

Fall Turkey Harvest Report 2015

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Abstract

The 2015 fall turkey season ran for 69 days, from 12 September through 19 November. A second period fall hunt occurred from 30 November - 31 December in Turkey Management Zones (TMZ) 1-5. Statewide, the number of permits available (100,700) was up from the 96,700 available in 2014. Total permits issued through a random drawing process and over-the-counter sales were 65,705. Permitted hunters harvested 4,864 turkeys for a success rate uncorrected for nonparticipation of 7.4%. This success rate was higher than the 6.7% 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, turkeys are doing well statewide 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 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 12 September – 19 November in 2015 (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 2015 the second season ran from 30 November - 31 December) in the southern Turkey Management Zones 1-5. This allowed most fall turkey hunters 101 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 7-100 days.

Permit Levels

Permit levels vary depending on the spring hunting success, amount of timber, hunter interference, hunter demand, and turkey population densities and distributions within zones. With turkey brood production average to above for parts of the state in 2015, spring success increasing, and a high demand for permits in TMZ 2, the WDNR Wild Turkey Committee did increase the permit level for the 2015 fall season in TMZ 2 (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 2014, 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 or the season closed.

A total of 53,271 permits were issued through the drawing process and another 12,434 over-the-counter for a total of 65,705. This was more than the 62,708 issued in the fall of 2014.

Harvest and Success Rates

Fall turkey hunters registered 4,864 turkeys in the fall of 2015. This is an increase from the 4,228 registered in the fall of 2014. 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 7.4%, up from 6.7% in 2014, and close to the previous 3 years. Fall success rates varied by zone from 5.8% to 9.1%, with the highest success rate occurring in Zone 7 (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 2015 was 64%, 2014 was 65%, but lower than the average between 1989 and 2014 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 (69%) was higher than in 2014 (66%). Females comprised 50.5% of the harvest while males accounted for 49.5%. Adult females comprised 32.6% of the fall harvest, juvenile hens 17.9%, gobblers 36.5%, jakes 12.9%. The percentage of adult males in the harvest was higher than in 2014 (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. 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 were no fall accidents during the 2015 hunting season. There have been no accidents in fall turkey hunting for seven of the last nine 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 2015.

Zone	Hens	Juv. Hens	Toms	Jakes	Unks	Total Harvest	Permits Issued	% Success
1	254	196	290	96	0	836	14,392	5.8%
2	624	300	724	263	0	1,911	21,873	8.7%
3	354	185	376	133	0	1,048	14,631	7.2%
4	187	108	208	65	0	568	8,185	6.9%
5	91	41	99	40	0	271	3,800	7.1%
6	35	16	48	17	0	116	1,400	8.3%
7	35	21	26	9	0	91	1,000	9.1%
FM	6	5	6	6	0	23	424	5.4%
UNK						0		
Totals	1,586	872	1,777	629	0	4,864	65,705	7.4%

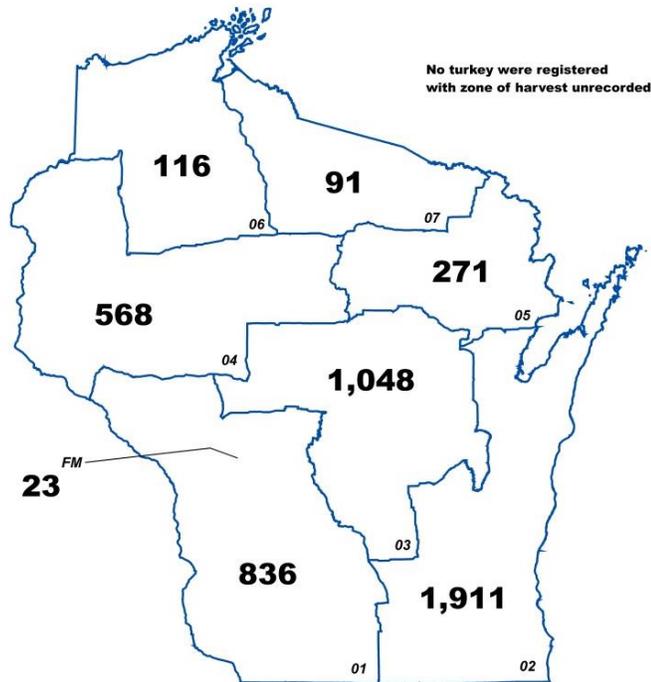


Figure 1. Fall turkey harvest by zone, 2015.

Table 2. Historical number of permits issued, harvest, and permit success for fall turkey hunting, 1989-2015.

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%
2015	65,705	4,864	7.4%

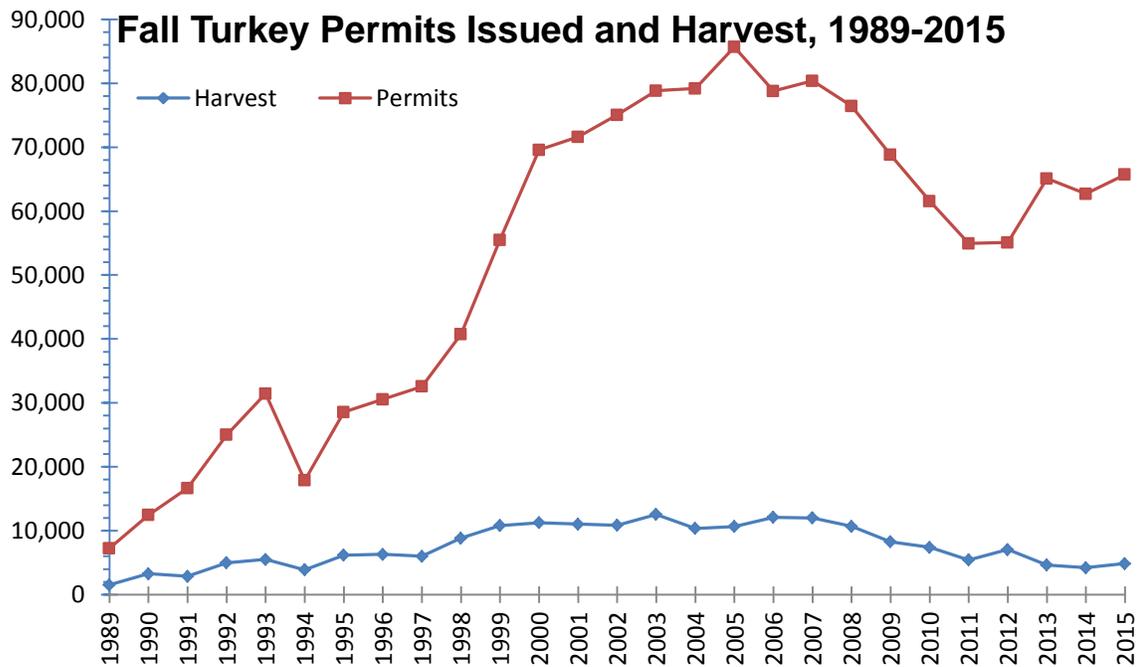


Figure 2. Fall turkey permits issued, and harvest, 1989-2015.