6%
7	31	25	26	17	0	99	1,000	9.9%
FM	6	2	4	2	0	14	139	10.1%
UNK						0		
Totals	1,465	826	1,331	605	1	4,228	62,708	6.7%

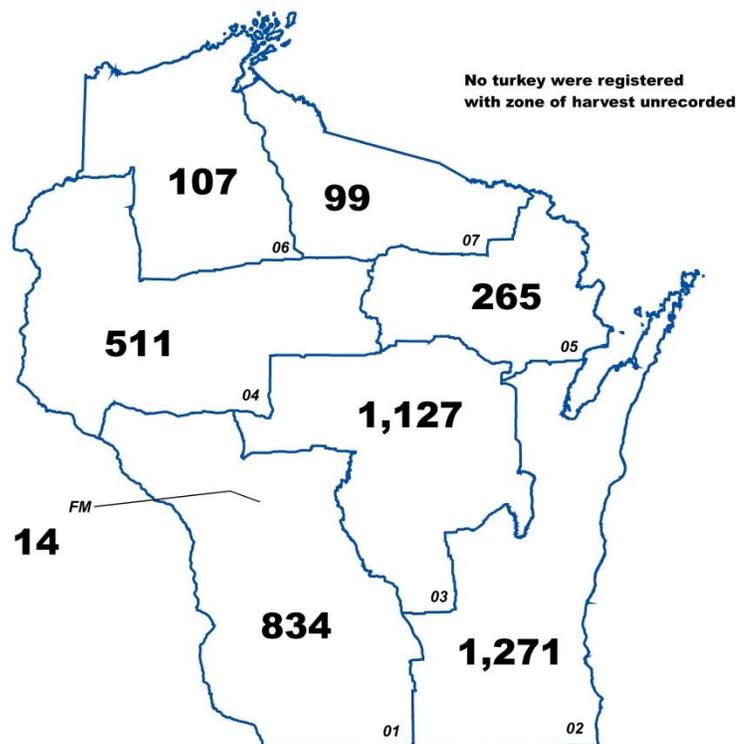


Figure 1. Fall turkey harvest by zone, 2014.

Table 2. *Historical number of permits issued, harvest, and permit success for fall turkey hunting, 1989-2014.*

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%
2009	68,796	8,281	12.0%
2010	61,567	7,394	12.0%
2011	54,949	5,433	9.9%
2012	55,099	7,054	12.8%
2013	65,101	4,631	7.1%
2014	62,708	4,228	6.7%

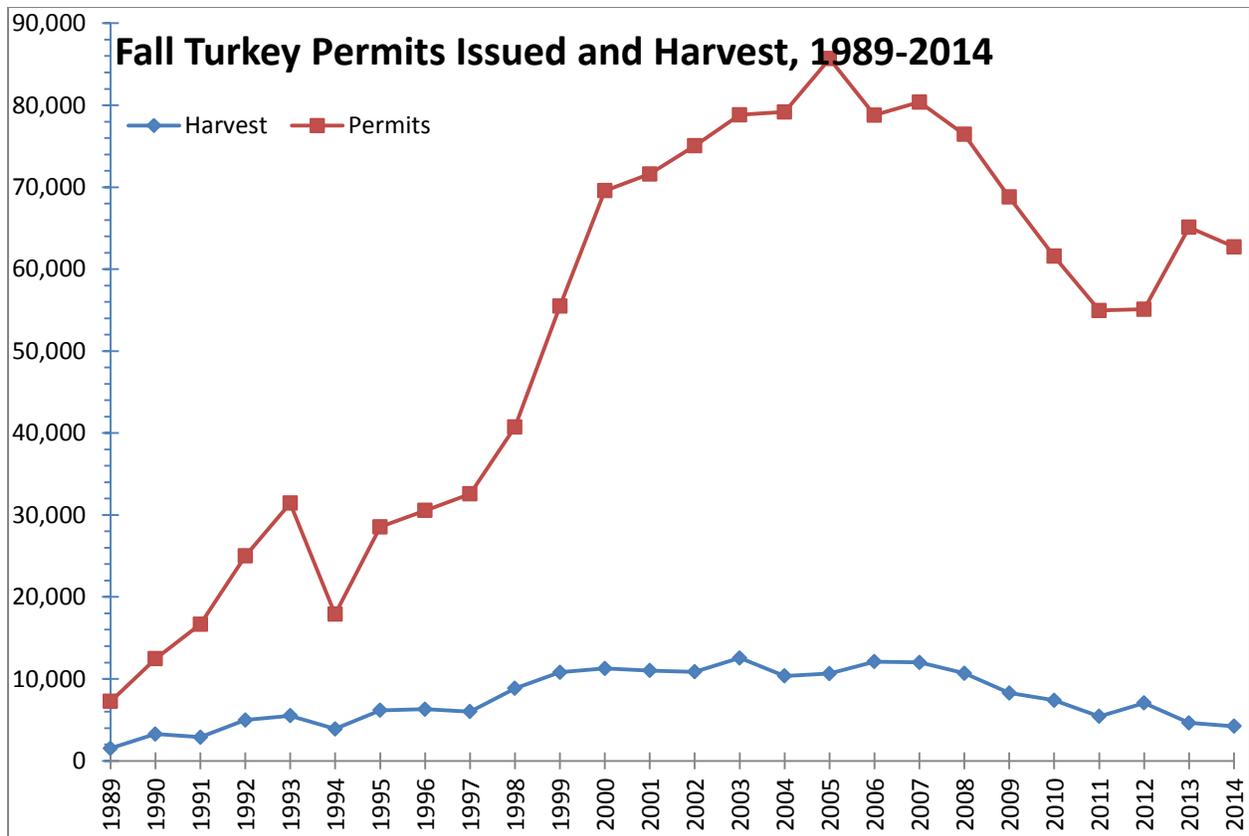


Figure 2. *Fall turkey permits issued, and harvest, 1989-2014.*